

PEGASUS



BOOKS

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LIFE

A NOVEL

#1 INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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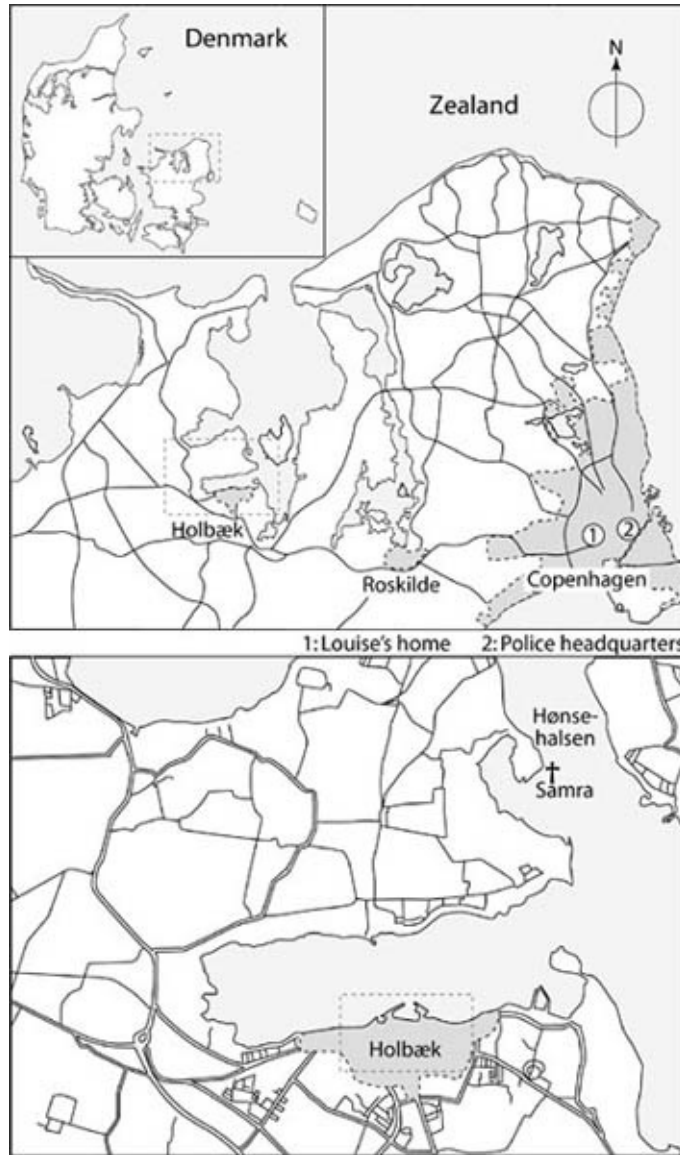


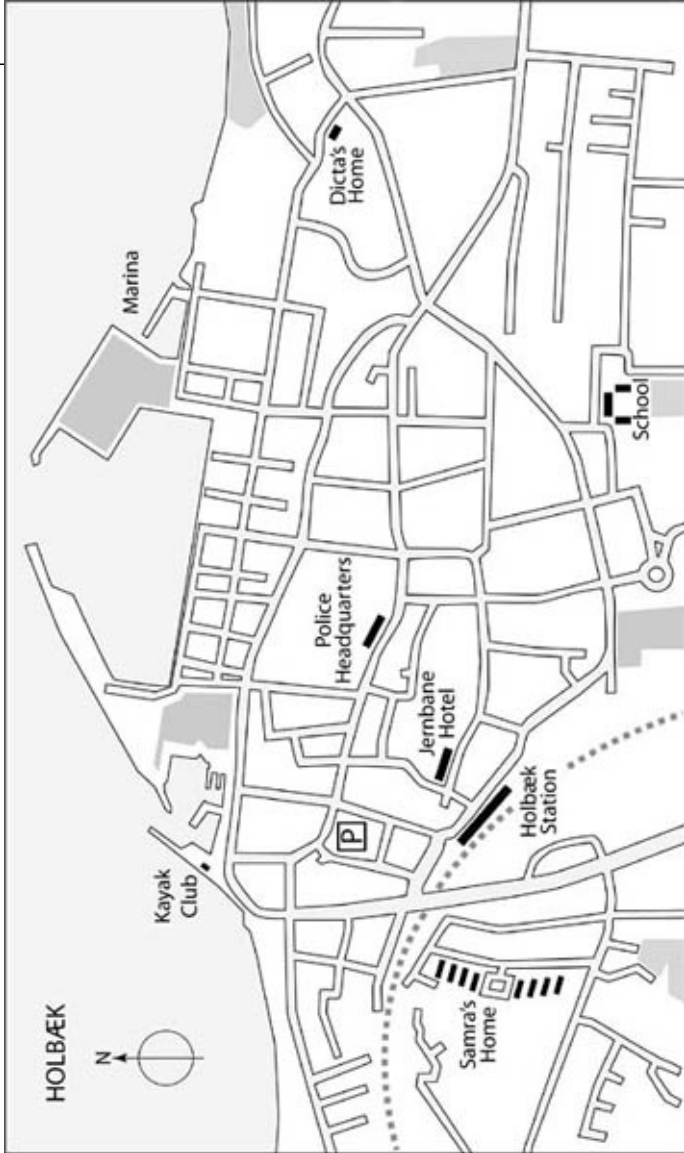
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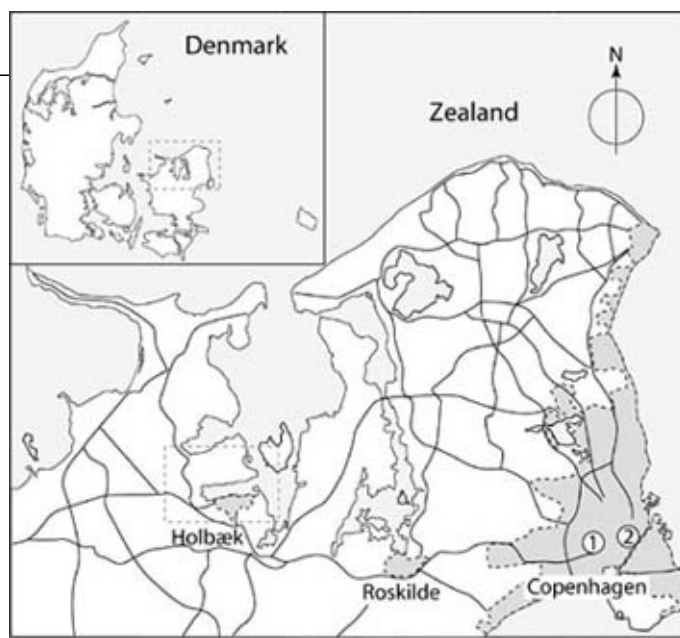
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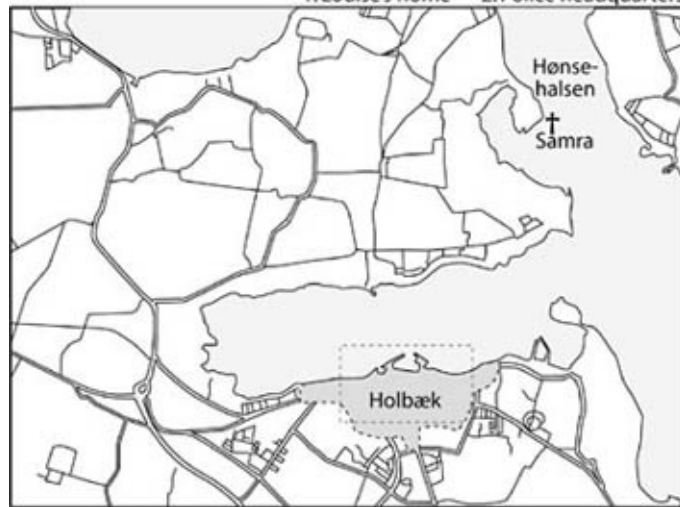
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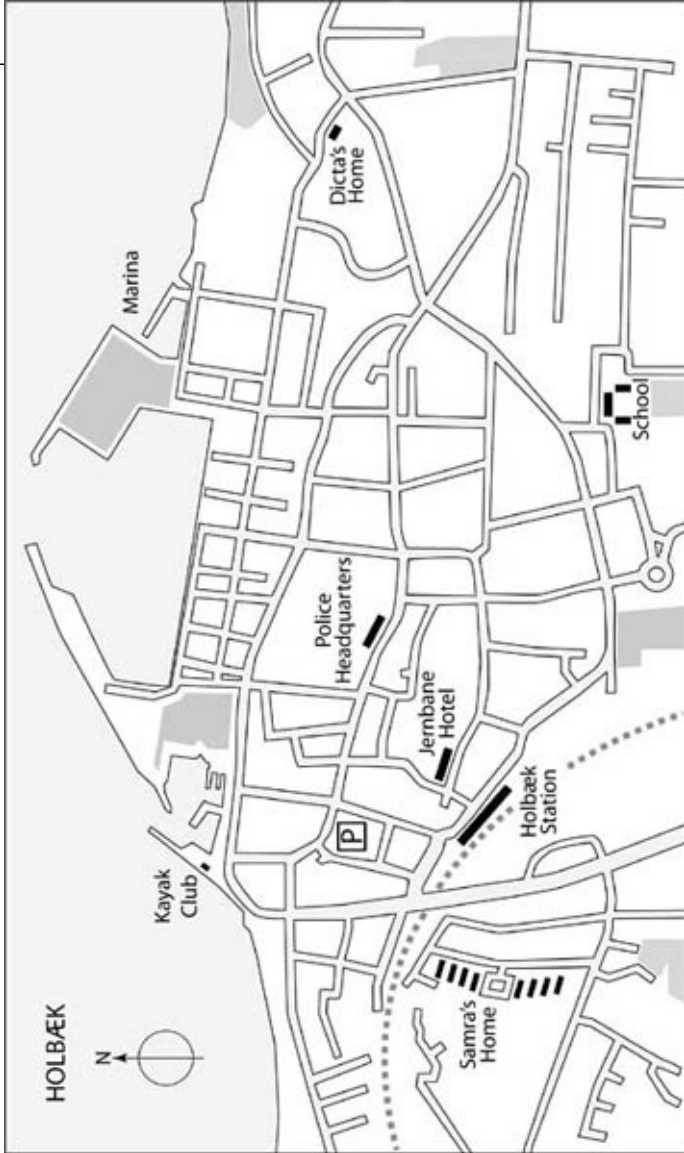






1: Louise's home 2: Police headquarters





When women are seen as the carriers of a family's honor they become vulnerable to attacks involving physical violence, mutilation and even murder, usually at the hand of an "offended" male kin and often with the tacit or explicit assent of female relatives.

—Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
“Opinion Piece for International Women’s Day: Honor Killing and Domestic Violence”
March 2011

An honor killing is the murder of a family member due to the belief that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family or community.

The United Nations Population Fund estimates that perhaps as many as five thousand women and girls a year are killed by members of their own families. Many women’s groups in the Middle East and Southwest Asia suspect the number of victims is about four times greater.

The perceived dishonor can be the result of dressing in a manner unacceptable to the family or community, wanting to terminate or prevent an arranged marriage, engaging in heterosexual activity outside marriage, or engaging in homosexual acts, amongst other things.

The most famous honor killing case in Denmark was that of Ghazala Khan, a nineteen-year-old woman who was shot and killed outside a train station in Slagelse, west of Copenhagen, in 2002 because her family disapproved of her choice of a husband. Nine people, including her father, brother, three uncles, an aunt, and two family friends were convicted of murder or accessory to murder in the case.

SHE COULD JUST MAKE OUT THE BLUE FLASHES BETWEEN THE densely grown tree trunks, but she couldn't see how many police vehicles were at the scene. The forest road was bumpy with enormous piles of firewood on either side, blocking out the bright morning light.

Søren Velin sped up, shooting small rocks against the undercarriage of the car, which skidded a little whenever the road turned. They waved him through the police blockade, and he parked next to one of the squad cars.

Louise Rick got out. The road ended at a bluff where a small path led down the last stretch to the water, which extended smooth and calm across the sound to the tree-lined shore of Oro Island in the distance. From here Louise didn't recognize any of the men in the huddle at the top of the bluff, so she grabbed her jacket out of the backseat and waited for Søren to lead the way.

"A fisherman found her," a dark-haired, powerfully built man who came to greet them explained. He walked past Søren and offered his hand to Louise.

"Storm," he said. "I'm glad you were willing to help us out."

Louise shook his hand and smiled. Storm was the captain of the Unit One Mobile Task Force with the Danish National Police, and he knew as well as she did that willingness had nothing to do with why she was out here, on the shore of the sound just north of Holbæk an hour west of Copenhagen. Higher-ups had made the decision before she was even asked, and they had just been lucky that she was, in fact, also willing to help.

"We still don't know how long she's been in the water," Storm continued as the three of them headed back toward the bluff. "The fisherman notified the Holbæk Police this morning at 8:35, saying he had spotted a motionless figure in the water. The girl had a heavy slab of concrete tied to her torso which was keeping her submerged under about four and a half feet of water where the body was stuck in some chicken wire. The fisherman gave up trying to get her loose with his oar and called the police, who showed up along with an ambulance. The Falck Rescue squad just finished recovering the body."

Louise noticed the search-and-rescue van with its trailer for the rubber raft that they had used to recover the girl. One diver had gone into the water to cut her free, then passed her off to the other diver, who hoisted her up into the raft. Now they were loading the rescue raft back onto the trailer. Louise walked all the way over to the edge of the bluff and saw the white sheet covering the dead girl's body and the crime-scene technicians in their coveralls busy combing the shore for evidence.

"The local police have cordoned off the site, and as you can see the CSI techs are already at work," Storm continued. "But we're still waiting for a couple more cars."

He interrupted his brief summary when they reached the others, and he introduced each of them in turn.

"That's Bengtsen; he's been with Holbæk's crime division since before anyone can remember," he said with obvious respect. "He knows everything worth knowing about Holbæk and the people who live here."

Bengtsen nodded at her, but he kept his hands in the pockets of his tweed trousers.

Storm stepped over to a man with an olive complexion.

"Dean Vukić," he said, and the man shook hands with Louise. There was something hypercorrect about his well-dressed style, the shirt and tie under his leather jacket making him look more like

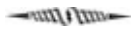
banker than an assistant detective.

Another man offered his hand to Louise.

“Mik Rasmussen,” he said.

Like Vukić and Louise herself, Mik was in his mid- to late thirties.

“Louise Rick,” she said. Out of habit she was about to add “Unit A,” but she caught herself. She quickly looked around at all the new faces. It was quite a small group, and she wondered briefly how she would fare at finding her place in this pack.



After the briefing that morning back at Copenhagen Police headquarters with Unit A—her homicide investigation unit—Captain Hans Suhr had opened the door to the office that Louise shared with her partner, Lars Jørgensen. Louise had just set her coffee cup on her desk and was asking her partner about his adopted twins, who were home sick with the flu, when Suhr uttered in two short sentences that Louise’s former partner Søren Velin was on his way to HQ to pick her up.

“Starting today you’ve been temporarily reassigned to the Unit One Mobile Task Force with the National Police,” he said, already on his way back out the door.

Louise quickly jumped to her feet and stopped him in the corridor, wanting to know what was going on. Suhr’s response was curt and clear: because she was deeply familiar with cases like this one. Then he hurried off.

Louise went back to her office and took a sip of her coffee, shaking her head in response to her partner’s raised eyebrows, meaning that Suhr hadn’t given her anything to go on.

“Rape, I’m assuming,” she said on her way out the door with her bag over her shoulder, telling Lars she hoped his twins would feel better soon. On her way down the back stairwell to the exit onto Otte Mønstedsgade she thought it must be a rape case of a certain caliber since a local police force had called for assistance. It was only after she was sitting in the car next to Søren Velin heading out toward Cape Tuse—or more specifically, a nature preserve out there with the unusual name of Hønehalsen, “the Chicken Neck”—that she realized she had misunderstood her boss.

“I have no idea whether rape was involved,” her former partner told her as she started asking him about the case, preparing for what lay ahead. “But it looks like the girl is from an immigrant background, and my understanding is that that’s why Storm really wanted you on this case.”

Louise sighed. She had just wrapped up a case like this, and she was still having such a difficult time letting go of it that she was considering seeing one of the police psychologists at the Counseling Services Unit to avoid any permanent trauma. As a young officer, she had always taken it hard whenever she was confronted with people’s personal tragedies, and she had worked to learn how to handle this. Even so, she still sometimes found herself succumbing again, and that’s what had happened with her last case, an attempted “honor” killing. The case had ended with a charge of aggravated assault, but Louise and the rest of her investigative team had absolutely no doubt that certain members of that family had actually intended to kill the sixteen-year-old girl, but they had botched the job, so now their eldest daughter was a vegetable in the neurology department at National Hospital in downtown Copenhagen.



“She was lying on her stomach,” Storm explained, pointing to a spot on their right not far out into the

sound. “We don’t know who she is, but we think she’s between fourteen and sixteen years old, give or take. She didn’t have a purse or any type of ID on her.”

“The canine unit is on its way. Then we’ll have to see whether they can find anything that could identify her,” Bengtsen interrupted, coming over to stand next to the Mobile Task Force captain. “We can probably assume she was thrown into the water from a boat,” he continued, both hands still in his pockets and his eyes scanning the water. “It’s too deep here for anyone to have carried her out. A slab of concrete like that weighs quite a bit.”

Louise heard car doors slam shut and noticed a blue van now parked next to the other vehicles, and two men putting on their work clothes. She recognized one of them as Frandsen, head of Copenhagen’s former Forensics Division, which had just been renamed the Forensics Center. She walked over to say hi. Frandsen had recently turned sixty, and the Forensics Center had thrown a birthday reception for him at their offices on Slotsherrensvej, in Copenhagen’s Vanløse district. Louise had given him a little pipe holder carved out of mahogany for the pipe he always carried with him, even though she had never seen him light it in all the years she had known him. Whenever Frandsen pulled the pipe out of his pocket and stuck it in his mouth, she knew it meant he was concentrating.

“I guess we’re back in business,” Frandsen said, pulling a large wooden box out of the back of the vehicle. “And here I was just getting a taste for the golden years.”

Instead of throwing a big birthday party for the family, Frandsen and his wife had chosen to spend two weeks in Thailand on vacation. *They must have just gotten back*, Louise thought. She smiled because he hadn’t spent even a second wondering what she was doing at a crime scene so far from Copenhagen, a sure sign that he was wholly focused on the task he was about to start.

After he got all of his equipment together, he followed his team out to the bluff, and Louise walked over to the people standing with Dean and Mik, who had just gotten back from talking to a woman who had been out walking her dog.

“Nothin’,” Dean said. “That woman lives on a farm right around here and takes her dog on walks through these woods twice a day.”

A big black Citroën rolled up.

“It’s Skipper,” Søren said, waving at the car.

Louise had heard of him over the years. He was a fixture at the Mobile Task Force and National Police, and he had a reputation for unparalleled skill with crime-scene investigation and detail. Another thing she had heard about Skipper was confirmed by the muffled sound of music booming behind the closed windows of his car. On their way out here, Søren had told her about Skipper’s enormous passion for jazz fusion, which was a complete mismatch with his understated sweated-proper Windsor knot, and otherwise distinguished and reserved appearance—including his neatly groomed gray hair combed back in a soft wave.

Louise introduced herself to Skipper, then Søren added that she had been his partner before he had joined the Mobile Task Force.

“Well, then I’m sure we can’t get anyone better,” Skipper said with a warm smile. “Glad to have you with us.”

“Thank you,” she said, wondering what else Søren had told him. She watched Søren as he spoke to two of the local uniforms. He had already been with Unit A homicide at the Copenhagen PD for a while when Louise was offered her job there, and they had enjoyed a really good working relationship for a couple of years before he shifted to a new job.

The CSI techs were working on the bluff and at the edge of the water. There would be hardly any traces of DNA left on the girl because she had been in the water, but they were taking thorough

photographs of the body and scene, bagging items from along the shore, and two men were focusing exclusively on finding footprints and tire prints. The coroner from Copenhagen had also shown up Louise discovered. Flemming Larsen's six-foot-six frame was impossible to miss, even though he was standing with his back to her as he balanced his bag on his knee to fish something out of it. When he turned around and caught sight of Louise, he set the bag down and walked toward her with a big smile on his face.

"Does your being here mean this girl's from Copenhagen?" he asked, surprised, giving her a hug that lasted a bit longer than Louise would have preferred. She had worked with Flemming on many of her cases, and lately they had also been seeing each other a little outside of working hours, but no one else needed to know that.

"They sent me out here to assist the Mobile Task Force," she replied, thinking it sounded a bit strange.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said, smiling. "I didn't think Suhr and the rest of Unit A could spare you. Is it permanent?"

"It's just for this case—and I'll think they'll manage," she answered, thinking that the only person at Copenhagen PD who seemed to have a problem with her working with the Mobile Task Force was Michael Stig. But that was probably just because he thought they should have picked him.

"Good luck, and give me a call some night when you've got time to go out and have a glass of wine." He walked over to pick up his bag as Frandsen returned from the shore, announcing that the coroner could proceed with his *in situ* examination of the body.

Louise followed him to the bluff and looked down as Flemming removed the sheet and squatted next to the girl. She was lying on her back on the black, wet shore of the sound, her eyes closed and the slab of concrete still tied to her stomach.

Her long-sleeved T-shirt and lightweight beige jacket had slipped off a little, revealing how the rope had dug into her skin. The coroner carefully pushed her long, dark hair to the side so it wasn't plastered to her face like yarn anymore. Then he started his examination of the body.

Louise listened in as he leaned over and reported to Skipper, who had appeared with a notebook to record keywords.

"Unidentified woman found a short time ago," Flemming started, focusing initially on the face. "No petechiae in the conjunctiva or surrounding the eyes. Around the abdominal region a—" he studied the rope for a moment before continuing—"blue nylon rope is visible, approximately three to four yards in length tied with a square knot with one end wrapped around the subject's waist and the other around a concrete stepping stone measuring twenty by twenty inches. Livor mortis visible on the abdomen which does not disappear when pressure is applied. This suggests the victim has been dead for at least four to five hours. Rectal body temperature is eighty-one degrees, and the water temperature is sixty-two," he said and then looked up at Skipper.

"What do you think about the cause of death—did she drown? And how long has she been here?" Skipper asked, taking a step closer.

Flemming stood up and crossed his arms as he contemplated the girl on the ground. Then he shook his head.

"I can't tell what she died from. There are no signs of force, but I don't think she tried to inhale underwater. Otherwise she'd have foam both in her mouth and around it. But obviously that may have washed off. The petechiae are sparse and reddish; she has goose bumps over her entire body, which we often see in individuals who have been in water. And there is pronounced wrinkling on the fingers, palms, toes, and soles—but that shows up only after a few hours."

He concluded by saying that, judging from the rigor mortis, petechiae, and the body temperature, I would tentatively estimate the girl had been dead somewhere between nine and fifteen hours.

“When can we get her autopsied?” Skipper asked, waving Storm over so he could give his approval for the autopsy and lean on the coroner if he said all the autopsy rooms were in use.

Flemming looked at his watch and then at the two men.

“We can get started at one o’clock, provided you can get Falck Rescue to dispatch their bone bus out here that fast,” he said darkly.

The bone bus. Louise shook her head. The nickname had stuck whenever people talked about transporting a body. In some cases it was highly appropriate, but in others it seemed more jarring. Such as now. They put the girl into a white-plastic body bag, and she was ready for transport to the forensics lab in an ambulance with covered windows. Impersonal and cold for a young girl, whose identity they didn’t even know.

For a moment Louise had an urge to ride along with the girl so she wouldn’t have to make the trip alone, but the vehicle wasn’t like an ordinary ambulance with a seat for a family member. The ambulance was stripped bare so there was room only for two stretchers, and there was a large exhaust fan in the ceiling. She pushed the idea from her mind.

After the coroner left, Storm started heading for the cars to drive back to Holbæk PD headquarters.

“That means she might have been in the water since midnight,” Storm said just before opening the door of his car. “Let’s get going.”

Louise took one last look at the scene before climbing in next to Søren, and they drove back along the forest road.

HOLBÆK POLICE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS WAS IN AN ELEGANT, old-fashioned building of red brick with white window trim, making it look both impressive and well maintained. Storm led the way, and Louise followed him up one hallway and down another before they reached the Criminal Investigation Division. The offices were arranged in a row—some detectives shared, others had their own. The latter was the case with Bengtsen. His was a corner office with windows facing both the front of the police station and the large green lawn and pond at the end of the building. By contrast, Mik Rasmussen and Dean Vukić shared a smaller, darker office where there wasn't room for much other than desks and bookshelves.

Louise had a hard time imagining how they were going to find any room for the extra help they had called in. Earlier, Søren had told her about a case in which they had squeezed an extra detective in at a little schoolhouse-style desk out in the hallway, and another case in which they kept moving a detective around, but this time it wasn't going to be that bad because right then her old partner emerged from an empty office. He ran his hand through his longish blonde hair as he looked at the weekend bag and two computer bags he had set down on the floor in front of him.

“Are you moving in?” she asked, walking over to him.

“It'd probably be smarter to wait until we know who we'll be working with, but it'd be nice to have a proper place to sit,” he said. At that moment Storm stuck his head out a door at the end of the corridor.

“Everybody's meeting in here,” he shouted, waving for them to join him.

They entered what must have been the division's conference room, and Louise guessed this was likely where the Criminal Investigation Division normally held their morning briefings. The walls were painted a warm yellow reminiscent of a child's drawing, with the sun a little too heavy and saturated with color—over the top for a small room, but the light from the tall windows helped compensate for the compact feel. In front of one window they had a large whiteboard set up similar to the one they had in the briefing room at the Copenhagen PD, with bits of blue and green lines that the eraser had missed. On another wall there was a large dry-erase calendar next to an enlarged map of the area around Holbæk. Someone had decorated the opposite wall by tacking up a Matisse print, and an overhead projector was tucked away in the corner behind the door. Louise sat next to Søren, grabbing one of the lined legal pads stacked on the table with a few pens, which must have been left over from a previous meeting.

“I think he's going to split Mik and Dean up, and you'll get partnered with one of them,” Søren whispered to her.

Louise looked at both of them. One would be just as good as the other. It was standard procedure to form teams by mixing local and backup officers, so she wasn't even going to start hoping for a particular outcome. She had also quickly determined that she was the only woman in the group, so it might well be that the local boys were sitting here wondering about their prospects of being partnered with her. She had heard stories about local police officers calling in sick because they felt invaded when backup suddenly showed up from the Mobile Task Force and started screwing with their routines. Her thoughts were interrupted when Storm started speaking.

“Nobody has reported the girl missing, so we've put out notices to all police districts about the

discovery, and we'll be going to the press with a missing-persons report," he said, opening the meeting. "Without a photo, initially," he added. "We'll stick to describing just the clothes she was wearing when she was found. If that doesn't turn anything up, we'll have to release one of the forensic pictures. We just don't want to risk her parents' finding out that way," he said, and several heads in the room shook. "We'll set up three teams ..."

At that moment the door opened, and a woman with elegant orange hair and red lips came in with a bag over her shoulder and a laptop under her arm.

"Hi," she said, smiling.

"Ruth Lange," said Storm, gesturing toward her. "Ruth is our administrative assistant."

Warm hellos filled the room.

"Ruth and I will hold down the command center, which will be here in this conference room," Storm said, pointing at the yellow walls.

"The teams are as follows," he continued, once Ruth had set her things on the table and taken a seat. He looked around the room. The local officers were sitting next to each other. Louise was sitting next to Søren Velin, who stood out in his cargo pants and black turtleneck. Skipper was to her left.

"Skipper and Dean," said Storm, "you two are responsible for the site where the body was found. In other words, all of the technical evidence."

The two men smiled and nodded to each other.

"Louise Rick and"—he looked down at his papers—"Mik Rasmussen. We're putting you two together to identify her family and social circle. We've got to find out what the motive might be. Rick has some experience working with ethnic minorities," he continued. Louise furrowed her brow. She wouldn't have gone that far, but she wasn't going to correct Storm right now.

"Bengtson, you and Søren Velin will handle telecommunications and question potential witnesses in the area."

Bengtson set his pad on the table and nodded in satisfaction.

Louise guessed it was probably more the telecommunications and any subsequent wiretapping that he was happy about, and not working with Søren, because she had noticed Bengtson sizing up her former partner. They would make an odd couple, Bengtson with his tweed and corduroy and Søren with his very casual style.

People started talking a little across the table, especially Skipper and Dean, who seemed quite happy with each other. Louise smiled at her newly assigned partner, who quickly looked down after having given her a quick nod.

Storm told everyone to quiet down and took control of the meeting again.

"We don't know anything about the victim. Flemming thinks she was dead before she was placed in the water, but he can't say with any certainty, so we'll need to wait for the autopsy."

Storm got up and pointed at Louise and Mik.

"And you two will attend the autopsy. I just got off the phone with Frandsen—he's the head of the Forensics Center in Copenhagen," he added, in case anyone in the room didn't know who he was. "He'll make sure one of his people is ready around one o'clock so the autopsy can get started on time."

Bengtson grunted to show that he was quite familiar with the head of the Forensics Center and that he also knew a CSI tech would be present at the autopsy.

Louise stood up as Storm gestured at the door.

"I've put in a request for an official car for you," he told Louise. "You can pick it up when you're done with the autopsy. And Ruth will make sure to get you set up with your own laptops."

She gave him a questioning look at his use of the plural.

“One laptop for our internal networks and intranet, and one for the general Internet,” he explained.

Of course they work on two computers, she quickly thought. The Mobile Task Force operated on a heavily firewalled secure police network, but they naturally also had access to the Internet and an open e-mail system. The laptops would be some of the new gear suddenly available to her.

“You’ll also get one of our cell phones, but keep your own with you so ours isn’t busy when we need to reach you.”

As though that were going to be a problem, she thought, but she just nodded.

“We’ll be staying at the Station Hotel, which is just a little ways up the street across from the train station,” he said, pointing out the window. “I hope you’ll be able to make it back from Copenhagen by dinnertime. Afterward we’ll touch base here again and keep working.”

“Sounds good,” Louise said, following him as he explained that they had cleared out an office space and Mik could share. They stopped outside the empty office where Søren was standing with his things. He had been given a spot in Bengtsen’s corner office, and as he walked past her in the corridor she could tell from the look in his eyes he was quite satisfied with this outcome.

The room she was going to be working in was small and Spartan. The walls were a dull eggshell color. The desks and two office chairs reminded her of old school furniture, with names and swastikas scratched into the desktops. Mik Rasmussen had already begun to move his things in, but Louise’s area was completely empty. She went in and settled into her chair, from where she watched Mik stock his desk with paper and set out pencils in a handleless mug from a local soccer organization.

“Do you play?” she asked.

He looked over at her with a confused expression and then followed her eyes to the mug.

“I *used* to play,” he replied curtly. When she kept looking at him, he explained that he had played soccer for several years with the Holbæk Ball & Sports Association.

“But we never got further than the Sjælland playoffs.”

“But you don’t play anymore?” she prodded, keeping the grilling going.

He shook his head.

“Now I paddle sea kayaks and teach kayaking down at the Rowing Club.”

Louise smiled at him. At no time during their brief acquaintance had she suspected him of being particularly athletic. He was just too lanky and reserved for her to connect him with any form of outdoor recreation.

“Do you know when they’re going to notify the media?” she asked. Bengtsen was taking care of that.

“I doubt it’ll go out right away, but once it does I’m sure it will get a lot of airtime,” he replied, pulling on his windbreaker.

His accent had a distinctly Sjælland ring to it, which she recognized in her own speech since she had grown up in Central Sjælland herself. She had worked hard to rid herself of the accent, but sometimes it still reared its head.

She looked at the clock and, discovering that it was nearly noon, she stood and pulled her bag over her shoulder. They had to get going.

“Time to go?” he asked, and she let him lead the way out, through the back entrance to the lot where the squad cars were parked.

They drove in silence, and it suited her just fine that neither of them felt the need to entertain the other. Gradually, though, the silence got to be too much for her, so she broke it as they drove through Roskilde.

“Have you worked with the MTF before?” The Mobile Task Force was an elite National Police unit dispatched throughout Denmark to assist local police departments investigating serious crimes.

He nodded, and Louise explained that she wasn't permanently assigned and that this was her first case with them.

The September sun was blinding them, so he pulled the visor down and positioned it carefully before he finally started talking.

“We had a murder up here a few years ago when they called in the MTF after a few weeks. That was under our old boss, and for that case in particular it probably would have been smart to have called for assistance earlier, because the perp was never found. But that's not how things run anymore. Now they call in assistance the moment a murder is discovered.”

There wasn't a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

“How long have you been a detective?” she asked with interest.

He did the tally in his head before answering.

“Eight years, but I've been here eleven. I became a uniform right out of the police academy.”

That confirmed for Louise that he was in his mid-thirties. Actually thirty-six, a year younger than she was.

“I assume you live in Holbæk?” she said, thinking she sounded like a reporter doing a lengthy interview, although it didn't seem like it was bothering him.

“On a farm just outside town. Do you know Holbæk?”

She nodded and told him that her parents lived not far away and that when she was a teenager she used to spend all her free time at the Alley, one of Holbæk's nightclubs.

He turned his head and studied her, and she knew he was wondering whether he had seen her before.

“Maybe we've danced together,” she joked, glad that the conversation was starting to loosen up and take on a less formal tone.

His eyes were already back on the road, concentrating on a couple of bicyclists. He politely mumbled that if that were the case, he probably would have remembered it.

She was about to try again, but just then he turned off onto Frederick V Avenue and parked up alongside Fælded Park across from the Pathology Lab. Flemming Larsen was waiting for them when they entered.

“Åse is already here, so let's just head up and join her,” he said, starting toward the elevator.

Louise smiled. Åse was one of her favorites among the forensic pathology staff. Not that Louise was a feminist, but the tiny woman whom Louise initially had taken as fresh out of college and green was in fact extraordinarily competent and thorough. Åse had her very own quiet style whenever she started to work photographing a corpse, moving on to the lesions on the body and internal organs, and it was clear that she considered every detail important. Now she was already ready to go, waiting for them in the little corridor into the autopsy section in her scrubs with blue medical booties carefully secured over her shoes.

“Well, we meet again,” Louise said.

Mik went straight into the rear autopsy room, which was commonly called the murder room. It was twice as large as the other rooms where autopsies were performed so there was room for any law enforcement officials who were supposed to observe. Louise and Åse stayed outside talking while they waited for the fingerprint expert who had been called in to finish taking the body's prints so he could run a comparison on the girl, in the faint hope of identifying her that way. When Flemming asked them to come in, they walked past the line of smaller autopsy stalls where other forensic pathologists were working. They continued to the autopsy room, joining the forensics team in charge of preparing

the body and Mik Rasmussen, who was sitting on a stool in one corner with a pad of paper on his knee ready to take notes when the actual examination got going.

Louise grabbed another stool and sat next to him. They kept back while Åse pulled her camera out of her camera bag and started taking pictures of the fully clothed corpse from various angles while speaking quietly to Flemming. When she finished the examination, the other forensic techs stepped forward and removed the girl's clothes. Åse took pictures of each garment separately, and then at last they were ready to start on the external examination.

During a brief break, Louise stood up and stepped forward to take a close look at the naked girl. She looked so very young. Her long, dark hair lay out over the table; around her neck she was wearing a thin gold chain with a tiny heart. She had no makeup on. *Obviously it could have been washed off in the water*, Louise thought, but there was no dark residue around her eyes.

She stepped back again when Flemming and Åse were ready to continue. The coroner reiterated his comments from the examination at the crime scene: "No clear signs of violence, no signs of pathology or specific identifying marks."

Mik scooted his stool over to the windowsill on the back wall so he could use it to hold up his notepad, and he wrote extensively as everyone continued speaking behind him. Flemming Larsen also repeated that there were petechiae in and around the victim's eyes, and then the forensic techs went over every inch of the girl's body, using an arsenal of cotton swabs to dab for evidence before turning the body over.

Åse was taking pictures of every detail the whole time. When Flemming finished examining the back of the body, he straightened up.

"The top left side of the neck shows two yellow, slightly rounded abrasions," he announced. Åse stepped closer, and together they bent down.

"These are quite unusual and were sustained after death. I can't exclude the possibility that they occurred during transportation here," he said, asking the men standing in the corner by the door to open the girl up.

Louise stepped out with the others while the forensic techs did their work, finishing half a cup of coffee in Flemming's office before being called back into the autopsy room.

The body had been opened with a long, straight cut, and the internal organs had been lifted out on one block and rinsed. Now the last stage of the autopsy could get under way. The light from Flemming's work lamp that hung from the ceiling by its long arm was intense, reflecting a glare on the white tiles of the end wall and the shiny surfaces of the stainless steel tables. A long hose hung over the deep sink where the block of organs lay, with the shrill sound of regularly spaced drips whenever a drop of water hit the basin.

"She is a healthy young woman," said Flemming, mostly directing his comments at Mik and his notes. Flemming announced that her last meal had been rice and beans.

He worked a little more in silence until he continued: "There is no water in the lungs or sphenoid sinus, so there is no indication that she drowned, but she was underwater for a few hours. She had acute hyperinflation, the lungs are large and pale, which may be because she had difficulty breathing, but I can't give you a cause of death," he said, completing the autopsy.

Everyone said thank you, stepped out, and pulled off their masks and white coveralls. Louise hurried back a moment to talk with Flemming before following Mik over to the elevators to head down to the car. They agreed that he would drop her off at the Polititorvet, the large, red-brick neoclassical building that housed the Danish National Police headquarters, where she could pick up the car she had been assigned. Then she planned on stopping by her apartment in Copenhagen's Frederiksberg.

neighborhood to pack a bag.

AFTER LOUISE PACKED A FEW THINGS, SHE DID A QUICK WALK-THROUGH of her apartment with her weekend bag in her hand. She packed both warm- and cold-weather clothes. Even though they were halfway through September, they were still having days so hot that even shorts and T-shirts seemed like overkill.

Her answering machine was blinking. She pressed PLAY and walked over to the windowsill to grab the vase of flowers she had bought the day before. It would be easy enough to bring the flowers wrapped in a bit of newspaper to her room at the Station Hotel in Holbæk.

“... you can call any time today. We’re supposed to be getting together tomorrow, and it would be nice to know if we’re all set or if I should just wait on standby until it suits you to call me back. Beep.”

Camilla Lind’s voice was cut off by the answering machine’s shrill beeping sound.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Louise said to the machine, reaching for the phone.

“Hi—and I’m sorry,” she began, heading off Camilla’s initial reproach for her laxness in returning calls. “I’ve got to cancel for tomorrow.”

“Well, then let’s set up a different time to get together,” Camilla said.

Louise’s best friend worked the crime desk at *Morgenavisen*, and she was used to Louise canceling when she was working on a case. In turn, that usually also meant that Camilla could expect to get some kind of story lead out of her. Their jobs were connected in a way, even though they approached homicide cases from different angles.

Even so, it surprised Louise a little that Camilla didn’t protest more vigorously, which left Louise feeling guilty. She knew that her friend could really use her support right now, and she wanted to be there for her too. It just couldn’t be right now.

“I’ll give you a call in a couple of days,” she promised, explaining that she was on her way out the door.

Then she hung up and changed her voice-mail greeting.

“This is Louise. I’m not checking my messages, so call me on my cell. Bye.”



Camilla Lind stepped up her pace so she’d be able to make it to Markus’s independent boarding school on time and then take the subway with him all the way back to the Frederiksberg Community Center so he wouldn’t be late to his break-dancing rehearsal at Hot Stepper again. She had planned to buy a bottle of water and some fruit for him on the way, but she dropped the idea when she looked at her watch at Nørreport Station, bounding instead down the stairs and darting onto the subway in a quick leap.

She was sorry that her date with Louise had fallen through. Camilla had been looking forward to slumping down onto Louise’s couch and venting all the thoughts and feelings that were filling her. But after talking with Louise, Camilla had called the Copenhagen PD to find out what was up, since Unit 4 was apparently involved. Camilla sensed that they were giving her the runaround when the duty officer insisted he was unaware of any new case. Annoyed, she quickly packed up her things and shut down her computer to head out the door. On the way, she ran into her editor, Terkel Høyer, who was

coming to see her with a missing-person report from the Holbæk PD involving the body of a teenage immigrant girl.

Camilla quickly realized that her workday wasn't over yet after all. Both of her colleagues were out. Kvist was taking some extra vacation days he had earned, and their intern, Jacob, was in Australia with his girlfriend for the entire month of September, so everything was riding on Camilla. Her editor just nodded when she announced on her way out that she would be right back after she dropped her son off at home. Her cell phone was already in her hand so she could get hold of her irreplaceable babysitter, Christina, and have her watch Markus after his break-dancing session.

"Be back as fast as you can," Terkel called after her.

With her back to him, she raised one arm in the air in acknowledgment. She knew where he stood; the paper should be in on the story from the get-go. She agreed. The stories of eighteen-year-old Ghazala Kahn, who had been shot by his brother on the square in front of Slagelse Station in September last year, and the even younger Sonay Mohammad, who was slain by his father in February 2002 and thrown into Præstø Harbor, had filled many front pages and garnered a great deal of media attention during their investigations and subsequent trials. So obviously they should run with the story too.

Markus was waiting for her on the sidewalk in front of his school, wearing his backpacks, and she could tell that he was looking for her. She started running toward him and waving as soon as he spotted her. Hurrying hand in hand, they raced off and made it just before rehearsal began. Markus quickly changed shoes and put on his hoodie and baseball cap while Camilla went to the food court to buy a bottle of water and a banana, then handed them off to him. The door closed, separating her from the loud pounding music and the fifteen tough eight-year-old kids—fourteen boys and one girl—who would spend the next hour practicing the Baby Freeze and various other moves. She sat down on a bench in the lobby for a moment.

Christina had promised to be at the community center in forty-five minutes so she could take over by the time rehearsal was done. Then she and Markus would go home and have some dinner together. Camilla was already braced for a fairly late night before she could make it back home herself.

She had just stood up when she saw him—and sat back down again, heavily, as though two powerful hands had given her a rough shove to the chest. She knew instantly that he had been watching her, and her stomach turned as he approached. She couldn't stand up, and instead sat and looked up at him as he spoke.

"For the love of God, you've got to stop calling me and sending me e-mail," he said. "You have got to respect my boundaries and stop contacting me."

Then he was gone. Out the door and down the sidewalk. Camilla felt as though the whole interaction had played out in slow motion, and yet she had not had time to react or say anything.

She sat there, frozen. Anger and pain filled her, both fighting to take over. She wanted to run after him and make him understand. Tell him that she needed to stay in touch. That she needed him, and that they had been good together. But she couldn't stand up; her muscles felt weak and useless. He ignored her phone calls and didn't respond to her e-mail. He didn't want her. It was over, and that was unbearable.

She just sat there and collected herself, her deep stomach pains converging at her diaphragm. Finally, she stood up and started walking back to the subway.

“THE BODY OF AN UNIDENTIFIED TEENAGE GIRL WAS FOUND this morning in Udby Cove on Cape Tunø north of Holbæk. The girl is approximately fourteen to sixteen years old and appears to be of Arab origin. She has long, black hair and was wearing a beige summer jacket over a dark blue T-shirt with long sleeves, faded Miss Sixty-brand jeans, and white Kawasaki shoes. If you have any information about this girl, please contact Holbæk Police.”

Louise heard the missing-person report break on the news on the local P3 radio station during the drive back to Holbæk. It was almost five o'clock when she parked behind the police station. Upstairs in the corridor she nodded at Mik Rasmussen, who was talking with a colleague.

Inside the sun-yellow command center, someone had set up a small fourteen-inch TV that was playing in the background at low volume, and there was coffee in the carafe. Ruth, the administrative assistant, and Storm were talking to Bengtsen about coordinating the first interviews with witnesses who might have known the girl. A communications guy was walking around, almost finished running a few extra outside phone lines, and Ruth was just getting a large database system up and running.

“Have you taken a look around the Station Hotel?” Ruth asked.

Louise shook her head and said she would drop her things off when they headed back there for a bite to eat.

“Have we gotten any leads from the missing-person report?” she asked with interest.

“A few tips have come in, but not really anything we can use,” Ruth replied.

“But we have ten men circulating a description of the girl in town, so I don't think it'll take long for something to turn up,” Storm added as he stood up. “Let's head over to the hotel and grab something to eat.”

Ruth flipped the lid of her laptop shut and pushed aside the stacks of binders, pens, and pads that she had been quick to requisition before the investigation really got going. No one was going to have time to keep filing requisitions for everything they would need once the case was really under way. The mobile command center was almost ready.

At that moment one of the four telephones in the office started ringing.

“DNP Unit One Mobile Task Force, Ruth Lange speaking,” she said, pulling back her voluminous hair.

“Okay, send her in. We'll come get her.” She hung up and looked at Louise.

“There's a young woman here who thinks the victim we found may be a friend of hers. Can you go and talk to her? I just told your partner he could go home for a few minutes before dinner.”

Louise nodded and poured a cup of coffee from the thermal carafe in the middle of the table before she grabbed a pad of paper and a ballpoint pen in case her computer hadn't been set up yet. The coffee sloshed over the rim and down the side of the cup, burning her fingers as she walked down the corridor. Swearing, she set the plastic cup down on the desk a little too hard, causing it to slosh more. She quickly wiped her hand on her pants and went out to meet the witness.

A tall, very pretty, very young blonde teenager was walking in slowly, uncertainty in her eyes.

Louise approached her with an outstretched hand and a welcoming smile.

“Hi, I'm Louise. Let's go in here.” She pointed toward her office, which still seemed unoccupied and cluttered although her partner had already put his things away.

“Would you like a glass of water?” she asked as they stepped in.

The girl shook her head and sat down on the edge of the hard wooden chair that Louise had pushed toward the end of her desk.

The bags containing her laptops were still the way she had left them, but she waited to pull the pages of paper out of one of them, hoping that a little informal chat would get the girl to relax.

“What’s your name?” Louise began, leaning back slightly in the office chair.

“Benedicta, Dicta for short....” The girl cleared her throat and repeated her name a little louder. “Dicta Møller. I’m in ninth grade at Højmark School,” she continued.

“And you’re worried that girl we found out at Hønehalsen may be someone you know?”

It wasn’t that uncommon for girls to worry about their female friends and contact the police if a girl was reported missing in the media.

“There’s a girl who’s in ninth grade with me but in a different homeroom who wasn’t in school today,” Dicta began.

Louise didn’t rush her.

“She and I were going to get together this afternoon, and I haven’t been able to get hold of her. She’s not answering her cell, and no one answers when I call her at home.” Louise nodded and waited again without saying anything. “I’ve been calling all afternoon.”

“Do you think she might have taken off somewhere with her parents and forgotten about your plan this afternoon? Something unexpected may have come up.”

Dicta thought for a moment as though the possibility hadn’t occurred to her, but then she shook her head.

“She wouldn’t have forgotten this. We were going to go through the photos,” she said, now with more strength in her voice. “She was over at my house yesterday after school, and we talked about them. One of the photos is going to be published this weekend in the paper.”

Louise asked her to explain what kind of photos she was talking about and what paper she was referring to.

“I’m a model,” the girl explained. “I model for a few stores, including Boutique Aube, and the paper is supposed to run their big ad on Saturday. The photos were ready, and Samra was supposed to come to the photographer’s and take a look at them. So she wouldn’t have just taken off.”

Tears started streaming down Dicta’s cheeks, but she continued: “She would never do that. She keeps ...”

Dicta’s emotions overwhelmed her, her words pouring out in a completely incomprehensible mess. Louise held out her hand to stop the flood of words.

“What does your friend look like?” she asked when the girl had calmed down a little.

Dicta straightened up and carefully dabbed the tears so they wouldn’t ruin her makeup, as though she had only now discovered that she was crying.

“She has long, dark hair.”

Louise sat up and grabbed her notepad.

“And is your friend ethnically Danish?” she asked, waiting for the next crucial answer.

“No,” the girl replied hesitantly, as though she were afraid that was the wrong answer. “She’s from Jordan.”

“Does she have any distinguishing marks that you can think of? Or things she usually wears?”

Dicta fell silent, picturing her friend in front of her.

“She usually wears a watch. It’s a Dolce & Gabbana knockoff. I bought it for her in Thailand—and she’s also got a ton of bracelets. You know, bangles, where each individual one is thin, but you can

wear a lot of them at the same time.”

She used her index finger and thumb to indicate a width that Louise estimated at about four inches.

“Anything else?”

“Nothing that she wears regularly, but she does have jewelry.”

“What about her clothes?” Louise asked instead.

“Just the usual. Jeans and T-shirts ... a lot of times she’ll wear a top with a little blouse over it, and she has a beige jacket like they mentioned on the news on the radio.”

Louise glanced down at the girl’s feet and saw a pair of black Kawasakis. She pointed at them.

“Does she have a pair like those too?” she asked, knowing most of the girl’s friends likely had them. She couldn’t understand how the floppy little sneakers managed to stay in style. They’d been popular when she was the girl’s age, as well.

Dicta nodded.

“We bought them together; hers are white.”

The girl stopped, unable to think of anything else. Louise didn’t pressure her, instead saying, “Okay. I’ve got all this information written down. The last thing I’ll need is just your friend’s full name and address, and also how to get hold of you in case we want to talk with you again.”

“She usually always responds to text messages on her phone. I’ve also tried texting her, but she doesn’t reply,” Dicta said, instead of giving Louise what she had asked for.

“What’s her name again?” Louise asked before Dicta started talking.

“Samra al-Abd. She lives on Dysseparken, apartment 16B,” the girl said. She seemed to consider her words before continuing. “She comes over to my house a lot when her parents let her, but her father can be pretty strict; sometimes she’s afraid of him. And now she’s suddenly missing...”

Louise tried to reassure her by repeating that there could be any number of good reasons why her friend had missed school or blown off their plans to get together.

“There’s no need to assume the worst,” she said. Louise knew that lots of people saw ghosts in broad daylight when it came to persecuted immigrant girls and their fathers. Still, she had to admit that many of the things Dicta had told her might well indicate this was the right girl.

“Could I get your friend’s phone number?” Louise asked, watching Dicta take her cell phone back out and browse through her contacts. Louise took down the number and also asked for her friend’s home number on Dysseparken.

The girl pressed the button a few more times and also gave Louise the parents’ phone number.

Once she had written down both numbers as well as Dicta’s, Louise nodded toward the cell phone and asked if Dicta happened to have a picture of her friend on it.

A moment later Dicta passed her phone across the table and told Louise she’d taken the picture outside of school the week before.

Louise quickly leaned forward and took the phone, but the picture was taken from so far away you could see only the long, black hair and a blurry face. There was a certain similarity between Dicta’s friend and the dead girl, but it was impossible to tell for sure if it was her.

“Unfortunately, this was taken from too far away for me to make her out properly,” Louise said, handing back the phone. “Do you think you have a better one?”

The girl shook her head and explained that she had had more pictures on her old phone, but she had lost it.

“I might be able to find one at home,” she offered, saying she would be happy to stop by with it the next day.

“It’s a deal. Then hopefully we can rule out your friend as the girl we found,” Louise told Dicta.

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