**Sample translation**

**Risk**

**By Sven G. Simonsen**

Prologue

Tonsai, Thailand

The light made the mountain seem as warm and living as they were. Golden rock and tanned, sweating skin. The woman, shorthaired with sinewy arms, was the one climbing. Her movements were lithe, as if she were performing a slow dance up the rock face. The man, with a week-old beard, sun-bleached hair hanging down his broad back, was belaying her from below.

The village beneath them lay in shadows between the sheer rock faces, and the cabins were only partially visible under the coconut trees that surrounded them. The rock face they were climbing, which was limestone, was the place the sun hit first – friendly at this time of day, uncompromising just hours later.

She reached a ledge and anchored herself to the bolts that marked the belay. It looked as if it was the only place on the route where two people could stand upright and take a proper break. She was two rope lengths up; above her the rock face extended a further forty metres. Steel bolts marked the route to the top.

She took in the slack, automatically securing it in the belay device, and the man started to climb. He took longer than the woman. At one point he had to take a break and rest, sitting in his climbing harness, legs braced against the rock face. The woman called out encouraging words as he shook his forearms to loosen his grip muscles and rubbed chalk into his fingers and palms before continuing to climb. Shortly afterwards, he reached her.

Fifty metres below them, the sun had just hit the foot of the mountain. In a gentle overhang immediately above the beach, four or five other climbers were practising bouldering technique. A couple of hundred metres further east, where the village opened out onto the beach, brightly coloured long-tail boats rested at the water’s edge. One boat had just arrived and a small group of newcomers was clambering over board. Knee-deep in water, they took their backpacks off the boat as they took in the view of the beach and sea around them.

The two rock climbers remained where they were; she shaded her eyes with her hand and pointed out across the sea before them. Far out there, between cliffs that rose sheer from the ocean, a passenger boat was on its way in, maybe from Phi Phi, maybe from one of the other islands.

He placed an arm around her waist and she leant against him, gave him a long kiss. From a bag hanging off the back of his harness alongside the chalk pouch he took a small camera. He drew her even closer to him and, holding the camera at arm’s length, he took a picture – the two of them together, against a backdrop of sea and sand and palm trees.

He said something to her, as if in explanation, and she smiled and nodded. But a moment later, she started waving her arms and seemed agitated. The man had released himself from the climbing rope. The woman pointed urgently at the rope but he just smiled and laughed at her. Holding a loop fastened above him with one hand, he stretched one leg out over the edge, as if to feel the thin air beneath them. The woman shook her head and turned away. The man took out his camera again and she must have been quick to forgive him, because now she posed as he photographed her, laughing and blowing him kisses.

Suddenly, the man pressed both hands to the back of his head, as if overcome by a sudden intense pain. The camera glinted silver as it plummeted to the ground. He slumped and the woman screamed and tried to reach him. Hands clutching his head, he sat swaying on the ledge.

Then he slipped down.

The woman hurled herself after him. She got a grip on one of his arms and was pulled over the edge, but lost hold of him when her own fall was arrested by rope and metal.

The man tried to protect himself the first time his head hit the rock face; after that, he fell lifeless. He landed in the sand on the narrow beach between the mountain and the high tide.

Climbers and instructors rushed over to him, and several people came running from the neighbouring café. They stood around the man passively. One glance was enough to confirm that he was dead. Several people wept. One girl turned aside and threw up.

Somebody pointed up at the woman dangling motionless in her climbing harness. They called up to her but she didn’t respond. Dark blood ran down over her face from a wound on her neck.

The image shifted again; for an instant it rested on the shoreline, where the waves still crashed softly in towards the land.

Then, abruptly, the film came to an end.

It took her head a couple of seconds to find its way back to where she was. She reached across the bed and switched on a bedside lamp. Felt the bed linen against her body, damp with sweat. There was an acrid smell, the stench of fear.

She closed the laptop, threw off the duvet and moved to the other side of the bed; lay there motionless feeling her pulse hammer. Fear, yes. It inhabited her body now. But so did anger. An anger so strong but as yet undirected.

She grabbed the phone that lay on her nightstand. Opened her contact list and keyed a name into the search field. Keyed it in wrong. Then wrong again. Steadying her index finger with her thumb, she keyed it in one more time and found her at last.

“Liv?” The voice sounded confused, drunk with sleep.

“Yes, it’s me.”

“What’s going…”

“You wanted to interview me.”

“Is that what you’re calling about? I thought you didn’t want…“

“Do you want that interview or not?”

There was a moment’s silence at the other end. “Is everything okay, Liv? You ring me in the middle of the night and…“

“Do you want it or not?”

“Of course I want it. But you were so certain that…”

“But now I want it.”

“Okay, great.”

“But on one condition.”

“Yeah?”

“That we do it my way.”

CITY OF LONDON

Wednesday 9 October

A beam from the low sun forced its way through blue-grey clouds. The light was shattered by the raindrops that ran down the outside of the window, flooding the little office with light and setting the wood of the coffee table between the two men aglow. A vase of fresh-cut flowers cast a narrow shadow over the table towards the Norwegian.

“This city… I barely recognise it any more.”

His partner, a man in his sixties, had finished his espresso and was now scraping sugar from the bottom of the little cup with a teaspoon. He ate the half-dissolved crystals from the spoon and took a sip of the mineral water beside him.

“St Paul’s Cathedral is over there. Imagine how it towered over the little houses when it was finished 300 years ago. No wonder people were God-fearing! St. Paul’s was the highest building in the City of London for 250 years. But now it’s totally hemmed in and overshadowed.”

“Money certainly does talk,” the Norwegian said.

His partner ran a couple of fingers over his greying beard and looked at him quizzically over narrow reading glasses. Then he smiled.

“Irony. Fantastic. Yes, of course. Money talks. Fortunately, we’re sitting at the top of the food chain.”

The man called himself Marks and was, by his own account, one of the tiny minority of Londoners actually to have been born and bred in the city. He gave a very convincing performance as a resentful London boy but – like most of the other information on his CV on the elegant home page of Overseas Legal, Ltd – this too was a façade. The Norwegian wasn’t particularly bothered by it. They knew what they needed to about each other.

What he saw before him backed up what he knew. The man’s suit was expensive but neutral; his hair, manicure and demeanour were discreet. The office was just one of the many thousands in the Square Mile, the heart of London’s financial district. The older man was a person who inspired confidence without attracting attention. This had enabled him to operate under the radar of the police and the tax authorities for three decades.

The atmosphere between them was relaxed now. Marks was chatty and jovial, and the Norwegian felt satisfaction spread through his body like a calm warmth.

He and Marks had discussed the test they had carried out two weeks earlier. As it turned out, he was the one who’d had most contact with Dlinruk – mostly because, of the three partners, he and the Russian were the ones who understood the technology. Especially the Russian, of course.

The Englishman already knew the most important thing: the money had arrived.

“It was poetry in motion,” Marks interrupted. “And those lucky enough be involved are grateful. Dear General Hasanov in Baku has bought himself a villa in Antibes. And our friend Deputy-Minister Gupta in Delhi has already enrolled all his children at a private school in York. In ten or twenty years those telecoms millions he tucked away will look like old money.”

Outside, the blanket of cloud closed again and suddenly the room seemed as dark as the streets thirteen floors below them. For a couple of seconds, until the Norwegian’s vision adjusted, the man opposite him looked like a mere shadow.

“Tell me, how did you actually come to be doing this?” asked the man, now restored to flesh and blood.

He was ready for the question – had expected it to come earlier.

“A moment’s inspiration, you might say. I listen when people talk. I see other people’s talents and I’m conscious of my own – although I don’t display all of them in public.”

It wasn’t an answer that left one much the wiser but Marks seemed satisfied.

“Even though I’m not a specialist, I can see that this is both ingenious and simple. Of course, that’s how genius often manifests itself: the basic idea is terribly simple.”

The Norwegian nodded again.

“It’s a shame we can’t do it forever, but we know the limitations. One flash flight – the technology doesn’t allow for anything more.”

“And is everything looking good from Dlinruk’s point of view?”

“It definitely seems to be. The most important thing for him was to have all the mechanisms tested out in a cohesive operation. I think what he was most excited about was the method for making the transfers without signatures. He now feels certain that this is no problem.”

“Good to have it confirmed.” Marks started to chuckle. “He’s a bit of a one-off, this Dlinruk.”

“That’s putting it mildly. The first time I met him, he was lying on a sofa giggling and playing Pac-Man. And that was in the lobby of Le Meridien in Brussels.”

“Oh my!” Marks chuckled a bit more. Then he stood up with surprising agility, went over to the desk and moved his mouse, bringing an e-mail inbox into view. He cast a quick glance over the latest messages and smiled.

“The wife and kids are on holiday. They ring and mail all the time to tell me how much they love me.”

He picked up a framed picture that stood on his desk and his smile grew even broader.

“Euro Disney last summer. The twins loved it. The wife too.”

For an instant, he appeared to vanish into his own thoughts. Then he put the picture back down again, stroking an affectionate finger over the glass.

“This will be my last project. When it’s over, I am going to concentrate on my family. A young wife needs attention and I want to be there for the kids. Make sure they grow up to be decent people.”

Marks looked over at the Norwegian.

“Definitely to be recommended, a family. That’s what it’s all about in the end, eh?”

He sat down again, swinging in his chair pensively.

“Or – what is it that drives you?”

The Norwegian gave it a moment’s thought. “Money – that’s an incentive of course. But most of all I’m doing *this* because I have the *opportunity*. How many times in your life do you get the chance to do one spectacular thing that you are better placed to succeed at than any other human being?”

“And the other…?”

“Family? That’s not my thing. You can’t control the outcome. Things can go wrong as a result of external factors.”

“You are obsessed with those calculations of yours!” The Englishman gave a hearty laugh. “You really do risk-assess everything you do, don’t you?”

The Norwegian smiled faintly. He saw no reason to become more intimate with Marks.

Marks turned serious again.

“So everything’s under control for our operation? If not, you have to tell me. If one of us goes under, the others will be dragged down too.”

The Norwegian’s gaze didn’t waver as he answered.

“All clear. I’m monitoring all the parameters. The likelihood of setbacks is extremely low.”

Marks had stopped swinging in his chair.

“You really don’t talk about risk in the same way as other people. What is this all about – are you a gambler?”

The Norwegian shook his head.

“A gambler is the last thing I’d call myself. I control risk. That’s what makes me a winner.”

Marks took off his reading glasses, folded them slowly and shoved them into a soft leather case.

“And me – am I a risk?”

“We pose a certain risk to each other, we both see that,” said the Norwegian. “But neither of us can hurt the other without hurting himself. And within these limitations, we can do business together.”

“MAD.”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re too young to remember that. It’s a term from the Cold War: Mutually assured destruction. The US and the Soviet Union both knew that if one of them tried to hit the other with a surprise attack, they’d end up wiping each other off the map.”

“And that’s us?” asked the Norwegian.

“Yes, that’s us.”

[p. 73]

Stockfleth’s café was directly behind Oslo District Court and it wasn’t much less crowded here than on the pavement outside. Liv and Stefan Wiig had found a relatively quiet corner right at the back on some sofas. She was eating a brioche, constantly tearing off new bits of it with her fingers as she drank a latte. He contented himself with biscotti and an espresso.

“So what can you tell me about Olav’s work?” Liv asked. “If you read the interview in VG, you’ll know roughly what I’m after.”

Wiig flinched slightly then smiled again.

“No beating about the bush – I take it small talk isn’t your thing.”

“Sorry, I’ve got out of the habit.”

“I can understand that,” Wiig said.

Leaning forward with his elbows on the table he said;

“Every time a dictator has been overthrown in recent years, you’ve probably heard speculation about how much money he had stashed away and where that money might be,” he began. “About Gaddaffi’s people who supposedly drove a convoy of gold and dollars through the desert. Viktor Yanukovych who withdrew billions before being kicked out of Ukraine. Headlines about how the money has to be found and returned to the country.”

“Yes, I’ve picked up that much.”

“But the big question is how they actually do it – how do they get all that money from A to B? After all, you don’t drive a convoy of gold all the way from Tripoli to London. Luckily for the bandits, there are plenty of people offering to help them with the move. That’s what Olav was working on and what I’m working on: how people move sums that would – if they were in cash – fill entire trucks, so that they can be spent on apartments and shares and cars and fur coats wherever people might wish.”

Liv nodded pensively and Wiig continued.

“By the way, there are infinitely more people interested in moving millions and billions and getting them in circulation than just the world’s corrupt heads of state. Money acquired through theft and tax evasion in east and west, north and south. Take the now notorious Lagarde list of secret Greek bank accounts in Switzerland, for example – assets that were “mislaid” by one Greek politician after another. If countries like Greece and Italy could tax just half the money that is being siphoned off they wouldn’t need emergency aid and rescue packages. Even modest taxation of all the money hidden away in tax havens worldwide would add up to more than the total that the world’s wealthiest countries spend on development aid.”

Wiig paused briefly to check that Liv was keeping up. She nodded for him to continue.

“It doesn’t even have to be a rich country. In South Sudan, where GDP per head is half a per cent of the level in Norway, the president went public a few months before the civil war broke out telling certain people who had stolen a total of 24 billion kroner – they weren’t named, but their names are known – to please return the money. Guess what happened when they didn’t?”

“Nothing?” Liv suggested.

“Correct. And think of the countries where they have real assets, like the big oil exporters. Based on current yield, Russia has lost over four trillion kroner since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Saudi Arabia and Nigeria have both lost up to two trillion since the 1970s. In many of these countries, the biggest profiteers are still in power.”

Liv sipped the last of her latte.

“And ordinary people may imagine they have good leaders because they don’t have to pay a lot of tax. But the truth is that the people at the top hand out a fraction of the oil profits and steal the rest. And when the oil wells run dry, the country goes bankrupt.”

“Exactly,” Wiig said eagerly. “And then we have countries where most of the state budget goes on military spending, like Azerbaijan and Pakistan and Sudan. If you’re a general there, you can dip your fingers straight in the till. Or if you’re a Communist Party prince in China or hand out state contracts in India. The protest movements in the West have focused on the richest one per cent among us. We – and by that I mean our tiny department in the Financial Intelligence Unit and our international partners, who have much greater resources than us – are focused on an even smaller group. We’re talking about fewer than a hundred thousand people with a total of 55 trillion kroner tucked away in tax havens.”

“You don’t mean billions?”

“No, I mean trillions. Earned or stolen – but tax-evaded all the same. In total, we now believe that at least 120 trillion kroner are stashed away in Switzerland and the Cayman Islands, for example. That’s equivalent to the combined GDP of the US and Japan. Banks provide facilitators to help them hide the money. There’s only so much joy to be had from a mega fortune if you’re sitting in Juba or Kabul or Nur Sultan. The point is to help make the money available wherever it’ll be fun to spend it.”

“And who offers these kinds of services?”

“There are plenty of providers. Even the Vatican Bank has lent itself to money laundering. Without the Pope’s knowledge, obviously, but it just goes to show what can happen if you rely on God Almighty to take care of the auditing. Not so long ago, the UK’s two biggest banks agreed to pay 15 billion dollars in fines to the American authorities for money laundering. HSBC, the biggest of the two, had moved billions of dollars from Mexico to the US despite being warned that it could be drug money. It mostly was, incidentally. The same bank had also systematically removed details from bank transfers showing that large sums came from Iranian companies that the US would have blocked.”

Stefan Wiig got them some more coffee. When he returned, Liv was sitting peering interestedly at the people around them. The next table was occupied by an elderly married couple who had just come back in from having a smoke; the man had fetched a refill of black coffee in a paper cup. Now the woman sat poring over a little pile of lottery scratch-cards she was scraping with a lighter while the man conferred with VG as he filled out betting coupons. There wasn’t any lottery win today, as far as Liv could tell. Maybe they’d have better luck with the soccer.

“You could write a research paper about this place,” Wiig said. “Because it’s right next to the courthouse a lot of the people who are involved in or watching court cases come here for a coffee. You can get an idea of the kinds of cases being heard just by watching the customers on any given day. They’re not all coffee-bar cosmopolitans if you know what I mean. You won’t just see celebrity lawyers with sky-high salaries but their clients too, with family and friends. Every social grouping is represented.”

A young waitress walked among the tables clearing up; Wiig piled up their empty cups and plates and handed them to her.

They were silent for a while before Wiig spoke again.

“Are you sure Olav didn’t mention me?” he asked. “We worked pretty closely together.”

Liv thought it over again.

“I don’t think so. Sorry. But there’s a lot I don’t remember anymore. I can’t remember him mentioning any other colleagues either. Olav didn’t talk all that much about his job on the whole.”

“Well, I’m a bit less disappointed then,” Wiig replied, with a little smile. And despite failing to remember him, Liv could picture him as Olav’s close colleague. Olav would have appreciated his humour and enthusiasm.

“But back to what we were discussing – and this is the point: there are increasingly fewer places to hide in the international financial market. Governments worldwide, not least here in Europe, are desperately seeking tax income. They are fighting a titanic battle to cover budget deficits while ordinary people seethe with discontent.”

“So the bandits can see that the international mood is shifting,” Liv said. “And think they don’t have much time left to secure their fortunes.”

“Precisely. There’s a feeling that this won’t last forever. The EU and the US are pushing to get oversight of the property their citizens have placed in tax havens. The British are working on their protectorates – places like Bermuda, the Cayman Islands and Jersey. Liechtenstein is cleaning up. Switzerland is working on it. Here at home, the authorities have signed tax information exchange agreements with pretty much all of the world’s tax havens.”

Wiig picked up some biscotti crumbs that still lay on his plate and washed them down with a sip of coffee.

“Hackers and whistle-blowers are a mounting risk,” he continued. “When a Swiss bank employee decided to disseminate a list of foreign accounts in Swiss banks a couple of years ago, he triggered one hell of a row. One man. Before, people *assumed* that enormous sums were stashed away in tax havens. Now we *know* that the Germans alone have two hundred billion euro held in Swiss bank accounts. And they aren’t keeping their money there because the internet banking systems are so user-friendly.”

He laid his palms on the table dramatically. “And when we get leaks like the Panama Papers, the Paradise Papers – well, *that’s* when it’s really fun to get down to work!”

“And Olav – what did he do with this? What do all of you do?” Liv asked.

“We’re involved in pushing for these developments, you could say. And we’re not doing so badly considering that there are only a handful of us working in the department that deals with this. Without Olav,” he swiftly added. “It’s not a fair fight. You can imagine how much filthy rich criminals are willing to pay to protect their assets. But if you factor in the resources of our partners – primarily the FBI – the playing field evens out a bit. And then we do have certain things that make us useful to our partners.”

Liv thought over what he’d told her.

“This is exciting. I’m almost wondering whether there might be a new project for me here at some point in the future. I think I can sense some overlap with my own field experience.”

Stefan Wiig nodded.

“That may well be true. It’s widely recognised that criminality and conflict go hand in hand – war and unrest create their own business opportunities.”

Wiig pursued this line of thought further.

“You say you’re interested in corporate social responsibility. How about looking at areas where companies neglect their responsibilities to an extent that becomes criminal? Take Shell in Nigeria, child labour in Bangladesh – check out how baby-food producers pay doctors to tell mothers not to breastfeed their babies. Or you could look at what it’s like to grow up in countries where the police and courts are just as likely to support the criminals as their victims. Norway shares a 200-kilometre border with a country just like that.”

“The convergence between political and economic criminality. That’s definitely a potential angle. And this is all very helpful…” Liv hesitated slightly.

“War profiteers and child soldiers. Could that be a topic? You’ve been to places like that, haven’t you?” he asked.

Liv turned her coffee cup between her hands, her gaze becoming remote.

“I remember the first time I came to a roadblock manned by children,” she said. “They were ten or twelve years old: small, skinny kids with heavy weapons. Damn but I was scared. The kids themselves didn’t look as if anything could scare them any more. Maybe that was the most terrifying thing about it.”

She shook her head as if trying to banish the image.

“Maybe I could see things more clearly if I could find out what Olav was working on in greater detail.”

Wiig leaned back, folding his hands in his lap.

“In that case, I don’t really know how much more I can help you.”

“Can or want to?”

“I do want to, absolutely,” he replied quickly. “And I’m not saying this just because of workplace confidentiality. The simple fact is that there’s a lot I don’t know about Olav. The stuff he was working on went over most of our heads.”

“Really?” Liv looked at him expectantly.

“Olav was the one who actually found things that made us useful to our partners. He wasn’t just a technical wizard – he also had an intuitive understanding of how money moves. Maybe it was something to do with him being a free spirit himself, not a bureaucratic type like the rest of us.” This sounded like an insight that had occurred to Wiig as he spoke. He continued.

“Olav only reported in when he thought he had something to report. Now and then, he might turn up unexpectedly at a meeting and make an observation that was impressive – even astounding. But we definitely didn’t have an overview of everything he was doing.”

When Liv left the café half an hour later, it was with mixed feelings. She had liked Stefan Wiig. At the same time she couldn’t help but wonder about how little the Economic Crime Department – or at least Wiig himself – seemed to know about Olav. A couple of times, it had felt almost as if he were interviewing her to find out more about his closest colleague. For her part, Liv had wanted to discuss Olav’s death. But after a while Wiig had used the word “accident” so many times that she no longer saw the point.

[p. 345]

Beirut

Tuesday 7 January, 05.40

Liv felt somebody shaking her. She thrashed around and tried to free herself by striking out – to no avail. She opened her eyes and see the captain standing over her. He continued to hold her arms until she relaxed and nodded a reassurance to him. Then he carefully released his grip.

“Beirut in half an hour. Inspection, customs.”

Liv nodded. “*Shukhran*. Thanks.”

The captain reached for a bundle lying by the door, pulled it over to Liv and slapped it with a heavy hand. A change of clothes. Then he went out, leaving the door open behind him.

Liv was furious with herself. She had allowed herself to fall asleep without formulating a plan for what would happen later. She had been out for several hours. What was she going to do now?

She sat up, moving her arms and legs to get a status report on her body. Nothing had got any worse, she concluded. On the pipe where the flashlight still lay, she spotted a roll of gaffer tape and reached for it. She took a closer look at the roll, pulled off the outer layer, which was coated in oil and dirt, then continued to tear off pieces. First of all she stuck them over the scissor wounds, then over other larger and smaller cuts and scratches. In the end, she found some compresses in the leather bag the captain had left lying there, placed them against her toes and the soles of her feet and finished off by wrapping several layers of tape around both feet.

She pulled on the clothes the captain had left her: a T-shirt and an old pair of sweatpants. Then she cautiously stood up, stretched, went over to the door and peered out.

Outside day was breaking. There was a brisk breeze and the ship rocked in the crosswind. Liv saw two of the crew washing the deck and preparing to dock. The ship had rounded a long mole that sheltered the entire harbour area and was slowly advancing towards the smallest and innermost quay. The quays they passed were deserted, but up ahead an official car stood parked on the quayside and two men in uniform had already got out and were keeping an eye on the ship.

Liv did some quick thinking. How was she going to explain why she was on board this ship? How could she hope the customs officers would let her go ashore when she had neither passport nor visa? With her *looking* the way she did?

She made the only possible decision. Neither the crew nor the customs officers saw her come out and sneak to the rear of the deck. Nor did they hear her slice through the waves and swim away.

Liv climbed up some old tractor tyres that were hung along the quayside as fenders on the opposite side of the pier to where the customs officers were waiting. Once up on the quay, she ran as fast as she could into the shadows behind a group of containers. She was shivering with cold. It would be warm in a few hours but for now the cold of night persisted and the wind blew straight through her dripping wet clothes.

She knew where she needed to go, she must already have known it deep down when she boarded the boat in Famagosta. But would she really be able to get there?

She sprinted across the open space between the dock and the main road nearby, which followed the shoreline. She easily found her bearings on Charles Helou Street, but resisted the temptation to follow it to Hamra, the district she was heading for. There was too great a risk of being seen. She would have to keep to the small streets and alleys.

Suddenly she heard the screech of tyres on asphalt; turning, she saw the customs car approaching at top speed. She dodged behind the row of parked cars and ran in a crouch up the nearest side street. Looking back, she saw the car gaining on her and ran onwards, criss-crossing several blocks. Whenever she had a choice, she always took the darkest street.

Beirut was famous for its nightlife. People here liked to say they lived in the present because they had lost their future so many times. But during the final hours of the night it was quiet. The best thing you could do was stay tucked up safe at home. Syria was only a few dozen miles away and the war was creating unrest here too.

Twice she had to hurl herself into a doorway when police cars passed by. It wasn’t the police she wanted to explain herself to. The few times she heard a car around a corner, she ducked for cover.

Liv had expected to recognise the place better than she did. Beirut was hardly a small town but it wasn’t usually difficult to get your bearings in the centre. She thought she was moving parallel to Hamra Street, so sooner or later she should hit a side street where she would recognise her surroundings. Sometimes she thought a house or a shop looked familiar, but she was far from sure. Most of the shops and cafes were closed up with metal shutters. Everything would be more recognisable in daylight.

She was just starting to think she might be on the right track when a stray dog suddenly blocked the street ahead of her. At first it simply stood still, watching her; then it started barking loudly. Liv walked calmly to one side to get past it, but the scrawny animal followed her, coming closer. The barking brought more dogs dashing in from the side streets and soon she was surrounded by six or seven of them. Some kept their distance, barking, while others stood snarling in front of her.

She backed away but the dogs followed. She retreated further and nearly fell when her back hit a garbage container. When she reached out an arm to steady herself, her hand fell instead upon a bag of rubbish. Without thinking, she threw the bag at two of the dogs standing nearest to her. They leapt aside but quickly hurled themselves back onto the bag when it burst open, spilling food waste on the ground.

The rest weren’t distracted for long. They were only two or three metres away when she reached over the edge of the container, grabbed everything she could get hold of and hurled it out. The dogs’ barking hurt her ears; the animals jostled around her, snapping at bags as she waved her arms and yelled to keep them at a distance. Then, for a brief moment, they all seemed to have forgotten her. Without turning her back on them, she quickly moved around the container. Before they had a chance to come after her, she pressed a shoulder against the container, pushing against it with all her weight. Her thigh muscles trembled uncontrollably and she was close to giving up when the container reluctantly started to roll. The front wheels tipped over the kerb, the container fell over with a crash and the contents tumbled out. A hot stench of rotting matter hit her.

For a matter of seconds, she stood behind the overturned container watching the dogs rip into the garbage. Then she withdrew as quickly as she dared and disappeared into a side street. She ran uphill for two blocks before slowing her pace.

She was still fighting for breath when she turned a corner and nearly collided with two men sitting in plastic chairs, automatic weapons on their knees. She quickly turned on her heel but they shouted after her, gesturing for her to come out of the shadows.

She vaguely remembered that a powerful political party had its headquarters in this district. She started to jog but heard the guards coming after her. She picked up speed, running as fast as she could.

All at once she felt an intense pain in her left foot. She limped onward on her right foot as best she could then sank down behind a dusty wreck of a car on a street corner. In the light from a shop sign she saw that a large shard of glass had cut through the tape and embedded itself between her toes. She reached in between them with her fingers and drew the glass out. Fresh blood ran from the wound.

She ran onwards until she reached a narrow alleyway between old apartment blocks. Then came the sound of running footsteps again – she couldn’t tell whether they were behind her or ahead. Without thinking, she ran over to the wall of a house and, grabbing onto power lines, bricks and guttering, managed to climb up to the lowest balcony, one and a half storeys above the ground.

She crouched down on the stone floor, and remained lying there until long after the footsteps had passed by.

When she got up again she felt something tickle her neck. Clothes hung out to dry. She grabbed a simple dress and pulled it on. It made her a bit less conspicuous.

But she was still a Western woman staggering alone through the streets of Beirut.

She continued walking – no longer thinking clearly, not knowing what it was in her that chose the direction. Around her she heard the sound of a city waking from sleep. Between the facades, beyond the streets that pointed east, she saw the sky coloured pink and gold. Soon the sun would climb over the horizon and shortly after that, the city would be bathed in harsh light.

Eventually she came to a district she was certain she recognised. There were no longer any high-rises; here the buildings were a mixture of offices, tradesmen’s businesses and apartment blocks.

She stopped in front of a fairly old three-storey house, craning over the wall that surrounded it to get a better look. Picking up some pebbles from the side of the street she threw them at the window on the ground floor. No reaction. She found some bigger stones and continued to throw. They made a crash so loud that the whole neighbourhood must have heard it.

Then the door flew open and a man came storming out.

“Bastards!” he shouted.

Then he caught sight of her. “Liv?! What the hell!”

She collapsed, lying in a heap against the cast iron gate.