

## ***Paradise Hill***

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Sample of pages 9-44

**Tuesday 20 June 1989**

1

The gravel road was rough, but level – it was easy to trundle the pram down the slope. Until it suddenly narrowed and became a path, full of stones, roots and deep tracks. The woman pushing the pram regretted her choice of route, but when she had missed the bus from Tranby, she had succumbed to the temptation to take the shortcut home to Lierbyen. It had been a long time since she last walked on these slopes, and she had completely forgotten how steep and bumpy everything was. She carefully eased the pram down so as not to wake the baby. The five-year-old boy sped wildly in and out of the path in circles round her and the pram. She had told him he had to be quiet, not shout at any rate. Now he came rushing out of the underwood with a stick he had picked up, pointing it at his mother.

‘You’re dead,’ he shouted.

‘Even! I told you to be quiet.’

‘Bang!’

‘Sshh!’ she whispered. ‘You’ll wake your sister!’

He didn’t listen, just went on shooting with the stick at everything around him.

‘Stop that!’

She forgot to whisper, her reprimand came out louder and more irritated in tone than she had intended. The baby in the pram started to move. The boy disappeared into the scrub once again, his mother could hear twigs snapping. Then there was silence.

‘Even? What happened? Did you fall?’

‘Mummy!’

‘What is it?’

‘Mummy, come here!’

‘I can’t go in there. You’ll have to come out, Even.’

The baby started to whimper. Probably hungry. Again. She rocked the pram.

‘But mummy... come here!’

‘No buts, Even. We haven’t got the time, and I can’t leave the pram here on the middle of the slope.’

She sighed and stood for a moment with her face turned towards the sun, felt it sting her cheeks pleasantly while she waited for her son to come out. She could really do with a little colour! Weeks with only a little sleep had left her skin sallow. She closed her eyes and breathed in the good, dry summer smell of raspberry bushes and sun-warmed grass.

‘Mummy, there’s something here!’

His voice sounded strange. She tried to catch sight of him through the dense foliage. She spotted the red T-shirt in the midst of all the green. His thin arms were hanging straight down, he was still holding the stick that had been a gun a minute ago. The sun went in behind a cloud, and a shiver of cold stroked her bare arms. She manoeuvred the pram crosswise on the path and made sure that she had put the brakes on properly. The baby lay on its back with closed eyes now. The dummy moved rhythmically in its small mouth. She cautiously stroked its warm forehead and shifted the blanket a little to one side so that the child would not get overheated before replacing the insect netting over the opening.

‘I’m coming now, Even.’

The branches scratched her bare arms, and her sandals were not designed for tall grass and all the twigs and thin branches. The scrub was dense, and the slender birch trunks behaved as if they were alive, it seemed as if branches and leaves clawed out at her when she tried to advance. Her son was now crouched down in the clearing, his head tilted to one side as he turned to see if she was coming, waving excitedly at her.

There was something lying in the grass. In the second it took before the sense impression reached the right part of the brain for processing, she pulled the boy to her. Then came the reaction. She felt it first up and down her spine. A heat that spread on the inside and contracted her stomach, forcing its contents up into her throat. She threw up onto the grass and at the same time tried to hold her hands in front of her son’s eyes. Neither was particularly successful. She felt how the warm remains of a currant bun and cola ran down one of her calves, down into her sandal.

‘Come on,’ she whispered. ‘Don’t look, Even, it’ll be alright, alright.’

She continued to whisper comforting words that had no effect while she pulled the boy with her out of the bushes. How was she to explain this to a five year old? How could she prevent him having sleepless nights or nightmare-ridden dreams? How was she herself to be able to live with the sight of the dead body flickering on her retina?

Back on the path she loosened the brakes on the pram, and with one hand on the handlebar and the other clasping the boy’s small hand she walked as fast as her half-reluctant and now slightly whimpering son could manage to keep up. The baby had started to cry, but she was incapable of calming it.

‘What is it, mummy? Don’t walk so fast!’

At first glance, for an absurd moment, she had believed that it was a window dummy without any clothes. The girl was extremely pale and lay in an unnatural position. One arm had been placed at her

side, the other at a right angle above her head. The legs were parallel, the knees with a slight bend resting against each other, as if she was posing. The lips were apart, stiffened into something that was reminiscent of a smile. The black hair could just as well have been a wig. But it wasn't a dummy. It was a real person, a real ordinary dead person that had stared at her and Even. Stared? She grimaced. The girl in the grass had gazed at her with eyes full to the brim of nothing. But the worst thing was the insects. They had crawled around the naked breasts and up towards the neck.

'It was just a dummy, Even,' she said, trying to smile to her son. 'It was just one of those large dummies they have in clothes shops.'

#### **Thursday 12 June 2014**

#### **2**

Verner Jacobsen raised the bottle of mineral water to his lips. The pill stuck to his tongue and he recognised the bitter taste of aspirin. The office was so situated that it rested in constant shadow, but even so it was as if the walls quivered. It must be the heat, Verner thought. Normally he never had headaches. Or was it the old case that had made it feel as if parts of his brain had come loose and were now moving jerkily back and forth? He loosened slightly the elastic band that held his hair in a ponytail, and massaged the back of his neck with one hand, drank more mineral water and felt the pill disappear down his throat. Then he immersed himself in the files of the old case once more.

Camilla Carlsen had been found close to the path that passed through a small spinney in the middle of the long slope. Paradise Hill. Nothing much about these photos that reminded one of paradise, Verner Jacobsen thought, wiping the sweat from his forehead. He had just read the transcript of the questioning of a witness, a young mother who had discovered the body. At first she had thought it was a window dummy that some teenagers had stolen and then thrown away. And, Verner had to admit, the dead person did look like a dummy that someone had flung away into the grass – stiff-limbed and as pale as china, beautiful and lifeless.

An oppressive stillness enclosed the police headquarters. The early summer had been unusually quiet so far. That was why he had the old case on his writing desk. It would soon be twenty-five years since Camilla Carlsen had been found raped and murdered on the path on Paradise Hill in Lier. Her parents wanted a last attempt to be made to get the case solved before the expiry date caught up with them on 19 June. A change in the law was in the pipeline that would mean that murders committed after 1 July 1989 would never have an expiry date, but the change would not apply in this case. So they only had a week left to find the killer. Verner Jacobsen was in a way pleased about the new measure, since no one with a serious crime on his conscience would be able to feel secure from now on. At the same time, he feared that the work load would increase to unprecedented heights.

The newspapers had also hyped the Camilla case by writing that time was short. Verner Jacobsen drank the rest of the water in slow gulps. The future of the girl in the photos in front of him had come to an end there on a hillside in 1989 – she was in no haste any more. But taking the never-ending grief of the next of kin into consideration, it was of course important to get to the bottom of the case. It was sad, but the chance of something new emerging from the old reports, or in questioning new witnesses after so many years was negligible.

Camilla Carlsen, 18 years old at the time, had been a popular girl, according to her parents. The newspapers had also described her as a girl with good grades who played sports and sang in the choir. A Christian choir, the victim's mother had emphasised when he had talked to her the week

before. She had given him a collection of private photos in addition to Camilla's last photo album. Now they all lay spread out across Verner Jacobsen's desk.

Camilla had long, dark hair, as glossy as well-groomed horse-hair. In most of the photographs she was smiling and looking straight at the camera. Well aware of herself, Verner thought. She knew that she was pretty. And she was too. Now what was left of her lay as small heaps of white bones at the bottom of a coffin a metre or so beneath the grass of Tranby church.

Some of the photos had been taken at concerts and on trips together with the choir. Young people in neat rows, most of them girls, all in red sweaters. The boys stood there like a thin stripe in the middle, in navy blue. All that was missing was the white to create an illusion of healthy Norwegian teenagers under the altarpieces and crosses in churches and chapels. Camilla had written long lists of names in careless handwriting under some of the photos in the album: Trine, Monica, Vibeke, May, Anette, Ewa, Tom, Pål, Martin, Cato, me, Anita, Hege and Lise. 'These are the sopranos,' her mother had said, placing a forefinger on Camilla, pride in her voice. Verner recognised the photo from newspaper cuttings that had been archived in connection with the Camilla case, or the 'Paradise Murder' as it was also called in the media.

Drammens Tidende and Buskeruds Blad had carried several articles about the choir environment before the murder took place. One of the headlines was: *Drugs in Christian choir environment?* Verner Jacobsen skimmed through the subject matter, which said that several of the choir members had been in possession of marijuana. Those who had supplied them with the drug had never been found, identified or arrested. Within the police there was speculation as to whether members of the choir, even the vicar or the catechist, could have anything to do with the case. However, the problem disappeared just as suddenly as it had arisen. When the summer holidays were over, an encouraging article was written stating that the choir environment was clean and that the conductor would welcome new members.

In most of the photos, Camilla was surrounded by female friends. Verner had questioned those of her closest circle the week before. He glanced at the reports. Ewa Lothe Lyngås, May Ringnes and Anette Nordal. None of them had come up with anything that could shed new light on the old murder case.

Verner Jacobsen dug out the witness statements from 1989 by the same three girls and read them through once again without finding anything he might have overlooked. All three told the same story then as now:

The girls had been at May's, who lived at Haskolljordet, the housing estate that lay between the power plant and the former asylum. They had all walked together from there and up Paradise Hill. They had stopped for a while to chat and have a smoke at the crossroads to Brattbakken. Then Camilla had walked up towards Tranby, May had gone down towards Lierbyen again, and the other two into Brattbakken. May said that she had lost her packet of cigarettes, so she had turned round and gone back. Then she had discovered Camilla. She was standing with a boy by the name of Dennis Hegdal. May saw them, but they had not seen her, she explained. A little later, May had also run into Ewa. That was a bit strange, May felt, for Ewa had also been on her way home. Ewa for her part explained that she felt like going for a walk, and that was why she had changed her mind and turned round. Anette maintained that she had gone straight home.

In the new questionings, Verner Jacobsen had finally asked them to relate everything in a reverse chronological order. He knew that normally the story will then change somewhat, one will remember other things when forced to tell everything the other way round. If one was speaking the truth, that

is. It was only Anette's story that changed, she had added some disconnected comments about the weather, and that they had bought cigarettes in Lierbyen before walking up the hill. Verner had gotten the feeling that she was the only one who was telling the truth. Why, he thought, wondering what the other girls might possibly have in the way of secrets.

Dennis Hegdal had been under suspicion from the start. He was the only one apart from the girls who they knew for certain had been in the area, and he had been wanted by the police, suspected of the murder. The problem was that he had never been found. And that was almost as great a mystery as the murder itself. Verner Jacobsen dug out some more newspaper cuttings and went through those again as well.

*Important witness probably drowned*, was one of the headlines in Drammens Tidende and Buskeruds Blad two days after the discovery of the murdered girl, Camilla. The article shared the front page with an article about the killing on Paradise Hill, and the two incidents were subsequently linked together. Dennis was described by his classmates as a lonely nuisance, quite uninterested in hanging out with the boys or playing football, he was however good at running – quite a talent, actually. But he preferred to run on his own. He looked pretty normal in the photo though, Verner noted. Thin and sinewy. A little weakling with slightly delicate features. Verner felt a spontaneous sympathy for the boy. He himself had been unable to put on a gram of weight no matter what he did, and his height had bothered him ever since he was a teenager. He was still short, one centimetre too short in fact to fulfil the old height requirements for acceptance at the police academy. Verner rubbed the back of his neck again. His headache refused to budge.

*The discovering of a rowing boat adrift in Holsfjorden has been linked to the missing Dennis Hegdal (18). Dennis Hegdal was last seen on Paradise Hill in company of the murdered Camilla Carlsen. The suspicion that he has something to do with the murder has been further consolidated. Discoveries made in the boat suggest that the youth intended to take his own life. The search for the missing boy continues with the assistance of divers.*

The article was followed by a series of photos, then a final summary filled with journalistic speculations.

The Camilla case was gradually scaled down when no more information turned up that could shed light on the case. After a year it was concluded that Dennis was in all probability the killer, and that it was highly probable that he had taken his own life by drowning himself in Holsfjorden. The drifting plastic boat had been proved as belonging to him. A few days after the murder, Camilla's pastel T-shirt had been found at the water's edge along with Dennis' jacket, and there was a farewell letter lying in the boat. Analyses of the handwriting revealed that it was Dennis who had written it. The body was admittedly never found, but it was a fact that the fjord was said to be bottomless in certain places. If one had the intention of drowning oneself, knew where the greatest depths were and, in addition, was equipped with a sinker of sufficient weight, one would never be found. It was not quite correct to say that the fjord was bottomless, but it was nevertheless a fact that Holsfjorden had a depth of almost three hundred metres at certain points.

Dennis' younger brother, Ruben, fifteen years old at the time, had been questioned in the case, but he was uncommunicative and, in addition, stammered strongly, something that could perhaps explain why he opened his mouth so unwillingly. He had no opinion about what had become of his brother, but thought it likely that he had drowned himself. His mother and father, on the other hand, had always refused to believe that their son had committed suicide. Dennis was not the type to take anyone's life, neither his own nor that of others, his father, Andreas Hegdal, had pointed out –

extremely convincingly. However, a mother and father would naturally strongly maintain that their son was innocent until the opposite was proved – and perhaps longer still.

His parents still lived in Lier. Verner Jacobsen suddenly decided to get out of the muggy office and pay them a visit. He gathered all the documents and placed the binders in a neat row at the back of his desk. The sweat stood out on his brow and he wiped it off with the back of his hand. Perhaps this case was pushing the temperature up and giving him hot flushes. Or perhaps what was building up on the home front was what was worrying him? Ingrid was so bloody irascible at present. One more week. And then vacation time. He wasn't looking forward to it.**3**

It was not the fact that Julie had grown up that worried police inspector Bitte Røed, it was that she had grown up so fast. She had always wanted her children to become independent individuals, but at the smallest indication that they would be able to manage for themselves, it was as if every cell in her body was immediately equipped with spikes and hooks. Bitte Røed wrote a text message: Shall we go down to Holsfjorden and have a barbecue this evening? She added a smiley before pressing send. They could bring a disposable grill and some hot dogs. And while Peder would probably be spending all his time out on the floating stage, diving and thrashing around in the water, she could perhaps manage to have a conversation with Julie.

She took hold of the bag from Baker Klausen and tried to worm the coconut bun out without covering the entire table with shredded coconut. She suddenly wished she had someone that she could talk with about the children, but Robert always left the unpopular decisions to her. In fact, he left practically everything to her. And then she automatically started to think of Kristian again. It had been so nice to have him around. It annoyed her that she couldn't manage to push him out of her mind. She had been so captivated by his intensity, for she liked intense people, just as much as she hated people who were indifferent. Such as Robert, the children's father, had been. A drowsy man, without any enthusiasm for anything. Or, maybe that wasn't quite true, Bitte had to admit. Robert had been incredibly enthusiastic when it came to the eight-year-younger mistress who had been the cause of her being left virtually alone with the responsibility of bringing up a ten-year-old son and an almost grown-up, rather difficult daughter. And Kristian had suddenly been transformed into yet another ex the previous winter, when he ended up on the wrong side of the law.

'It's nice to be alone. It really is!'

She whispered quietly with forced enthusiasm, as if to kid herself into believing it, while reminding herself at the same time that her ex-husband and ex-lover were both living proof of how stupid she could actually be. She sat fiddling with the phone, waiting for a reply from her daughter when the door opened.

'Am I disturbing?'

Bitte Røed quickly stuffed the rest of the coconut bun into her mouth, it stuck softly to her palate and behind her front teeth, and made it impossible to utter a word. She swept the bits of shredded coconut across the desk with a swift sweep of the arm in an attempt to buy herself a little time and also conceal her bad choice of lunch. Verner Jacobsen stayed by the door with his hand on the handle and one leg still out in the corridor, as if keeping an escape route open.

'No, I've just got something going on with Julie,' Bitte said as soon as she had managed to swallow. She put down the telephone and smiled in a way that was to signal that it wasn't all that important. But it felt important. There was something or other that was troubling her daughter at the moment, but Julie flatly denied it every time she asked if there was anything wrong.

‘Have you gotten any further with the Camilla case?’ she asked instead.

‘No, not at all. But I’m thinking of having a chat with Dennis Hegdal’s parents, the boy who drowned himself, remember. Do you feel like coming along?’

‘Yes, please. I’m dying from the heat in here.’

She scraped together her phone, sun-glasses and lipstick.

They had only just left town. Bitte Røed was driving. For a moment, she wondered which way she ought to choose to Lier. The motorway was the fastest, and if they took the Reistad hills, they would pass Lier tavern. They had the area’s best, and largest, soft ice. She was just about to suggest stopping at the tavern when she noticed Verner Jacobsen chuckling while he was looking at her.

‘What is it?’

‘Icing sugar. You’ve got icing sugar right up to your ear lobe.’

Bitte Røed rubbed her cheek. At the large roundabout outside the closed-down Osram factory she ignored her stomach’s protests as she took the right-hand lane and swung straight onto the motorway. She didn’t manage to counter Verner Jacobsen’s comment with a joke. She just felt stupid. Fat and stupid, and the air in the car grew muggy, even though they were driving with the air conditioning on full blast.

I shouldn’t have said that, Verner Jacobsen thought. He had only intended to make small talk, but in a moment of over-confidence had forgotten that he was lousy at doing precisely that. Why had she shut like a clam just at the word icing sugar? Verner had long since stopped wondering what could make women feel offended. He had only intended to say something cute.

Fortunately, it didn’t take them long to get to Tranby.

Dennis Hegdal’s parents’ house must at one time have been the pride of Tranby. The house lay on a spacious plot, but the lawn was overgrown and the fruit trees old. A wall of natural stone enclosed the whole area. The stones looked as if they had been selected with care, they all fitted perfectly together as if they had been trimmed. An outdoor barbecue in the same style blended with the landscape, mostly perhaps because it was overgrown with moss and creepers and clearly had not been in use for ages. Everything indicated that those who lived here were elderly. They were prepared to sweep the steps, but couldn’t make the effort, or see the necessity, to replace the front door. It was a peeling relic of the seventies, with long, vertical panes of thick, rough glass. The doorbell didn’t seem to work. It was not until Verner Jacobsen knocked on the door with the back of his hand that it was eventually opened.

‘Andreas Hegdal?’ Verner asked. He presented himself as chief inspector and presented his ID card.

The old man nodded briefly, but made no sign of wanting to let them in.

‘What do you want?’

His voice was rough and testified to many years of smoking. The coughing that followed his question possibly indicated an advanced stage of COPD. He also smelt as if he had sat indoors smoking most of his time as a pensioner, which he had clearly been for quite a few years.

‘We’re here in connection with the re-opening of the Camilla case from 1989. We were wondering if we might come in and have a little chat with you and your wife about it?’



‘We’ve said all there is to say. Dennis isn’t here any more,’ the man said sullenly, and was about to shut the door. ‘And he still hasn’t been found guilty,’ he added. ‘You never found any evidence that it was him.’

The man shook a bony fist at them. Verner Jacobsen could see how the sun-weathered skin stretched tight over the bones. He took a step backwards, as if facing an aggressive dog. Bitte Røed on the other hand stretched her hand out towards the man. Courageous, Verner just managed to think, before he saw that Andreas Hegdal grasped her hand and smiled.

‘That’s one of the reasons why we want to talk to you again,’ Bitte said gently. ‘The girl’s family have pressed for a re-opening of the case. They naturally want an answer as to who killed their daughter, so that they finally can find peace. So I’m afraid we have to inconvenience you again. Perhaps we can also find out what happened to your son,’ she added.

‘He died! Rowed out into the middle of the fjord and drowned himself, wasn’t that what your proficient police force worked out back then?’

The man looked tired, but waved them in.

A woman sat in the living room, huddled in an armchair with brown-chequered upholstery and arm-rests of leather – a massive survivor from the seventies. The smell of nicotine was all-pervasive even with the light draught from the transom window, which was ajar. After some laborious foot-work, the woman swung the chair towards them. She looked up, her eyes tired with age.

‘Please, don’t get up,’ Bitte said.

Bitte rushed over to her with an outstretched hand, even though the woman had made no sign of getting up. Verner looked at her feet. The swollen calves were jammed into a pair of worn slippers. The veins looked like small blue balloons tied together by a network of threads just under the skin. Perhaps she couldn’t even walk? Regardless, it must be painful.

‘We’ve come to talk about Dennis,’ Bitte went on in her friendly way.

The woman’s smile vanished and her face twisted. It looked as if she was forming her mouth into a scream, but no sound came. Bitte started backwards, shocked by the violent reaction. Else Hegdal stared at her, and something gleamed in her eyes, but just as quickly it was replaced by the puzzled indifference from before.

‘He’s dead. You’ve decided that. Nothing more to talk about,’ the old lady spat out.

Bitte sat down on the very edge of the sofa.

‘Wouldn’t it be nice if we could confirm what happened to him?’ asked Verner, who was the only person still standing. Andreas Hegdal had sat down next to Bitte on the sofa. He nodded, while pressing his lips together into a thin line. Verner was not sure whether it was an unconscious tremble that old people often get, or if it was a sign of agreement.

‘We’re here to find answers,’ he went on. ‘Uncertainty is awful.’

He immediately thought of Ingrid. She was still in the dark when it came to his broodings. His bad conscience pricked somewhere in the region of his heart, and a dull warmth shot down his left arm. I’ll get to it soon – in the course of our vacation, he thought, pushing aside his thoughts of his wife and what he perhaps was going to do.



‘That’s why,’ he said and noticed that the words came out with a slight sigh, ‘we would like you to tell us one more time what you remember of the day when Dennis disappeared in 1989.’

‘We’ve said all that so many times,’ Else said.

A moist film now covered her eyes, and her hands went to her face. She hadn’t any eyelashes! Is that what happens when one wipes tears away for a quarter of a century? Verner Jacobsen wondered.

‘We were at work that day,’ Andreas said. ‘We used to work at Dyno, both of us. You know, the explosives factory. It’s closed down now. I was production manager, and Else was employed in the payroll office.’

‘Ruben was at home,’ Else mumbled, ‘but I think he said that he didn’t see Dennis either.’

‘Is Ruben the younger brother?’

‘Yes. It was the first day of the summer holidays, he was home alone. No one missed Dennis until the evening. But he was often only home to sleep. Dennis, I mean. We were used to him often being away for quite a long time.’

‘Where does Ruben live now?’ Verner asked, and thought he would have a chat with him at the first opportunity.

‘He lives here,’ Else said, and a cautious smile formed on her lips. ‘It’s good to have him close by.’

‘How old is he now?’ Bitte asked.

‘There’s nothing wrong with him even though he lives alone,’ Else exclaimed. ‘He’s got his own flat in the basement, with his own entrance and everything, if you were wondering. Usually eats dinner with us, but he manages fine by himself.’

‘OK.’

Bitte gave a disarming smile. If he lived downstairs, they could ask him themselves, but he must be around forty, she worked out. She found herself wondering what it would be like if her children went on living with her for another twenty years. The thought was just as frightening as seeing them move out.

‘When did you first suspect that something could have happened to Dennis?’ Verner asked. He wanted to get some sort of progress. The living room was even warmer than his office, if that was even possible. A couple of flies were buzzing at the half-open window.

‘Not before late,’ Andreas said. ‘I was out working on the barbecue all evening, can remember it as if it was yesterday. Put the last stone on precisely that day.’

‘You’ve built it yourself?’

Verner felt a stab of envy. He himself was well over-equipped with thumbs.

Andreas made an indefinable circular movement with his neck, as if nodding and shaking his head at the same time.

‘Never got used,’ he said.

‘Well yes, well no,’ Else mumbled, fishing out a handkerchief that had been stuck down the side of the chair cushion. She blew her nose without making a sound.

‘When we started to wonder where Dennis was,’ Andreas went on, ‘we didn’t know where to start to look. Dennis was the sort of boy who didn’t say very much, never had any friends visiting. Ruben had no idea who he normally used to hang with either, but he had sometimes seen him together with May and Camilla.’

‘I went there,’ Else remarked. ‘To Camilla’s house. And that’s where I got this premonition, well, I know it must sound strange, but I do get them from time to time, premonitions.’

It was as if she had suddenly woken up. Her eyes seemed brighter.

‘I can wake up at night and just know that something is going to happen,’ she went on. ‘It’s just like thunder. Pressure builds up, and then one day the crash is inevitable.’

It was as if her shoulders caved in and she sank into the back of the chair. She sat there, shuffling her legs backwards and forwards, and by so doing moving the chair from side to side. When she opened her mouth again, it was as if she was talking to herself.

‘The worst thing is when the crash of thunder doesn’t come. The pressure builds in here. She struck herself hard over the ribs with a flat hand. There was a hollow thumping sound, and she coughed heavily a couple of times. She left her hand lying on her chest and continued:

‘I can remember that the previous night I had dreamt something so horrible that I simply knew – or of course I didn’t know, not really yet. That was what was so terrible.’

She remained sitting there for a while, her gaze in the past, before exclaiming, with a surprisingly strong voice:

‘And I had heard the deathwatch!’

Bitte Røed gave a start at this outburst.

‘The deathwatch?’

‘Yes, at any rate that’s what people used to say in the old days, and I think there’s something to it. A clicking sound in the house. An omen that someone is going to die.’

‘That was the borer beetles,’ Andreas said. ‘Don’t you remember? It went quiet when we got rid of the old writing desk.’

Else ignored him with a slight sniff.

‘It’s just like a clock,’ she went on. ‘A ticking, only slower. I heard it distinctly during the days before Camilla was killed and Dennis disappeared: Tick! Tick! Tick!’

Andreas moved his head from side to side, leant over towards Bitte Røed and whispered with a small, almost imperceptible smile:

‘It went quiet when we got rid of the writing desk.’

Else stared straight in front of her. She was clearly elsewhere then in her own living room.

‘So I went to Camilla’s mother that evening,’ she muttered. ‘Camilla hadn’t come home either, and none of her friends knew where she was. Her mother was just about to notify the police that she

was missing when I arrived. So I went with her down to the station and reported Dennis missing too. But neither of them ever came home, and the day after Camilla was found.'

She hid her face in her hands.

'We haven't spoken to each other after that. I didn't even dare to turn up at Camilla's funeral. And Dennis never got one.'

Her body shook noiselessly. Verner assumed that she was crying. So much grief, after so many years, he thought. It's just not true that time heals all wounds. To lose a child is a wound that can never fully heal, it can open up and start bleeding again at any time. He felt a treacherous film of moisture building up in his eyes and focused hard on removing it.

So far everything they said agreed with the police reports he had read. Facts that had been checked many times during the first period of the investigation, and that had always led to the same conclusion, even though these two parents had repeatedly denied that this had been the course of events; that Dennis Hegdal had first taken Camilla's life and afterwards gone into hiding. According to the report from the pathologist, about twenty-four hours had passed from Camilla was murdered until she was found. It was assumed that Dennis had drowned himself in Holsfjorden shortly after that.

Verner Jacobsen thought about what Andreas Hegdal had said about the borer beetles, and recalled that insects had also been mentioned in the report. They had, among other things, discovered white fly's eggs on all the moist places of the body: in the nose, eyes, genitals – but no larvae. This had helped to determine the time of death with a high degree of accuracy: She could not have been lying there for many days. She also had fresh ant-bites.

During the interrogation of the witnesses it had emerged that one of Camilla's friends, May Ringnes, had seen Camilla together with Dennis on two occasions. Or, rather, she had just assumed it was Dennis the second time, because shortly before she had seen him and the victim together on the path on Paradise Hill.

She had stated that she had come across them the second time after having said goodbye to Ewa. They had been lying in the bushes where Camilla was found later. To begin with, she had believed that it was just a question of willing fooling around in the grass. But gradually she had admitted that she had only seen the man's back, and that she had rather poor distance vision. So she could not say with certainty that it was Dennis, though she did remember that he had quite a large tattoo on his lower back.

'Do either of you know May Ringnes?' he asked.

'Of course we do,' Else sniffed. 'She's the daughter of the woman who worked at the meat counter in the grocery store during the 1970s, the one who was married to the cousin of your uncle, Andreas, isn't that right? The one who came from the farm at Henum, the neighbour of the one with the mad bull that attacked you once.'

Andreas nodded.

'Oh yes, everyone knows May Ringnes,' he said.

'Why's that?'

'She's a tart, always has been,' Else went on.

‘Did Dennis have any form of tattoo on his body?’ Verner asked.

‘Dennis? Oh no, I can assure you that the boy avoided all forms of pain,’ Andreas said.

He took the pack of tobacco that lay on the coffee table and started to roll a cigarette with trembling fingers.

‘And no scars or other marks on his body?’

‘You lot asked about that then as well,’ snapped Andreas, who had now finished rolling himself a thin cigarette. He brushed the left-over bits of tobacco down onto the floor. Verner noticed that Else gave him a quiet, reproving look.

‘No! He didn’t have any scars.’

Else had started to rock back and forth in the chair again.

‘What did you dream that night?’ Bitte asked, trying out another line of approach. ‘You didn’t finish telling us.’

‘Many people don’t believe that I can remember a dream after so many years,’ she said. ‘But I can, because I write them down. Then it’s easy to remember them.’

‘And do you still remember it?’ Bitte asked patiently. Else nodded and closed her eyes.

‘I dreamt that my two boys, Dennis and Ruben, were small. They were sitting on the stony shore down at Holsfjorden. They were looking for fossils – there are fossils there, you see, real ones. And then, out of the fjord comes a snake – straight out of the fjord, just like that!’

She raised her bony arm up in the air, and Bitte gave a start at the surprisingly rapid movement.

‘The snake swallowed Dennis, but Ruben just sat there with his stones as if nothing had happened.’

‘And what do you think the dream was trying to tell you?’ Bitte asked.

‘I’m not sure.’

Else opened her eyes again, but they were far off, as if she was still inside the dream.

‘I’ve thought and thought about that for ages. I think it was an omen. Something was about to happen. And then it did!’

‘Tell us.’

‘But you already know!’

Else looked resignedly at them.

‘I had that dream the night before Camilla was killed. I saw her too, in the dream that is. She was one of those inflatable plastic dolls that lay on a floating bed out in the water. But it wasn’t Dennis who killed her, it can’t have been! No one knows what happened. You never found out!’

She had worked her way up out of the chair, and now stood swaying on her thick lower legs right in front of Bitte, pointing an index finger at the tip of her nose.

‘He hasn’t killed anyone, do you hear me! Not himself either, I can’t believe that!’

‘What makes you so sure?’ Bitte asked, looking up at her.

‘He couldn’t kill a fly. He was kind, there wasn’t anything bad in the boy at all. Too good for this world, that’s what he was.’

It was as if the air went out of her like a balloon, and she dropped back into the armchair again.

Parents refuse to realise that their children are other than they wish them to be, Verner thought and glanced at the flies in the window. They were still butting against the window pane. There was such strong circumstantial evidence that Dennis was the killer that he felt this job was mere occupation in the absence of more important cases. He refrained from sighing out loud. Pressure from Camilla’s family and the media were the main reason why the case had acquired renewed status, and the approaching expiry date had effectively obliged them to work against the clock this final week before the summer holiday.

Else Hegdal was twisting her hair with one hand, constantly scratching herself at the same spot high up on her left temple. Bitte Røed glanced quickly over at Verner Jacobsen. He tightened his ponytail, a sure sign that he too was beginning to get impatient.

‘Erm...,’ he began and rubbed his wrist as if to check the watch he wasn’t wearing. ‘We must be moving on. I think this is enough for today. Thank you for your help.’

The two old people gave a short nod, and Bitte sent Verner a sweaty, grateful look. Andreas was just about to get up when a woman opened the living room door and peeped into the room. He sank back into the sofa with a smile.

‘I’ll be off now,’ the woman said gently. ‘I’ll take this out with me.’

She held out a plastic shopping bag from Coop Mega.

‘Who are you?’ Verner Jacobsen asked surprised. He let his gaze alternate between the two old people and the woman, who looked as if she was in her early forties. They had not been aware that there were other people in the house.

‘Oh, that’s Dahlia,’ Andreas said. ‘She helps us a bit from time to time. Cleaning and tidying, and she’s a great cook.’

He smiled and gave the woman a look that seemed a bit too hungry to be simply imagining the coming dinner. Dahlia stretched out a broad, strong hand that bore witness to many years of hard work. Her rings and red nail varnish seemed a bit out of place. She smiled warmly and kindly.

‘And you are...?’

‘I’m detective inspector Verner Jacobsen and this is my colleague Bitte Røed,’ Verner said.

‘We’re here regarding an old case.’

‘About Dennis?’ the woman asked.

‘You knew him?’

‘No, unfortunately, but it feels a bit as if I did.’

She threw her arms out in a theatrical gesture that seemed rather exaggerated, and pinched her mouth together as if sucking on a bitter drink through a straw.

‘Else and Andreas have told me so much about Dennis, and I’ve seen photos. We often talk about him.’

‘How long have you been working here?’ Bitte asked.

‘Not very long. And I wouldn’t call it work...,’ she smiled, ‘I just help them a bit from time to time. We’re more like friends. We’ve become really good friends, haven’t we?’

Dahlia went over to Else and stroked her cheek with the back of her hand.

‘Yes, you hardly even accept any money for what you do,’ the old woman nodded in agreement.

As if Dahlia noticed Bitte Røed’s scepticism, she added: ‘I got to know Ruben first, we met at Lier Art Association. My husband wanted to see his exhibition. After that I got to know this sweet couple.’

She gave Else a hug, then Andreas, before waving and picking up the shopping bag she had put down on the floor.

‘Rubbish,’ she said when she saw how Bitte and Verner were following the bag with their eyes.

Then she shut the door and disappeared.

Andreas got up and made as if he wanted to walk the two detectives to the door.

‘Dahlia has become like a daughter to us,’ he said. ‘Our lives have got much easier after Ruben got to know her and brought her into the house. She is really as if sent from heaven, works away the whole time, brings food and fills the fridge.’

‘How long have you known her?’

‘Well, about six months, I think. She appeared on the scene at just the right time, now that our health has really started to decline.’

‘How very fortunate,’ Bitte said.

Verner wondered if the Hegdals had a lot of money. In that case, it was not the first time a lovable lady had offered her services to prosperous elderly couples with a fortune. And the Hegdal couple must have saved a lot by not redecorating the past couple of decades, it looked like, neither inside nor outside the house.

‘What are you thinking about?’ Verner asked when they had shut the door behind them.

‘I think I must have become a bit cynical,’ Bitte muttered.

Verner Jacobsen glanced across at her.

‘In that case, we think roughly the same,’ he said.

4

Ruben Hegdal remained seated with his brush in his hand. The door bell had rung four times. He didn’t want to be disturbed. Not by anyone. Not even by her. He had heard her arrive an hour or so earlier. The vacuum cleaner had started immediately after the door had slammed up there. She had probably done the shopping and cleaned and fussed around them again. A stab of jealousy. Stupid, he thought. It’s stupid. I’m stupid.

Another ring at the door. The sound went straight through his body.

‘OK, OK, OK!’

He flung his brush away. It landed on the floor. He left it there and went to open the door. Ruben took a step back when he discovered two strangers standing outside.

‘Ruben Hegdal?’ the man asked, showing him a police ID.

Behind him stood a woman, also holding out an ID, which he tried to grab. But the woman reacted quickly and pulled it from him before he got a chance to take a proper look at it.

‘Can we come in.’

Ruben noted that this wasn’t a question. He let them in with an exaggerated and, he knew, impolite sigh. As he passed the bathroom door he fished up a couple of T-shirts that lay strewn on the floor, only to deposit them again on the arm of his work-chair when they entered the living room. He stuffed his T-shirt down into his grey sweatpants and picked at a spot on the thigh. What was it? Chocolate spread? He tasted the small brown scraping that had got stuck under the nail of his index finger. No. Paint, perhaps?

The two police officers looked around them. They weren’t wearing uniforms. He was suddenly afraid they weren’t from the police at all, but that someone had come to beat him up. The man didn’t look like a policeman at any rate, short and small-boned, with long hair. Like the hairs of a wet brush, he thought, neatly smoothed back, every strand side by side and bound firmly at the nape of the neck. But the cards they wore round their necks seemed genuine.

The strangers took a look round. The flat presumably looked as if it had been furnished at random, as if he had found a chair at a flea market and been given a sofa by a friend. Which was also true, when he came to think of it. The carpet he could certainly have inherited from his grandmother or some distant great aunt – it had an oriental pattern that was common in the sixties and seventies. The truth was that he had bought it at Fretex because it thought it looked cool. But the pictures on the wall had been selected and positioned in relation to each other with great care. No IKEA posters, just professionally framed lithographs plus a couple of oil paintings. Apart from the armchair and TV there was little that reminded one of a living room. They probably thought it was odd to have furnished the only sitting room in the flat as a workroom.

The small basement windows did not let in much light, so he had set up two large ceiling neon lights. This didn’t make the room any cosier, but it was practical. He was dependent on light. Good light. He had never been particularly interested in daylight, it reminded him too much of the fact that he ought to go out and get some fresh air. So it didn’t matter that the flat was three-quarters underground. Around midday the sun still managed to find a way in and spread patches of sunlight on the floor. The best days were when outside the day was dark with rain. He always felt so happy in a melancholy way to hear the rain dully striking the flagstones outside. But it hadn’t rained for a long time now.

The policeman had placed himself next to his work table.

‘You paint.’

It was a sober statement of fact, not with the usual gush of enthusiasm most people lay in their voices when they discovered his pictures. He was good, he knew that. And he was used to people noticing it. He felt disappointed.



‘Yes,’ he replied.

‘Is that what you live off?’ the policeman asked.

‘Yes,’ Ruben answered just as flatly, but then the woman gave a broad smile and went on:

‘You’re good!’

There it came, the confirmation. Ruben couldn’t resist smiling back at her.

The policeman had not shown any visible interest in the pictures laying around, but he scanned the room, his gaze went from side to side, and up and down, as if it was a camera. It was difficult to know what conclusions he was reaching. Chaos and clutter, presumably.

‘What do you use this for?’ Bitte Røed asked, pointing at the plastic boxes with cases, beads and various kinds of locks.

Ruben’s writing table was literally overflowing with brushes and small tools, sketch blocks and modelling clay – there were tubes of paint on and under the table.

‘Jewellery,’ Ruben said.

Bitte Røed picked up one of the boxes, looked at its contents and recognised a type of ball-shaped magnetic lock that she herself had on a bracelet.

‘We’ve come to talk about your brother,’ she said. ‘And we were wondering if you could tell once more about what happened on the day almost twenty-five years ago when Camilla Carlsen was found murdered and your brother disappeared.’

Ruben noticed that the man was searching for a place to sit down without finding anything except the too deep and not completely clean chair, and he felt a bit ashamed that his duvet still lay on the sofa. An empty packet of biscuits and a can of cola that had fallen over had left brown stains on the cover. He had slept in the living room again after having edited his last films. The policeman remained standing.

‘Yes, we know you’ve made a statement earlier. Perhaps you know that the Camilla case has been reopened? You knew Camilla, didn’t you?’

Ruben took in the words with a flutter of warmth in his chest. He suddenly realised what the two wanted. And he understood that he must avoid saying anything that could ruin twenty-five years of self-imposed silence. He took care to make his voice neutral, as if the information did not affect his body.

‘Reopened?’

There was only a week left, wasn’t the expiry date after twenty-five years? He had felt convinced that no one would ask any more about what happened back then.

‘Did you talk to Dennis the day he disappeared?’

Ruben fumbled for the chair, he had to sit down so they wouldn’t notice how his knees had suddenly started to tremble under the loose material of his sweatpants. The lunch he had eaten had started to shift around inside his stomach. He fished up the brush he had flung away from the floor and remained sitting, dipping it up and down in the glass of water that stood on the table. He had to paint. If he only started to paint, he would calm down.

He noticed that the two police officers were watching him. That didn't matter, he was used to being looked at strangely, and down at. The only thing he needed was his colours. A sheet of paper. To see how everything blended on the thick paper, to add a little salt where there was to be a different texture, and ensure that the paper had the right level of moisture, not too wet or too dry, for then he wouldn't get the effect of crystals forming on the paper. Ruben heard the man clear his throat, but he didn't look up from the landscape that was beginning to emerge on the watercolour block.

'We can see you're busy, but this shouldn't take long,' Bitte Røed said. 'Do you remember the day? Did you meet your brother that day?'

There was something about her voice, a cool summer breeze at the back of the neck, a pleasant shiver that made him start to tremble.

'I don't remember,' Ruben said. 'He probably stopped by the house. Perhaps. Just for a moment. To fetch a bag, I think.'

'Did you talk to him?'

'No.'

'Did you see him?'

'No.'

'But how do you know he took a bag with him, then?'

Dammit, how did he know that? Think, think, think. He hadn't been prepared to answer questions like that. Not now, so long afterwards, and he suddenly couldn't remember what he had said back then when it all happened. The letter! What was it his brother had said in the letter? And what had actually become of that letter? But then he remembered. There was something about that bag – he was to say that he had fetched his bag. That was it. He breathed more easily as soon as he recollected that.

'I saw that his sports bag was gone, so I just assumed that he had dropped by,' he said lightly and at the same time moved his head a little closer to the watercolour block, so that they couldn't see his face.

'Have you any idea where he was going?'

Ruben went anger suddenly flare up from somewhere deep inside him. Why did they have to poke and pry about that now?

'Exercising,' he repeated. 'I said that he fetched his sports bag, didn't I. And you know full bloody well that he drowned himself in the fjord afterwards. You found the boat, didn't you, and his suicide note and everything. Can you leave me in peace now! It was twenty-five years ago, all this! I thought we'd finished with the case.'

'Soon we'll never finish with cases like that. Fortunately,' Verner said. 'The expiry date is being annulled from serious criminal cases.'

A sudden roaring started inside his head, located right behind the ears. Ruben concentrated on listening and noticed that it changed character. A sharp whistling took over and spread rapidly, soon it would fill his entire skull. Annulled? Was that true? They were perhaps twisting things to get him to talk? But what if it was true? Then he would never find peace. Ruben felt a fearful tiredness that slowly permeated his body and made his arms wilt.

'It's good news,' Verner went on, 'that the case has been reopened now. The problem is that we are pushed for time, since the new law will not have retroactive effect. We found Dennis' boat back then, but no conclusive evidence. We never reached any final conclusion about what happened to Camilla. No one was ever sentenced. You knew Camilla?'

Ruben pinched his mouth shut. He didn't need to answer. No! He'd kept his trap shut all these years, he could manage another week. No retroactive effect, the policeman had said. No one could force anything out of him at all. But his body betrayed him and he found himself nodding.

'She must have been a few years older than you – how well did you know her?'

'Quite well, but everyone knew who she was of course.'

'Your brother is still seen as the killer. I know that if someone is a suspect in a case like this one, the suspicion tends to stick. Unless one can prove that it wasn't the case. And the fact is that we have no proof. Your brother ought to be innocent unless proved guilty, but that's not always how it works out in life. Wouldn't it be good to get to know the truth at last? Wouldn't it allow everyone some peace, no matter whether he was guilty or not?'

The truth, Ruben thought, what the hell do you two know about the truth. What you see is not always true. He thought of the present he had been given by his brother that day, and the letter, and all that had been written in the newspapers. That they had been able to determine the time of death so precisely because of the insects. He looked across at the model he had started to form out of wax that would soon be the template for the new piece of jewellery. It would turn out well. Everything was in the process of turning out well. Why should anyone start messing around with this old case now?

'Did your brother have a relationship with Camilla?'

It was the policewoman who asked. Laughter bubbled up inside him, he couldn't stop it.

'What is it that's so amusing?'

He pulled himself together. It wasn't amusing. Should he tell them what he suspected? It surely couldn't do any harm. And then he would be honest. The police were trained to catch people lying, and if he just said what he was able to say, and kept quiet about the rest, they ought to be able to trust him.

'I don't think Dennis liked girls, or rather he did like them, for he liked hanging out with them.'

'Who?'

'The girls. Camilla. And then May and Ewa. And Anette.'

'Why did he want to hang out with them, do you think?'

'No, I don't know, that was just nonsense. Obviously he liked girls, but I think he liked boys too, or maybe he was just jealous.'

'Jealous of whom?'

'Of Camilla. And of Trond.'

'And who's Trond?'

'He was Ewa's boyfriend. Well, they're married now, have two kids and everything.'

‘And you think Dennis was jealous of this Trond? Or of Camilla?’

Ruben shrugged his shoulders, as if suggesting that both suggestions might be possible.

‘What’s this?’ Bitte asked.

Ruben saw that the policewoman had picked up the piece of wax he was in the process of forming. The new design was tricky, but he wanted to make something really fine this time. Something that could make his sales take off. Dahlia deserved it. After all, it was she who had given him the idea of producing jewellery and displayed the finished collection in her shop. He pictured Dahlia as she came teetering into Lier Art Association on her high heels, almost toppling over forwards. She had been fascinated by his small sculptures, and her husband had said that he had a collection of similar pieces at home. He recalled how eager and somehow searching she had been. Her cheeks had flushed. He had liked the intoxicating feeling it had given him to stand in front of a woman who blushed. It made him feel as he was the one in control. But it hadn’t lasted long. Now she was the one who decided, she was the boss.

‘It’s to be pendant for a necklace,’ he said. ‘I’m working on a new design.’

‘A bit unusual,’ the policewoman said and replaced the lump of wax on the desk, while she also glanced at the finished pieces lying there.

He noticed that the corners of her mouth went down, as if she was disgusted, and he felt provoked. The veins in his neck pounded.

‘I sell lots of them,’ he said. ‘Necklaces, earrings, rings. Lots, lots, at Dahlia’s Design.’

That he sold lots was an exaggeration, but the old bag didn’t need to know that. Maybe he should tell her? That it was to honour his dead brother that he made precisely these pieces of jewellery? Perhaps that would wipe the scepticism off her bloated face? No, he realised. No one need know that he was trying to give his brother eternal life by making symbolic pieces of jewellery. That would be too stupid, and would mean that he would have to change his statement. They would realise that he had lied back then. For he had talked to his brother, and the shame at having lost the present that Dennis had given him on that last day was still as strong as ever.

‘Dahlia’s Design?’ the policewoman asked.

‘Haven’t you heard about it?’

Ruben stared disbelievingly at them.

‘The shop lies in Drammen, the pedestrian street in from the square. Her clothes have their own style. An incredibly cool mix of Norse and Egyptian patterns.’

‘Is that the same Dahlia that cleans for your mother and father?’

It was the policeman who asked, and Ruben saw the same doubt in his mug as the policewoman had had when she looked at the jewellery.

‘Is it illegal to have two jobs?’

‘Of course not,’ Verner Jacobsen said. ‘I would think that it’s not easy to make a living from a shop in downtown Drammen.’

Ruben didn't feel up to trying to convince them that his jewellery was sellable and that the shop was doing well. He wanted them to leave, felt worn out from having talked so much. Words had a tendency to tangle themselves into the wrong patterns, were never clear the way pictures were.

'What's your relationship with Dahlia?' Verner asked.

The policeman had also come over to the table, and he let an index finger slide over the already finished pieces of jewellery.

'I haven't any relationship with her,' he replied and thrust his hands deep into his pockets, fiddling with some chewing gum that was stuck on the inside, in the lining.

'No, I didn't mean it like that,' Verner said. 'I just heard your parents say that you were the one who had introduced her to this house. It seems as if you are useful to each other. She sells jewellery for you, and you made sure she got an extra job with your parents.'

'We're friends,' Ruben said. 'Soul mates, actually!'

He opened his eyes wide in a way he knew would make him look a bit of a half-wit. That normally made people go away and leave him in peace.

The police detectives looked at each other, and Ruben noticed that they smiled at each other in a funny way. Oh yes, he was used to that, that people rolled their eyes and thought he wasn't completely all there. That was fine.

Fine, fine, fine.

'We're old souls, the pair of us.'

It suddenly became important to explain.

'There are certain people,' he started, but then stopped to draw breath. 'Just once in a while, one meets someone who one is on the same wavelength with from the word go. That was how it was with me and Dahlia, and, and...'

He let his voice die out. They weren't listening. And all the talk about soul mates sounded too stupid, he realised. There were things that couldn't be explained, only felt. Now he felt just as stupid as he was trying to give the impression of being.

'That's also what happens if one falls head over heels in love,' Bitte said with a smile.

It was starting to smart in his chest again. There was a huge eagle under his breastbone, and now it was flapping its wings. An angry bird of prey. He wasn't in love, but could feel himself blushing even so. For a while he had believed that Dahlia liked him. Liked-liked him. But she was of course much too old, and married too. He liked young girls. Girls with long hair and skinny, tight bodies just like window dummies.

'You're wrong,' he said. 'Wrong, wrong, wrong.'

He could hear that his voice was getting irritatingly thin and piping. A sparrow's voice.

'Fine, fine,' the policeman said disarmingly. 'It's not all that important at all. We're more interested in what you did later that day your brother disappeared. Were you also out looking for him?'

Ruben shrugged his shoulders.

‘Nobody went looking for him. My mother reported it to the police, but they didn’t do anything, got it?’

He saw that something glinted in the policeman’s eyes, irritation probably, but then he rummaged around in his pockets and pulled out a business card.

‘If you happen to think of anything we ought to know about your brother, I’d like you to get in touch with us, he said.

Ruben took the card and placed it on the desk without looking at it. He pretended to be engrossed in his painting again and didn’t even answer when they said goodbye and let themselves out. For a long while he remained sitting hunched over the table, unable to control the thoughts that whirred round like aggressive insects just inside his skull. The case reopened – what good could come of that?