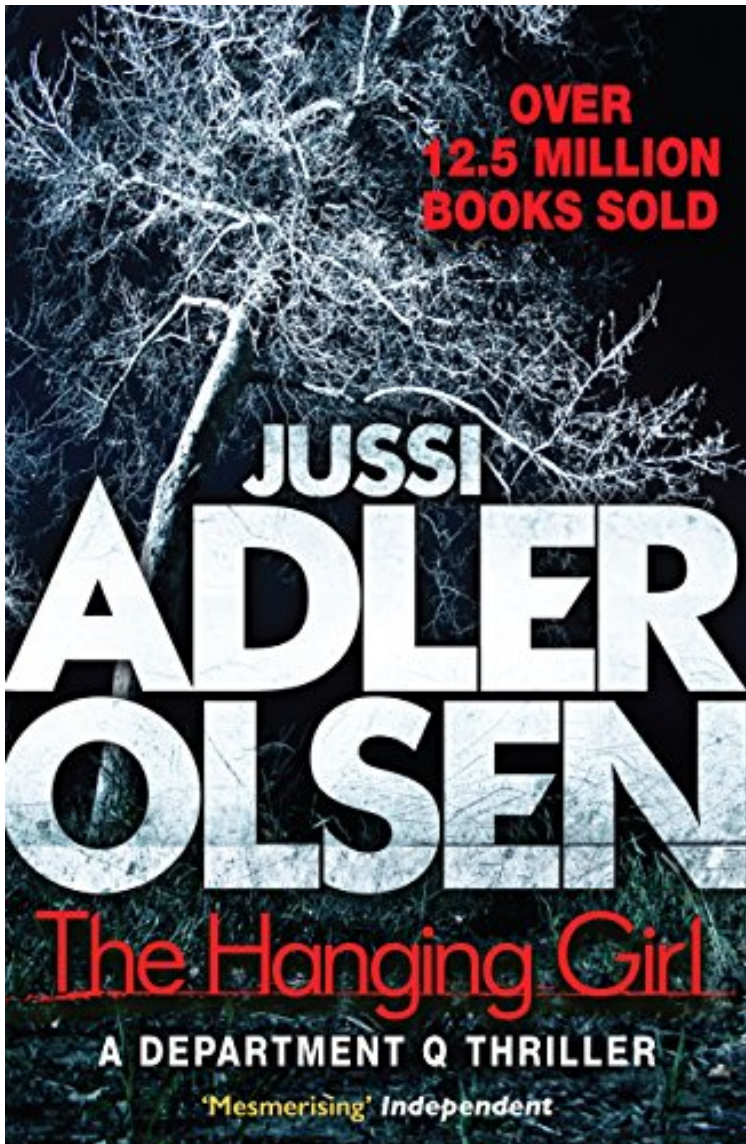


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# The Hanging Girl: Department Q 6 (English Edition)



*Par Jussi Adler-Olsen*  
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## Description :

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Jussi Adler-Olsen returns with the newest book in his acclaimed Department Q series. In the middle of a hard-won morning nap in the basement of police headquarters, Carl Mrck, head of Department Q, receives a call from a colleague working on the Danish island of Bornholm. Carl is dismissive at first, but then he receives some shocking news. Carl then has no choice but to lead Department Q into the tragic cold case of a vivacious seventeen-year-old girl who

vanished from school, only to be found dead hanging high up in a tree. The investigation will take them from the remote island of Bornholm to a hidden cult, where Carl and his assistants must stop a string of new murders by a skilled manipulator who refuses to let anything-or anyone-get in the way. For fans of Tim Weaver and Jo Nesbo

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Dedicated to Vibsen and Elisabeth, two strong women  
PROLOGUE  
November 20th, 1997  
She saw grey hues everywhere. Flickering shadows and gentle darkness covered her like a blanket and kept her warm. In a dream, she had left her body, hovering in the air like a bird. No, even better, like a butterfly. Like a multicolored fluttering piece of art, put in the world only to spread happiness and wonder. Like a hovering being high up between heaven and earth whose magic dust could awaken the world to endless love and happiness. She smiled at the thought. It was so beautiful and pure. Now the ceaseless darkness above her fought with dim glints like distant stars. It felt good, almost like a pulse conducting the sound of wind and rustling leaves. She couldn't move at all but she didn't want to anyway or shed wake from the dream, and reality would suddenly kick in, and then the pain would come and who would want that? Now a myriad of images appeared from life-giving times. Small glimpses of her and her brother hopping out over the sand dunes, parents shouting that they should stop. Stop! Why was it always stop? Wasn't it there in the dunes that she'd felt free for the first time? She smiled as beautiful beams of light slid under her like streams of mareel. Not that she had ever seen the milky sea effect before, but it must be like that. Mareel or liquid gold in deep valleys. Where was it she'd come to? Wasn't it a thought of freedom? Yes, that must be it because she'd never felt as free as she did just now. A butterfly that was simply its own master. Light and inquisitive with beautiful people around who didn't tell her off. Creative hands in all directions, pushing her forward and only wishing the best for her. Songs that lifted her and which had never been sung before. She sighed momentarily and smiled. Allowed her thoughts to take her everywhere and nowhere all at once. Then she remembered school and the bike, the icy cold morning and not least her chattering teeth. And just in that moment, when reality rushed in, and her heart finally gave up, she also remembered the crack when the car hit her, the sound of bones breaking, the branches of the tree that caught her, the meeting that...

Tuesday, April 29th, 2014  
Hey, Carl. Wake up. The telephone is ringing again. Carl looked up sleepily at Assad, who was camouflaged like a yellow carnival. When he'd started in the morning, the overalls had been white and his curly hair black, so if there was even a splash of paint on the walls, it would be a miracle. You interrupted me right in the middle of a complicated train of thought, said Carl, reluctantly taking his legs off the table. Okay! Sorry! The wrinkles of a smile appeared under the jungle of Assad's nine o'clock stubble. What the heck was it his happy round eyes expressed? A hint of irony, perhaps? Yeah, I know it was a late one for you yesterday, Carl, continued Assad. But Rose goes nuts when you let the telephone ring all the time. So could you please just get it next time? Carl turned toward a glaring light from the basement window. A little cigarette smoke should put an end to that problem, he thought, reaching out for the pack and slamming his feet back up on the table as the telephone started ringing again. Assad pointed at it insistently and slid out the door. It was turning into a hell of a situation with those two loudmouths jabbering at him incessantly. Carl, he said, yawning, with the receiver resting on the table. Hello! came from below. He took the receiver up to his mouth with his arm languid. Who am I talking with? Is that Carl Mrck? said a voice in the lilting dialect of Bornholm. Definitely not one of the dialects that did it for Carl. It was like bad Swedish with some grammatical errors, and no use anywhere except on the small island in the Baltic. Yes, I'm Carl Mrck. Isn't that what I just said? The sound of a sigh came from the other end. It almost sounded like relief. This is Christian Habersaat. We met each other a lifetime ago but you probably don't remember me. Habersaat? Carl thought. From Bornholm? Carl hesitated. Yeah, I... I served at

the police station in Nex when you and a superior were over here some years ago to escort a prisoner to Copenhagen. Carl racked his brain. He remembered the prison escort well enough, but Habersaat? Oh, right, he said, reaching over for the cigarettes. Yes, sorry for disturbing you but maybe you've got time to hear me out? I've read that you've just solved the complicated case in the circus at Bellahj. My compliments, although it must feel frustrating when the culprit commits suicide before the trial. Carl shrugged. Rose had been frustrated about it but Carl couldn't give a damn. It was just one less asshole in the world to worry about. Okay, but you aren't calling because of that case, are you? He lit the cigarette and tilted his neck back. It was only one thirty. Far too early to have used up his daily ration of cigarettes, which meant he should probably increase it. Yes and no. I'm calling about that case and everything else that you've so impressively solved in the last couple of years. As I said, I serve with the Bornholm Police and am currently sitting in Rnne, but I'm retiring tomorrow, thank God. He tried to laugh. It sounded forced. Times have changed, so it's not very exciting to be me anymore. No doubt we all feel the same, but only ten years ago I was the guy who knew everything about what was happening on most of the central and east coast districts of the island. Yeah, you could say that's why I'm calling. Carl let his head fall. If this guy wanted to convince them to take on a case, he needed to nip this in the bud immediately. He certainly didn't want to get involved with anything connected to an island where the specialty was smoked herring and which was closer to Poland, Sweden, and Germany than to Denmark. Are you calling because you want us to look into something for you? Because if that's the case, then I'm afraid I'll need to direct you to our colleagues on one of the floors above us. We've got far too much to do down here in Department Q. It went quiet on the other end of the line. Then the caller hung up. Carl stared in bewilderment at the receiver before slamming it down. If the guy was so touchy, then he damn well didn't deserve any better. Shaking his head, he'd hardly managed to close his eyes before the stupid thing rang again. Carl took a deep breath. Some people really needed it hammered home for them. Yes! he shouted into the receiver. Maybe that would scare the idiot into hanging up again. Er, Carl? Is that you? It wasn't the voice he'd expected to hear. He frowned. Mom, is that you? he asked tentatively. I get really frightened when you holler like that! Do you have a sore throat, sweetie? Carl sighed. It had been more than thirty years since he'd left home. Since then he'd dealt with violent criminals, pimps, arsonists, murderers, and rows of bodies in all manner of degrees of decomposition. He'd been shot at. His jaw had been broken as had his wrist, and he'd lost his private life and all the respectable ambitions inherent to anyone from Northern Jutland. It had been thirty years since he flew the nest and finally told himself that he was in charge of his own life. Parents were people you could choose to deal with or ignore as you pleased. So how the hell was it possible that she could make him feel like a baby with just a single sentence? Carl rubbed his eye and sat up a little in his chair. This was going to be a long, long day. No, Mom, I'm okay. We've got workmen in, so you can't hear yourself think. Right, well, I'm calling you with some very sad news. Carl pressed his lips together and tried to gauge her tone. Did she sound sad? Was she about to tell him in a second that his dad was dead? After he hadn't been home to visit them in more than a year? Is Dad dead? he asked. Goodness gracious me! Certainly not. He's sitting here beside me drinking a coffee. He's just been out to the stable to dock the piglets. No, it's your cousin Ronny. At that, Carl took his legs down from the table. Ronny? Dead? How? He collapsed suddenly out in Thailand while having a massage. Isn't it terrible news on such a beautiful spring day? In Thailand, she said, and during a massage. Well, what else could you expect? Carl searched for an appropriate answer. It wasn't really something that came naturally to him. Terrible, yes, he managed to say while trying to repress a horrible image of the presumably very comfortable end of his cousin's bulk. Sammy is flying out in the morning to collect him and his things. Best to get everything home before it's spread to the four winds, she said. Sammy is always so practical. Carl nodded. There would probably be a thorough appraisal when Ronny's brother stepped in. The crap in one pile and anything of any worth in the suitcase. He imagined Ronny's faithful wife. A stalwart little Thai woman, in fact, who deserved better. But by the time Ronny's brother had searched through the drawers, there wouldn't be much left for her other than the boxers with Chinese dragons. That was the way of the world. Ronny was married, Mom. I don't think Sammy can count on just coming and taking what he wants without so much as asking. She laughed. Oh, you know Sammy. It'll be fine. And he's going to stay out there for ten to twelve days. You might as well get a bit of color in your cheeks when you're travelling so far anyway, he says. And he isn't wrong there. He's a smart man, Cousin Sammy. Carl nodded. The only significant difference between Ronny and his little brother, Sammy, was a single vowel and three consonants. Nobody living north of the Limfjord could miss that they were related because they were like peas in a pod. If there was a film producer in need of a bragging, self-obsessed, absolutely untrustworthy show-off in a garish shirt, at least Sammy was

still available. They've set the date of the funeral for Saturday, May 10th, here in Brnderslev. It'll be wonderful to see you up here again, son, continued his mom. While the predictable update of the day-to-day life of a country family from Vendsyssel was rattled off, with particular stress on pig farming mixed with his dad's dodgy hip, the usual censure of politicians in Parliament and some other similarly depressing talk, Carl was thinking about the unpleasant tone of Ronny's last e-mail to him. That e-mail had undoubtedly been meant as a threat, something that had unsettled and frustrated Carl more than he cared to admit. After a while he came to the conclusion that Ronny intended to blackmail him with the nonsense. Wasn't his cousin exactly the type who would do that? And wasn't he always short of cash? Carl didn't like it. Would he now have to deal with that ridiculous claim again? It was utter drivel. But when you lived in the land of Hans Christian Andersen you knew only too well how quickly a little feather could turn into five hens. And five hens of this sort, in his position of trust and with a boss like Lars Bjrn, was really something he could do without. Damn it, what had Ronny been up to? On numerous occasions the idiot had blurted out that he'd murdered his dad, which was bad enough in itself. But worse was that he'd dragged Carl into the dirt by publicly declaring that Carl had been an accomplice to murdering Ronny's dad during a fishing trip, and in the ominous last e-mail had informed Carl that he'd put it in writing as a book and would be attempting to get it published. Carl hadn't heard anything since then, but it was a terrible situation that needed to be laid to rest now that the man was dead. Carl fumbled again for the cigarettes. Without doubt he should go to the funeral. It would be the place to find out if Sammy had been successful in getting Ronny's wife to surrender some of the inheritance.

Similar inheritance cases out east had ended violently, and of course one could hope that might happen again. But Ronny's wife, little what's-her-face, seemed to be made from another and better mold. She'd probably keep anything of financial value that belonged to her and give up the rest. And that might include Ronny's alleged attempt at a literary career. No, it wouldn't surprise him at all if Sammy succeeded in getting the notes home with him. And if so, then he'd better get his hands on them first before they made the family rounds. Did you know that Ronny was really rich in the end, Carl? chirped his mother somewhere in the background. Carl raised his eyebrows. Really, was he now? Well, he'd have to assume he was dealing in drugs, then. And you're sure he didn't end up with his head in a noose behind the thick prison walls of the Thai justice system? She laughed. Oh, Carl. You've always been such a funny child. \*\*\* Twenty minutes after the conversation with the Bornholm policeman, Rose stood in the doorway waving away Carl's tobacco smoke with obvious disgust. Have you just spoken with a Sergeant Habersaat, Carl? He shrugged. It wasn't exactly the conversation he was thinking about most just now. God only knew what Ronny had written about him. Take a look at this. She threw a piece of paper on the table in front of him. I got this e-mail two minutes ago. You might just want to call the man? There were two sentences on the printout that brought the mood in the office down even further for the rest of the day. Department Q was my final hope. I can't take any more. C. Habersaat Carl looked at Rose, who stood shaking her head like a harpy who'd given up on her marriage. He didn't like the attitude at all but it was best that way with Rose. Better to receive a couple of slaps around the face in silence than two minutes of complaining and hassle. That's how it worked between them, and Rose was good enough when it came down to it. Even if you did sometimes have to go very far down to get to it. Well, whataya know! But seeing as it was you who got the e-mail, Rose, you deal with the mess. Then afterward you can tell me what you managed to get out of it. She screwed up her nose, causing her war paint to crack. Like I didn't know you'd say that. That's why I called him right away, of course, but I got an answering machine. Hmmm. Well then, I assume that you left a message saying you'd call back, right? As she confirmed that she'd done just that, a black cloud formed over her head, and stayed there. She'd apparently called five times, but the man just didn't answer. 2 Wednesday, April 30th, 2014 Staff retirement receptions were normally held at the police station in Rnne. But that was precisely what Habersaat had not wanted. Since the new police reform had come into force, his good close contact with the local citizens, and what happened over on the east coast of the island, had been transformed to a constant transport back and forth from east to west, and suddenly endless decision-making processes sneaked in from the moment a criminal act occurred until something serious was done about it. Time was wasted, leads were lost, criminals got away. It's a golden age for crooks, he always said, as if someone cared to listen. Habersaat hated the direction society was moving in, both generally and more locally. And colleagues who supported the system, and didn't even know him and the extent of his forty years of loyal service, shouldn't be at his retirement reception like bleating sheep, acting like they were honoring him. As a result, he decided to hold the main reception in the local setting of Listed Community Hall, just six hundred meters from his house. With what he had planned for the occasion, it would be more decent in every way. He stood in front of the mirror a moment,

inspecting his parade uniform, noticing the folds that had formed in the material as a result of not being used for so many years. And while he meticulously and clumsily ironed the trousers on an ironing board that had never been put up before, he let his eyes wander around the room that had once been the family's warm and lively living room. Almost twenty years had gone by since then, and now the past stalked about like a purposeless stray animal among heaps of rubbish and junk that no one wanted. Habersaat shook his head. When he looked back, he didn't understand himself. Why had he allowed all the colored ring binders to take over the shelves instead of the good books? Why was it swimming with photocopies and clippings on every available surface? Why had he put all his life into work rather than those people who once cared about him? And yet he understood. He bowed his head, trying to give free rein to the emotions that momentarily came over him, but the tears didn't come. Maybe because he was all cried out a long time ago. Yes, of course he knew why things had gone the way they had. It was the way it had to be. He took a deep breath, straightened out his uniform on the dining table, picked up a worn photo frame, and caressed the picture in it as he'd done hundreds of times before. If only he could have the wasted days back. If only he could just change his nature and decisions and one last time feel the closeness of his wife and boy. He sighed. Here in this room, he'd made love with his beautiful wife on the sofa. Here on the rug, he'd crawled about with his son when he was very small. Here the arguments had begun, and here his gloom had established itself and multiplied. It was in this living room that his wife finally spat in his face and once and for all left him alone in life with the knowledge that a trivial case had ripped the happiness out from under his feet. Back when it all started, it had knocked him for six and left him in an almost permanent state of dejection, yet he just hadn't been able to let the case go. That was the way it was, unfortunately, and with good reason. He stood up, tapped one of the piles of notes and clippings, emptied his ashtray, and took out the trash with the weeks' ration of empty, rattling cans. Finally, he gave his inside pockets a last check in case he'd forgotten something and looked to see that his parade uniform was just as it should be. Then he shut the door. \*\*\*Despite everything, Habersaat had probably expected that more people would've turned up for the reception. If nothing else, then at least those he'd helped out during hard times over the years, but maybe also those for whom he'd smoothed out injustices and put a stop to unfairness. At any rate, he'd expected to see a few of the old retired colleagues from the uniformed police in Nex and maybe some of the citizens he'd provided authority for over the years in the small community. But when he saw that it was only the chair and substitute accountant of the civic association, the police commissioner and his immediate subordinate, together with the police union representative, who had dutifully turned up, over and above the five to six people he had invited personally, he dropped his long speech and let things come as they came. Thanks for coming out on this wonderful sunny morning, he said, nodding to his old near neighbor Sam that he could start filming now. He poured white wine into the empty plastic glasses and emptied peanuts and potato chips onto foil trays. There was certainly no one else offering to help. He took a step forward and invited everyone to take a glass. And while they assembled around in front of him, he discreetly put a hand in his pocket and took the safety off his pistol. Cheers, ladies and gentlemen, he said, nodding to each person individually. Fine faces for judgment day, he continued smilingly. Thanks for turning up under the circumstances. You all know what I've been through, that I was once like most men, especially policemen. I'm sure that those of you who haven't gone to seed can still remember me as a quiet and calm guy who could talk around a psyched-up fisherman with a broken beer bottle in his fist and a little too much adrenaline coursing round his veins. Isn't that right? Sam gave a thumbs-up in front of the camera but only one other person nodded. Even so, with downcast eyes, there was an expression of agreement here and there. Of course, I'm sorry that after all this time I'm remembered as the man who burned the wick at both ends on a hopeless case, which finally tore apart my family, friendships, and happiness. I'd like to apologize for that, as I'd like to apologize for the years of bitterness from my side. I should've stopped when I could. Sorry once again for that. He turned toward his superiors, his smile fading and his hand now clutching the pistol in his pocket. Colleagues, to you I want to say that because you're so new in office you can't be personally blamed for my problems. You carry out your work without fault in the way the foolish politicians tell you to. But many of your older colleagues, and those who came before you, let down not only me with their insufficient backing, but also a young woman through their indifference and thoughtlessness. For this betrayal I want to reciprocate with my contempt for the system that you've come to protect. A system that isn't capable of carrying out the police work we're employed to do. Nowadays, it's all about the statistics and not whether you really get to the bottom of things. So I say to you: I'll be damned if I ever got used to that! A few quiet protests came from the police union representative, as he was required to make, and another reproached him for what he judged as an unsuitable

tone for such an occasion. Habersaat nodded. They were right. It was unsuitable, just like most of what he'd boxed their ears with over the years. But now it had to end. He needed to put a stop to it all and make an example that would never be forgotten among his colleagues. And as unwilling as he was, the time had come. He yanked the pistol out of his pocket so violently that those closest to him disappeared from his field of vision. For a brief moment, he noticed the fear and horror that spread over his superiors, as he pointed the pistol at them. And then he let it happen.<sup>3</sup> It had been a typical night, so Carl made a start on the paperwork by putting his legs up on the table to catch up on some sleep. After clearing up the cases from the last few months, the time since had been a diffuse hotchpotch of conflicting emotions. It had been a real winter of discontent on a personal level, just as his almost three-year-long and growing resistance to bowing to Lars Bjrn's boorish authority on the work front hadn't been anything to smile about either. And then there was the business with Ronny and the uncertainty about his damn writing. To be exact, it was affecting both his sleep and his waking day. There were going to have to be some serious changes or he was going to go to ground. He took a random folder from the pile, dropped it in his lap, and grabbed a pen. After some practice with different positions, he knew how to avoid dropping things when he took a nap. Still, the pen fell on the floor anyway when Rose woke him with her cutting tone. He looked drowsily at the clock and realized that, despite everything, he'd managed to sleep for the best part of an hour. With a certain satisfaction he stretched, ignoring Rose's harsh look. I've just been in contact with the police in Rnne, she said, and you certainly won't be glad to hear why. I see. He moved the folder from his lap to the table and picked up the pen. An hour ago Police Sergeant Christian Habersaat turned up to his farewell reception at the community hall in Listed. And fifty minutes ago he released the safety on his pistol and shot himself in the head in front of ten shocked witnesses. She nodded tellingly as Carl's eyebrows shot up. Yeah, well, that's what I'd call really bad. Wouldn't you say, Carl? she said sharply. I'll know more when the police commissioner in Rnne gets back to the station. Turns out he witnessed the whole thing. But until then, I'll book tickets for the next flight. Okay, it's really all very unfortunate. But what are you talking about? Next flight? Are you flying somewhere, Rose? Carl attempted to look confused, but he knew where all this was leading. It had better be a damn joke. Look, I'm sorry to hear about Haber-whats-his-name, but if you think I'm getting on a flying sardine can to Bornholm just because of that, you've got another thing coming. And besides... If you're too scared to fly, Carl, Rose butted in, you'd better get a move on and book tickets for the ferry from Ystad to Rnne leaving at twelve thirty, while I talk with the police commissioner. It's your fault that we need to respond, after all, so you'd better do it yourself. Isn't that what you're always saying to me? I'll go and tell Assad that he can stop splashing around with paint in the other room and get himself ready. Carl rubbed his eyes. Was he really awake?\*\*\* Neither the drive from the police station to Ystad through the southern spring landscape of Skne nor the hour-and-a-half boat trip to Bornholm could subdue Rose's indignation. Carl had been looking at his face in the rearview mirror. If he didn't watch out, he'd soon look like his granddad, with vacant eyes and lifeless skin. He adjusted the mirror only to replace the view with a clear look at Rose's angry face. Why didn't you talk with him, Carl? came the constant refrain from the back in the worst imaginable tone of reproach. If there had been a taxi driver's compartment window between them, he'd have slammed it shut. And now, in the restaurant onboard the large catamaran ferry, the cold from the Siberian winds that sailed in over the foam-topped waves, and which Assad stared at worryingly, was nothing compared to the cold emanating from Rose. She'd definitely got herself stuck in a mood of which there was no getting out. I don't know what they call it, Carl. But in less tolerant societies what you did to Habersaat could easily be considered neglect of duty... Carl tried to ignore her. Rose was Rose, after all. But with her final trump, ... or even worse, manslaughter, the bomb exploded anyway. That's enough now, goddamnit, Rose! he shouted, slamming his fist on the table, causing all the glasses and bottles to bang together. It wasn't the angry look Rose flashed at him that stopped him in his tracks, but Assad's nod over toward the guests in the cafeteria, who were staring at them, openmouthed, with their pastries wobbling on their cake forks. They're actors! Assad apologized to the other customers with a cheeky smile. Just practicing a play at the moment, but they won't spoil the ending, I promise. Some of the guests were obviously speculating where the hell it was they'd seen those actors before. Carl leaned in over to Rose and tried to lower his tone. She was all right when it came down to it. I mean, hadn't she been there for him and Assad on numerous occasions over the years? He certainly wouldn't forget all she'd done for him when he was close to burning himself out in the Marco case three years ago. No, you just had to avoid picking at her quirks too much, because that was how she worked best. When it came down to it, she could be a little unstable from time to time, but if you wanted to help her calm down, the best thing to do was take the knocks or things would only get worse. He took a deep breath. Listen here,

Rose. Dont think Im not sorry about whats happened. But might I remind you that what happened to Habersaat was his own choice and doing. He couldve just called back or, alternatively, answered the phone when you called him. If hed warned us in an e-mail or letter about what he was going to do, then things wouldve looked different today. Wouldnt you agree, little Miss Holier-than-thou? He smiled conciliatorily, but something about the way Rose looked told him he should have dropped the last sentence. Thank God, Assad managed to avert anything developing further. Rose, I get your point. But Habersaat committed suicide and we cant do anything about that now. He froze suddenly, gagging a couple of times, looking drearily out over the top of the waves. So shouldnt we just try to find out why he did it? he continued a little feebly. Isnt that why were heading to Bornholm on this weird boat? Rose nodded with the faintest of smiles. It was acting at its best. Carl leaned back in his seat again and nodded gratefully to Assad, whose color had changed in a split second from his usual Middle Eastern glow to green. Poor guy! But what could you expect from someone who could develop seasickness on an inflatable raft in a swimming pool? Im really not so keen on sailing, he said in a worryingly quiet voice. There are sick bags in the restroom, Rose said dryly, pulling her travel guide to Bornholm from her pocket. Assad shook his head. No, no, Im fine. Ill be okay. Ive made my mind up. Never a dull moment with that pair.\*\*\*The Bornholm Police represented Denmarks undisputedly smallest police district with its own police commissioner and a force of around sixty. On the entire island, there was only one police station left, which in addition to being manned round the clock was also responsible for those police matters concerning not only the forty-five thousand islanders, but also the six hundred thousand tourists who visited every year. A micro universe of almost six hundred square kilometers of arable farmland, cliffs, and rocks, and an endless number of large and especially small attractions, which the local tourist organizations each attempted to publicize as the most unique. The biggest round church, the smallest, the best preserved, the oldest, the tallest. All communities with any self-respect had exactly what it was that made the island worth visiting. The broad-shouldered policeman down in reception asked them to wait a moment. Apparently there had been a vehicle with an excessive load on the ferry theyd travelled on, so there were a few things that needed to be attended to. Well, of course such an atrocious crime should take precedence over everything else, thought Carl with a mocking smile when one of them got up to point to the door they should use. The police commissioner received them in his best clothes in the assembly room on the first floor, with a spread of pastries and a mass of coffee cups. There was no doubt here about rank or authority, or that their presence, despite the seriousness of the situation, puzzled the local boss. Youve come a long way from home, he said, presumably meaning too far. Yes, our colleague Christian Habersaat unfortunately committed suicide. An unusually gruesome parting, he continued, still seeming somewhat in shock. Carl had seen it before. Police whod taken the academic route, just like all the other Danish police commissioners, and who as a result hadnt gotten their hands too dirty, were exactly the sort of people on the force who were least likely to feel comfortable witnessing a colleagues brains being splattered all over the wall. Carl nodded. I spoke briefly with Christian Habersaat yesterday afternoon. All I know is he wanted to initiate and involve me in a case, and that I probably wasnt receptive enough, so here we are. Ive got a hunch that it wont disturb your work if we take a closer look at things. I hope youll agree. If a scowl and a downturned mouth meant yes on Bornholm, then that was one thing sorted on the case. Maybe you can tell me what he was referring to in his e-mail to us? He wrote that Department Q was his last hope. The police commissioner shook his head. He probably could but wouldnt. He had people for that sort of thing. He beckoned an officer wearing dress uniform over to him. This is Police Superintendent John Birkedal. He was born on the island and has known Habersaat since long before I was appointed. John and myself, and our representative from the police union, were the only people from the station who attended Habersaats reception. Assad was the first to hold out his hand. My condolences, he said. Birkedal shook his hand awkwardly, turning toward Carl with a look that seemed familiar. Hiya, Carl, long time no see, he said as Carl attempted to suppress an instinctive frown. The man in front of him was in his early fifties, so almost the same age as Carl, and in spite of the moustache and heavy eyes he seemed like someone he ought to know. But where in the world had he seen him before? Birkedal laughed. Of course you cant remember me, but I was in the year below you at the police academy out on Amager. We played tennis together and I won three times in a row, I might add. Then you suddenly didnt want to play anymore. Was that Rose grinning behind him? He hoped not, for her sake. Yeah... Carl tried to smile. Actually, I wanted to, all right, but wasnt there something about a dodgy ankle? he said without the least recollection of the episode. If hed ever played tennis, then the error had been well and truly buried. Well, that was quite a shock with Christian, continued the superintendent, thankfully of his own accord. But hed been depressed for some

years, even though those of us at the station didnt notice it so much day to day. I dont think we can criticize his work as a uniformed policeman, can we, Peter?The police commissioner shook his head in the appropriate manner. But at home in Listed, it seems things were different for Habersaat. He was divorced and lived alone, extremely bitter about an old case that hed turned into his lifes work to solve, despite not working in criminal investigation. It was a very trivial case concerning a hit-and-run driver, some would say, but as the accident cost a young girl her life, it wasnt quite so trivial after all. Okay, a hit-and-run driver. Carl looked out of the window. He knew this sort of case. Either they were solved in a flash or else they were archived. It was going to be a short stay on the island. And the driver of the vehicle was never found, is that correct? asked Rose as she held out her hand. Correct, yes. If we had, well then, Christian probably wouldve been alive today. But Im afraid I have to run. Im sure you can imagine that we have a certain amount of internal formalities to take care of in connection with what happened today, not to mention dealing with the press, who we need to try and send on their way first. Couldnt I come over to your hotel a little later and answer your questions then?\*\*\*You must be the police over from Copenhagen, assumed the receptionist at Sverres Hotel without further niceties, selecting the keys to those rooms that were without doubt the least appealing she could offer. Rose, as usual, had haggled on the price. A little later they found Police Superintendent John Birkedal in one of the imitation leather chairs in the lounge above the dining room. Up here on the first floor, there was a good view out over both the industrial harbor and the back of a Brugsen supermarket. It wasnt pretty. If only the view had included a couple of freeways, then the overall impression would have been perfect. Probably not the best place to write a travel guide on this otherwise fairy-tale-like island. Ill be honest with you. I couldnt stand Habersaat, began Birkedal. But to see a colleague shoot himself in the head because he felt insufficient in his work is something that really hurt. Ive experienced a lot in my police career but I fear this will stay with me. Its quite horrible. Definitely, Assad interrupted. Excuse me, but I just want to understand correctly. He shot himself in the head with a pistol, you say. It wasnt his service weapon, was it? Birkedal shook his head. No, that was done by the book. He left it down in the weapons depot just before handing in his ID badge and keys to the station. We arent exactly sure where he got the pistol from, but it was definitely a 9mm Beretta 92. A real nasty piece of work to be carrying about. But youll know it, of course, from the Lethal Weapon films with Mel Gibson? Nobody answered. Right, well, its a relatively big and solid fella, which I thought was a fake at first when he pulled it out and aimed at the police commissioner and myself. It isnt a weapon he had permission for, but we know that a similar Beretta disappeared from the estate of a deceased person near Aakirkeby five or six years ago. Whether or not its the same weapon, weve got no way of checking because the former owner didnt have any papers. A deceased estate? In 2009? asked Rose, smiling with pouting lips. Was John Birkedal really her type? Yes. One of the teachers at the folk high school died midsemester. According to the autopsy, it was death by natural causes as the result of a weak heart but nevertheless, Habersaat was especially interested in the death when the property was checked. The deceased, Jakob Swiatek, according to some former students and teachers, had been tremendously interested in small arms, and on several occasions had shown some of the students a pistol which, according to their descriptions, could be a match with the pistol Habersaat used this morning. Yeah, you dont see a semiautomatic like that every day, so I just have one question, Assad interjected. Was the Beretta the basic model or was it a 92S, 92SB or 92F, FG, or FS? Because it cant have been a 92A1 seeing as that series is from 2010. Carl slowly turned toward Assad. What on earth was the guy talking about? Was he also an expert on Berettas now? Birkedal shook his head slowly. So he didnt know damn all about that either. But no doubt hed dig up an answer before the sun went down over Rnne harbor. Hmm, maybe I should sum up briefly what Habersaat stood for and what hed been through, continued Birkedal. Then later on you can have the keys to his house and take things from there. Theyll be left in reception later tonight. Ive conferred with the police commissioner and hes giving you a relatively free hand. I also think our colleagues are about ready with the house now, so you can get started. We just needed to check the property first. There couldve been letters or something similar that indicated why he took the drastic action he did. But you know all that. It is you, after all, who have the most experience with this sort of thing. Assad was nodding, holding up his index finger ready to speak, but Carl checked him with a look. Whether it was one pistol or another the idiot had blown his brains out with was totally irrelevant. As far as Carl was concerned, they hadnt travelled to this godforsaken place specifically to uncover why Habersaat had committed suicide, but more importantly to make Rose understand that the case she thought Carl should have done everything in his power to take on for Habersaat didnt actually have anything to do with them.\*\*\*For the approximately fifty students from eighteen upward enrolled at Bornholm Folk High School

for the winter half year, taking courses in music, glasswork, painting, or pottery, November 20th, 1997, had been another typical day with good humor and certainly no sense of danger, explained Birkedal. A totally normal group of mostly happy young students who got along well. They didn't know yet that Alberte, the gentlest, prettiest, and probably also the most popular girl at the school had been killed in a car accident that morning. A little more than a day went by before she was found hurled so far up in a tree by the roadside that it was almost impossible to see her. And the man who happened to look up at precisely the moment his car passed the tree, to his own misfortune, was a uniformed police officer from Nex by the name of Christian Habersaat. The sight of the fragile, limp body hanging from a branch burned itself into him, exactly like the inscrutable look that had forever attached itself to the girl's face. Despite only the slightest of leads, it was determined that she hung in the tree as a result of a serious car accident. A rather unpleasant episode that didn't resemble any other hit-and-run cases in the more recent history of Bornholm. Skid marks were searched for but never uncovered. There had been hope that paint flakes would be found in her clothes, but the vehicle had slid past without leaving any trace. Those who lived by the road were questioned, but no one and nothing pointed toward anything or anyone specifically. Only that one person on the stretch of road had heard a car at a terrible speed disappear off in the direction of the main road. After that, perhaps due to the death being suspicious or because there were no other cases, a systematic hunt was instigated for vehicles with dents to the front carriage that weren't immediately explainable. It was probably a day too late but, regardless, all cars on ferry departures to both Sweden and Copenhagen were closely monitored for the whole week, and all twenty thousand vehicles on the entire island were called in for inspection by motor vehicle diagnostics in Rønne and Nex. Despite the obvious disruption, the locals were surprisingly understanding and actively helpful to the extent that no tourist could move on four wheels without the hood being scrutinized by hawk-eyed locals. Birkedal shrugged his shoulders. And in spite of all the efforts, the result was zero. The Department Q staff looked tiredly at the police superintendent. Who wanted to tamper with an equation where the end result, regardless of what you did, was always zero? And you know with certainty that it was a traffic-related death? asked Carl. Couldn't it have been something else? What did you learn from the injuries at the postmortem? And what did you find at the collision scene? That she was probably alive for a time after she was hurled up there. Otherwise: fractures, internal and external bleeding, all the usual. And then we found the bike Alberte had cycled on quite a distance in the thicket and mangled almost beyond recognition. So she cycled there, Rose said. Do you still have the bike? Police Superintendent Birkedal shrugged. It was seventeen years ago and before my time, so I'm not sure. Probably not. It would be wonderful if you could do me the favor of finding out, said Rose in a sweet voice and with bashful eyes. Birkedal pulled his head back. A handsome married man tends to know when he's on thin ice. Why are you so certain that she was thrown up into the tree? Assad quietly asked. Couldn't she have been hauled up there? Was there a search for any sign of cordage on the branches above the body? Could a hoist have been used? Did Assad say cordage? A very specific word coming from him. Birkedal nodded, as there was certainly nothing wrong with the questions. No, the technicians found nothing to indicate that. You can refill from the thermos in the dining hall, came the message from the hotel proprietor standing in the doorway. It took no more than a split second before the coffee flowed dark in Assad's cup while he poured sugar directly from the bowl. How could his poor hardworking taste buds survive all his strange challenges? The others shook their heads when he offered to pour the coffee for them. How can it be that there weren't any leads from the collision? he asked, turning around. You'd expect some skid marks or at the very least some tire marks. Had it been raining? No, nothing to speak of, as far as I know, answered Birkedal. The report mentions that the state of the roads had been reasonably dry. Then what about the direction the body was thrown up in? Carl continued. Was that properly investigated? Were there visibly broken branches from where the body had been hurled up? Or was it possible to infer anything from the position of the body on the branches or the position of the bike in the thicket? Based on a witness statement from an elderly married couple who lived on a farm on the bend a little farther down, it was concluded that during the morning a vehicle came speeding from the west outside their house. The old couple didn't see the vehicle but they could hear the car revving up beyond all reason just outside the house and driving at full speed toward the last bend before the place where the tree stood. Were quite convinced that it was the hit-and-run driver that the old couple heard and that the girl was hit head on near the trees, and that the vehicle then drove off in the direction of the highway intersection without slowing down. What's that based on? On the witness testimony and the experience of the technicians from previous hit-and-runs. Aha. Carl shook his head. All these known and unknown factors. He was already tired just thinking about it. Suddenly the desk back home in the cellar

of the police station seemed far away. Who was the girl, then? The unavoidable question was asked from which there was no turning back once an answer had been given. Alberte Goldschmid. Despite her rather flamboyant surname she was an ordinary girl. One of those who suddenly felt freedom far away from mom and dad and reacted accordingly. You couldnt call her directly promiscuous but she was into a bit of this and that now that she had the freedom to do so. Everything certainly indicates that she took advantage of the couple of weeks she was over here, quite intensely. Intensely? What do you mean? asked Rose. A couple of partners here and there. Okay, did the girl become pregnant? The autopsy said no. And it would be superfluous to inquire after foreign DNA on the body, she continued. The year was 1997, need I say more? Three years before the central DNA register was set up. I dont think there was an intensive search. But no, there were no traces of semen in her or foreign skin under her nails. She was as clean as someone whod just stepped out of the shower, which she probably had, seeing as she took her bike before the other students had even assembled for breakfast. Let me get this right, said Carl. You know nothing, is that correct? This is the story of a locked-room murder and Habersaat was the local Sherlock Holmes, who for once fell short. Birkedal shrugged his shoulders again. He couldnt answer that either. Right, then, said Assad, draining the remainder of the hot coffee in one gulp. Lets call that a wrap, then. Did he really just say that? Rose turned unfazed toward Birkedal, again with her sugar-sweet eyes. All three of us will sit down together now, quietly and calmly, and read all this material youve brought for us, and thats probably going to take an hour or two. And when were done with that well probably want to ask a bit more about this and that in Habersaats investigation, and life and death. A hint of a smile creased Birkedals stoical mask. It was clear that as far as he was concerned they could do just as they pleased, so long as he wasnt involved. Do you think well find something that you should have found long ago? Something that might shed some light on the mystery of the girl in the tree? Carl said stubbornly. I dont know but I certainly hope so. The essence, I suppose, is that as far as Habersaat was concerned, Albertes death wasnt just negligent manslaughter and a case of hit-and-run. It was murder, he said. And Habersaat tried with all his might not only to substantiate that theory but to find the perpetrator. I dont know what he had to go on but there are no doubt other officers that can tell you more, not to mention Habersaats ex-wife. A plastic case was slid across the table. I have to get back to the station now but take a look at this DVD. Then youll know roughly what you need to know about his death, he said. It was filmed by one of Habersaats friends invited to the reception. His name is Villy, but over here we call him Uncle Sam. I assume you have your own PCs with you so you can play it on one of them. Enjoy, if thats the right word. And then he stood up suddenly. Carl noticed how Roses eyes were glued to his well-toned backside as he left. Hardly a look his wife would have appreciated. \*\*\* So radically had Habersaats wife put the past behind her that she discarded not only the mans name but also everything else imaginable that could bring forth memories of him, a fact she didnt try to hide when Carl attempted to get a telephone conversation going with her. And if you think that just because the man is dead now that I have the least desire to dredge up his and our mutual problems for anyone, youre mistaken. Christian didnt choose his family during some difficult years when I and especially his son really needed his attention, and now all his bad choices have ended with a cowardly suicide. Youll have to go elsewhere if you want to hear about his lifes biggest passion; you wont hear it from me. Carl looked at Rose and Assad, who both gesticulated to him to stay firm. Yeah, what else? Do you mean that he was in love with the Alberte case or perhaps even the victim? You cops never let up, do you? Ive told you to leave me in peace, so good-bye. There was the sound of the receiver being put down and that was that. She knew the speakerphone was on, Carl, said Assad. We should have gone out to her, like I suggested. Carl shrugged his shoulders. Maybe he was right, but it was late and the way he saw it, there were two types of witnesses to be avoided unless absolutely necessary: those who said too much and those who kept their mouths shut. Rose looked in her notebook. Heres the address for Habersaats son, Bjarke. Hes renting a room at the northern end of Rnne, so we can be there in ten minutes. Shall we get going, then? The decision was made. Rose was already standing. 4 The house on Sandflugtsvej was situated back from the road with a French balcony and the feeling of the good life emanating from it. Everything had been arranged down to the last detail, from the door knocker to the brass nameplate and well-mowed lawns. This was a place where you drove in newly washed VW Polos, French cars, or, for lack of something better, SUVs. All status symbols of the first degree in provincial Denmark. There was only one name on the door, Nelly Rasmussen. Yes, Bjarke Habersaat certainly does live here, she said with a friendly stress on Bjarke, as she stood there like a cougar in the half-open front door with a duster tucked in her cleavage and a cigarette burning between her outstretched fingers. But you shouldnt expect Bjarke to be in the mood to talk with you, she said with the look of a professional landlady, glancing unimpressed at Carls

ID card. He estimated that she was fifty-five. Blue housecoat, home-colored permed hair with highlighted split ends, and a crazily lopsided tattoo on her wrist that was probably, albeit in vain, supposed to make her more exotic. I think you should show a bit of sympathy and let him get over the shock. After all, its only a few hours since his dad, God bless him, took his own life. Assad took a step forward. Its really sweet that youre so good to your lodger and look out for him. But what if we had a final letter with us for him from his dad? Wouldnt it be a shame if he didnt get it? Or what if his mom had also committed suicide? Do you really think wed be allowed to tell you if that was the case? And what if were actually here to arrest Bjarke for arson? Would it still be all right then, that youre standing here in your heels and mocking the course of justice? She looked a little perplexed as she took in all the information and his smiling face. Maybe she became even more confused when Assad took her arm, patted it, and reassured her that he understood how much it must also affect her to have a lodger in so much distress. At any rate, she let go of the door handle and allowed Carl to nudge the door open with his shoe. Bjarke! she shouted reluctantly up the stairs. Youve got visitors. She turned toward them. Wait here in the hallway a minute before you go up. And knock on the door and wait until he opens himself, okay? Bjarke can sometimes be a little indisposed, but I hope youll overlook that under the circumstances. I certainly do. And double standards or not, thats just the way it is. You could smell the indisposition already halfway up the stairs. In fact, it smelled like a hash caf from the outskirts of Copenhagens Nrrebro district on unemployment benefit payment day. Skunk, said Assad. A very fine, strong smell. Not as sneaky and sour as hash. Carl scowled. That damned professor he was dragging along. Skunk or hash, the smell of decay was just as pathetic. Remember to knock, came the reminder from the bottom of the stairs. The message didnt reach Assads hearing range because without further ado he grabbed the handle and opened the door. Assad stopped immediately in the doorway and Carl understood why when he came up behind him. Hang on a minute, Rose, he said, attempting to hold her back. There, leaning back in a large worn armchair, sat Bjarke without a stitch on him, his legs pulled up under him and a bottle of paint thinner in his hand. And apart from being naked, Bjarke was also stone-cold dead, as anyone could see from this distance despite the sun barely being able to penetrate the thick hash fog. Slitting his wrists, Bjarke had ended his life with half-closed eyes in a dreamlike gaze. It hadnt been a difficult death. That wasnt skunk you smelled, Assad. It was the combination of hash and cellulose thinner, said Carl. Dont stand there blocking my way, snapped Rose from behind as she tried to push past them. You shouldnt come in here, Rose, it isnt pretty. Bjarkes dead. Theres blood all over the floor because hes slit his wrists. Ive never seen so much blood from one person. Assad nodded quietly. But then Ive seen a bit more of this sort of thing than you, Carl. It was a long time before the technicians and the doctor who would carry out the postmortem arrived. As a result, Bjarkes landlady had the entire staff of Department Q to cling to while she lamented over something so horrid invading her life. How in the world was she going to get compensation for the rug and chair when she didnt have the receipts for them any longer? When it finally sunk in for her that the young man upstairs had actually died while she was downstairs dusting, she needed to sit down to try to avoid hyperventilating. Imagine, what if someone has killed him, she whispered over and over. I dont think that is something you need worry about, unless, of course, youve heard something unusual. Has there been anyone on the stairs over the last few hours, or can you enter the bedroom from the back of the house? She shook her head. And you didnt do it yourself, I assume? continued Carl. Her eyes rolled as she began to hyperventilate again. Right, said Carl. Then he must have cut his own wrists. He was certainly in a state where he couldve done anything to himself. She pursed her lips and pulled herself together, mumbling about all sorts. Shed reached the point where she realized that she might have been an accomplice to crime by renting to someone who grew magic mushrooms on the windowsill and who, on top of that, breathed mostly through a chillum. It was at this point Carl left her to the other two, went outside in the gleaming sunshine, and lit a smoke. \*\*\* The search of Bjarkes room, seizure of his computer and the knife hed slit his wrists with, the collection of the technical data, and the postmortem and removal of the body down to the ambulance all happened so quickly that Carl was only on his fifth smoke when Birkedal stood with his investigator and a technician waving a scrap of paper in a plastic bag. Carl read the scrap containing just the words: Sorry, Dad. Strange, said Assad. Carl nodded. The message was so short and direct that it was moving in its own way. But why didnt the note read Sorry, Mom? In contrast to her late ex-husband, she at least had the chance of getting the message. Carl looked at Rose. How old was Bjarke? Thirty-five. So he was eighteen in 1997, at the time his dad became preoccupied with the case. Did you talk with June Habersaat? interrupted Birkedal. Well, it went so-so. She wasnt exactly cooperative if you ask me, said Carl. Right, well then, Ill give you the chance to try again. Really, how so? You could be the ones to drive down to her in Aakirkeby and

inform her of her sons death, couldnt you? That would also give you the opportunity to ask her the questions youre burning to ask and, in the meantime, itll give the rest of us more time to seal the room and prepare the body to be sent to forensics in Copenhagen. Carl shook his head. Seal the apartment and send the body to the mortuary? How long would that take precisely? Ten minutes? Wanda Phinn had married an English cricket player whod come to Jamaica to teach black people what he was best at: playing and winning innings. This Chris McCullum was steadier on his feet than most of the guys in whites, and armed with these skills had been tasked for six months with one mission: to get the Jamaican national team to score 10 percent better on their runs. For that reason, McCullum stood on parched grass in the baking sun from March to September sweating buckets more than ever before. During a training match he saw Wanda out of the corner of his eye running around the cinder track with long muscular legs, skin glistening, and thought he was seeing things. Wanda was very aware of what people thought they were witnessing. Shed had it banged into her since her figure had developed and shed learned to move around the track like a leaping gazelle. Are you Merlene Ottey? McCullum asked her outright after the match. Wanda bared her white teeth and dark gums in a smile. It wasnt the first time shed been asked and it was flattering, even though Merlene Ottey was at least twenty years her senior, because Merlene Ottey, Jamaicas top track sprinter for many years, was as beautiful as a goddess. She flirted a little and nudged McCullum cheekily on the shoulder for the compliment. And then he took her with him to England. Wanda loved white men. Not because they were particularly sensual. A man from Jamaica had the fire of many races in him, which the white just couldnt live up to, but on the other hand, white men knew who they were and, more important still, what they wanted to do with their lives. You could find security and a future with them, which was far from certain in Tivoli Gardens, the poor slum quarter in West Kingston where Wanda had grown up. For someone whose daily life consisted of shootings and cocaine in backyards, Chris McCullums proposal was a fairy tale that required no more than a millisecond to think over. He installed them in Romford on the outskirts of London in a tiny terraced house where she was about to die of boredom until the day when McCullum broke his ankle and was forced not only to sell the house but also to get a divorce from her. If he was going to continue living in the style to which he felt he was entitled, he was going to have to find a woman who was in a position to provide for him. And so after two years of security, Wanda was back to square one and a situation where she had only her own limited resources to keep her head above water. Wanda was uneducated, without hope of obtaining any kind of support, no special talents to speak of other than being a fast runner, and that wouldnt take you far, as her father always used to tease. So the job as a security guard at the rear entrance of a large company on the Strand in London was not only her salvation but also the only viable alternative to Jamaicas tin huts and bodily degradation before one hit forty, which would otherwise have been her destiny. And like a lion in a cage she stood and facilitated those more important than her to come in and out of the glass doors of the large building, nodding to them as they went over to a better-dressed woman who had the privilege to take their ID and press the button that enabled them to continue in the system. Here she was, alone in an empty room between freedom and riches, watching like a custodian over the secrets of the building without knowing what they were about. And while time went by, she had nothing else to think about other than that it was there outside that life ruled. It all happened out there while she stood here. Day in, day out, she stared through the glass doors looking out over Savoy Place directly to the wall that surrounded Victoria Embankment Gardens. There, behind that wall, is adventure, she thought. And the laughter from people who soaked up the rays of the sun in striped deck chairs or licked ice cream bought with money theyd never miss, tortured her in silence and, whats more, without anyone worrying about it. And so her new identity was born. She was just the woman who looked at walls. In those hours stolen from her by routine, the clouds of the past gathered over her. Wanda knew that all the serendipities and meetings of fate that had taken place before she came into the world must have had higher expectations than to simply create a person with an utterly subordinate security guard job on the Strand. As her Rastafarian father said with pride, through Wandas veins flowed equal measures of Dominican Arawak Indians, Nigerians, and Christians, washed down with a dash of Rastafarian gunpowder. And Wandas mother had laughed and said that she should just forget all about it and keep a cool head, then everything would be all right. Keep a cool head! That was what seemed so especially hard in her grey and inconsequential existence. Was it really meant to be that all the advantages and history should end with an unflattering grey uniform and hair hidden under a cap? But despite the hopelessness of the situation and the bad prospects, Wanda stood up straight when the better-off guests of the park and building sauntered by, and tried to rediscover that part of her that could get her away from the wall. As fate would have it, Shirley the only friend she had and who lived in the room two doors

downinvited her to come along to something she called Nature Absorption Intro. Shirley was into the occult and as such very open on her views and expectations of life. She listened to heavenly inspired music, had an interest in Polynesian kahuna fortune-telling, and used playing cards or the tarot before making decisions.

Through all these changeable guides shed encountered in her life, shed gained insight, as she called it.

Wanda never knew exactly into what, but Shirley could make her smile like no one else. And now she wanted to introduce Wanda to Atu Abanshamash, who, according to the website, was the beautiful radiant spirit whod come from the Scandinavian dream world to London with his new teaching that could sweep everything else to one side and create a complete understanding of the energy and connections of all humanity. Shirley was ecstatic and the price was reasonable, so if Wanda wanted to come along she would pay. It could be so much fun if they had something to share together.\*\*\*Atu Abanshamash Dumuzi was not like the gurus Wanda had seen in Shirleys myriad of brochures and on the TV. He didnt sit in the lotus position or in a carved chair in elevated serenity. He wasnt preachy, and he was neither fat nor ascetic. Atu Abanshamash was a real man of flesh and blood, who with a smile and a twinkle in his eye showed them the path to how the study of nature absorption could renew a person to such a miraculous degree that you finally felt as if each and every cell in your body could suddenly resist any sort of attack, and that your body in its entirety melted together with the universe that surrounded it. The universe and the energy of the sun were

Atu Abanshamashes mantra. And there, in that simple light Bayswater apartment, where the Nature Absorption Academy London branch was housed, he walked around those sitting on the floor and regarded them with magical eyes, making their throats blush and shoulders sink while they in rhythm to his words inhaled well-being deep down in their lungs. Abanshamash, Abanshamash, Abanshamash, he chanted slowly in a deep voice, and asked them to follow him in chorus. When theyd sat for a while with their eyes shut repeating the mantra, Wanda noticed her sense of orientation and desire to return to reality disappear. Open your eyes now and look at me, Atu said to his followers. Abanshamash, Abanshamash, he whispered, stretching his arms, causing his light yellow coat sleeves to fan like angel wings. I see you, he whispered. I see you now for the first time, and you are beautiful. Your souls are beckoning to me. You are ready. You are as beautiful as the sun itself, he said afterward to each man and woman as he walked in between them. When he came to Wanda he stood very still for a moment and let his eyes disappear into the abyss of her own. You are as beautiful as the sun itself. You are as beautiful as the sun itself, he said twice this time. But do not listen to anyone! Do not even listen to me! Listen only to your own Atman, your own soul, and surrender yourself. As if she was under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, these words penetrated Wanda like a long-awaited recognition and clarity. Of their own accord, her eyes opened, her skin burned, and her hands twitched with the sort of cramp she knew only from her orgasms. With lowered head, he caressed her cheek, returning ten minutes later to stretch out his palms toward her a few centimeters from her forehead. Let yourself relax, my flower. You have been through the first journey toward the rapture and rebirth of the empty moments, and now you are ready, he finished. Then she fainted. 6Wednesday, April 30th, 2014 They stood for a moment or two and took in the whitewashed ramshackle of a house, very probably one of the most unkempt on the centrally located Jernbanegade in Aakirkeby. Just as in many Danish market towns, streets like this were good examples of how one hundred years ago the workers had clawed their way up to own their own brick houses and small plots of land. A street like this was the daily bread in the past for stonemasons and carpenters, but it was apparent that it was a long time since theyd had much to do here. In a place otherwise called Flower Town in summer and Christmas Town in winter, there was neither much of a flower paradise nor a Christmas atmosphere to be found here on the worn-down backdrop of Jernbanegade. Through the crack in the door, Habersaats ex-wife could smell, much like a sniffer dog, the police badge in Carls pocket the very second she nudged it open. Move your foot, she snarled at Assad, when he tried to push the door open. Youve got no business here. Mrs. Habersaat, we... attempted Carl. Cant you read? It says Kofoed on the door. She pointed demonstratively down to the nameplate and pushed the door once again. There is no Habersaat here anymore. Mrs.... Kofoed, said Rose quietly. Were here with bad news about Bjarke. The subsequent five seconds were intolerably long. First her wavering look from one of the three petrified faces and on to the others. Then the second that reality kicked in to all the nerve systems and blocked them, followed by the realization that what was left unsaid was already too much, until finally a spark died in her eyes and her legs gave way from under her. Her unconsciousness didnt last long but long enough that she had lost all sense of time and didnt know why she lay stretched out on her sofa in the utmost of spartanly decorated living rooms. She was obviously still in the state of shock that had caused her to collapse. They looked around the living room. There wasnt much to write home about. Unopened bills in the

fruit bowl, piles of dusty Danish easy-listening CDs, furniture from discount stores, ugly ashtrays and vases in peeling ceramic. They let her lie there for a short while to come around, her stony eyes directed at the ceiling, while they went out to the kitchen where abnormally ugly tiles from the seventies sucked the light out of the room many Danes called the heart of the home. Even Carl could see that that description by no stretch of the imagination matched the owners ramshackle chaos of a room. We cant be hard on her, not in her state, Rose whispered. If we go gently, we can always come back tomorrow. They both noticed that Assad didnt seem to agree. Come in here, June shouted with a weak voice. You started this, Carl, so I think it should be you who says it to her. And tell it like it is, okay? said Rose. He was just about to point his finger at her but felt Assads hand on his arm. Then he walked in to the woman and looked her straight in the eye. Were here to inform you that your son is dead, June. But thats not all, unfortunately. Im sorry to have to tell you that he took his own life. At approximately four oclock, according to the medical officer. She sucked in her cheeks and sat a moment as though looking at herself in a mirror and trying to pull back the years from its merciless image of reality. Four oclock? she whispered, stroking her arm up and down. Oh God, that was just after I called and told him about his dad. She tried to swallow a couple of times, held her throat, and then said no more. When theyd sat with her for half an hour, Carl nodded to Rose. She could let go of the womans hand now so that they could get going. They had only just made it through the living room before Assad started. Would you mind if I asked you something just before we go? he said. Why didnt you go up to your son yourself and tell him about his dad, June? Did you really hate your husband so much that you never asked yourself if your son felt the same way? Did you think he wouldnt care if his dad was dead or alive? Id like to know. Rose beat Carl to it in firmly grabbing Assads arm. What on earth did he think he was up to? Empathy wasnt normally one of his weaker points. Trembling, June looked down at the floor, as if everything in her wanted to grab Assads throat and squeeze. Why do you want to know that, you ugly ape? she said with a muffled voice. Whats that got to do with you? Was it your life that bastard Christian took from you? Take a look around, would you? Do you think this was what I said yes to when that once handsome man kneeled in front of me on the grass out in Almindingen forest? Assad held his chin in his hand. Maybe to keep his mouth shut after her degrading tirade, maybe to show her that he was prepared to take the next round if it could help the case. Are you going to answer or what? spat out from her hateful face. Assad pulled free of Roses grip and stepped forward. Unusually for him, his voice was slightly shaky. Ive seen worse houses than this, June. And Ive seen people whod sacrifice their arm or leg for your ugly dilapidated roof over their heads and your bloody awful junk food in the fridge. I have, and Ive known people whod kill for your dress and the half pack of smokes lying there. But no, now that you ask: I dont think it was what you dreamt of. But arent dreams something you have to fight for? As I see it, it isnt only Christian Habersaats fault that youre sitting here and your son is lying in the morgue. Something doesnt add up in this story. For example, why did your son write Sorry, Dad in his little suicide note? Why doesnt he say sorry to you instead? This time it was Carl who grabbed Assads sleeve. What the hells gotten into you, Assad? Come on, were going. June raised her arm toward them as she hoisted herself up from where she was lying. It wasnt just that the information about the suicide note shocked her, but they could see that she also refused to believe it. That it was absurd. That it belonged to another world than hers. It isnt true what youre saying, you evil liar, she said with clenched fists. It isnt true. Rose nodded affirmatively that it was, as Carl pulled Assad out with him. When the group had reached the van on the other side of the road, Carl and Rose turned quizzically toward Assad. Is there something going on inside you that you ought to tell us about, Assad? Carl asked. This must be striking a chord or why on earth would you pull a stunt like that in there? What good did it do? Clown! was Roses only comment. Surprisingly concise. A thud came from behind as June banged the gate wide open. Now Ill answer you, you little shit! she shouted as she crossed the road. Bjarke had nothing to say sorry to me for, just so you know, she spat out at Assad. She turned to Carl and Rose. The tears streamed from her but the face was stone-cold. We had a good life without Christian. How should I know why Bjarke would write that? Hes just a bit complicated. She stopped, realizing her slip of the tongue. Was complicated, she corrected herself, her lips beginning to tremble. Then she grabbed Roses arm. Do you know the story about Alberte? Rose nodded. She looked surprised and let go of her grip. Well, good. Then theres no more to say. She dried her eyes on the back of her sleeve. My husband was obsessed with her. Ever since the day he found her body, he no longer existed in our world. He became loathsome, spiteful, and creepy. He disgusted me. Have you heard what you came for now? She turned to Assad. And to you Ill say that despite what you think, you know nothing of my dreams or about how Ive fought to make them come true, do you? Something happened to her in that moment. As if she didnt know the answer

herself. As if standing on the road in the twilight knocked her down a gear. It was at this moment Carl saw her properly for the first time. Not just a scorned woman over sixty, but a woman who in her mind had missed out on a huge chunk of life, while her body deteriorated. Just now, she seemed to find herself in that state of limbo that from time to time Carl wished he could bury himself in. And then she pointed to Assad, collecting herself before opening her mouth again. I wish I had a river I could skate away on, she almost sang. But it dont snow here, it stays pretty green... She looked like shed continue in her own train of thought, but gave up, her expression changing as she got back on track and remembered her aversion toward the dark curly-haired man standing in front of her. So just keep your mouth shut about my dreams, she said and let her hand fall. And you took the liberty to ask me why I didnt go to my son and tell him about his dad instead of just calling. Do you really want to know? Assad nodded. You see, thats exactly why I wont tell you. She moved step by step backward over the road, observing them individually with contempt. And now get out of here. I wont open the door for you a second time, if you hadnt already worked that out!\*\*\*They sat down in the hotel dining room with Roses PC in front of them. It was dark outside now, so they agreed to wait until the day after to meet with the substitute accountant representing Listed Community Hall. There were a few questions and impressions that needed to be processed first. The woman whod heard about the death of her son and ex-husband on the same day without totally losing it still haunted them. Why did she say that about the river she wanted to skate on? said Assad. Do we know if shes had a stay in the laundry bin? Loony bin, Assad, the other is for sorting out your clothes! Rose chipped in. And you appear to be the loony after the scene you made today. Well, it worked, didnt it? What does it say about her? That she worked for many years in Brndegrshaven Amusement Park, now known as Joboland. Make sense of that if you can. In the winter she works as a waitress in various places, so I dont see any obvious gaps in her life that point to any sort of nuthouse. When we go to Listed tomorrow to see Christian Habersaats house and the community hall, we might meet someone or other who can help us try to understand the Habersaat family better, so leave it for now. Shall we get going with the DVD? Carl turned to Rose. Are you sure you want to stay and watch, Rose? She looked puzzled. Why shouldnt I? Ive gone to police academy, too, you know, and seen pictures of corpses before. Fair enough, but these arent photos. As far as I know, its a very clear recording of a man who shoots himself in the temple. It isnt quite the same. Im with Carl, Rose, said Assad. Be careful. It can make you quite noxious when you see it the first time. Carl shook his head. Some words were obviously harder than others. This time its actually nauseous, Assad. And yes, Rose, it can be really unpleasant. If he imagined that she was finished protesting, then the following minute-long tirade about how absolutely ridiculous they both were convinced him that any further shielding of Roses mental well-being was useless. He pressed PLAY. According to the meager report we have to date about the event, the recording was filmed by one of Habersaats acquaintances who lived on the same road, Carl said. A guy known by everyone on the island as Uncle Sam. As far as I know, it was Habersaats own camera, so Sam wasnt too hot at handling it in the first few minutes. The last part was certainly true. There were some panning shots around the room, filmed with the speed of an Afghan hound and as shaky as a Lars von Trier Dogme film. It didnt make for pleasant viewing if you were prone to motion sickness. The room wasnt exactly full. According to the list, there was the chair of the civic association and her substitute accountant, who had seen to the formalities. Then there was the police commissioner, the local representative from the police union, Police Superintendent Birkedal, the neighbor from one door down, Uncle Sam, a retired sexton from Nex, a former cooperative manager, the village handyman, and one further individual who felt sick and left early. A poor turnout to honor someone, Assad grunted. Maybe thats why he blew his brains out. He shot himself because Carl couldnt be bothered to listen to him, came the dry response behind him. Thanks, Rose. Its impossible for us to know that. Now, can we continue? It was only after a few minutes, and after Habersaat had poured the white wine, that Uncle Sam worked out how to use the video camera. Now the camera panned slowly around in the lofty run-down hall with a couple of doors leading out to smaller rooms, then to a single hatch in the wall, probably opening out to the kitchen for serving on more festive occasions, and over the walls where a series of paintings hung of different merit and size. Habersaat stood in his finest clothes at the end of the hall in front of the windows overlooking a road that Carl took to be Hans Thygesens Vej, with the sea somewhere in the background. Okay, the dress uniform wasnt exactly modern, but then neither was Carls. In their line of work, there was seldom cause for dusting down formal wear. Thanks for coming, began Habersaat. He seemed surprisingly calm, as if he had not given a thought to what he was about to do. Carl observed the timer on the recording. In less than four minutes it would happen because that was when the recording ended. If it had been one of Carls acquaintances who killed himself as Carl was filming, hed also have had enough after a couple of

minutes. A damn hellish thought. He glanced over at Rose. No doubt she was noting the timer, too, her eyes already half closed. There was certainly no protest from him if they were. Habersaat toasted his guests and talked calmly to them, while the cameraman panned past the expressionless faces of the assembled group. He mentioned his time as a country copper in the good old days and apologized that he couldn't have stayed as he once had been. At this point the cameraman zoomed in on his pain-filled eyes, and publicly and without any sentimentality Habersaat apologized for allowing himself to be consumed by the infamous Alberte case that had robbed him of his former life. Then he directed his attention to his colleagues in the force and gave vent to his frustration and shame about the work that had been carried out. I wouldn't mind if he'd zoom out now so we could see what's happening, Assad said. Rose said nothing. She simply sat shaking her head. Protests could be heard from the man the report stated was the police union representative at the reception, but that didn't seem to faze Habersaat in the slightest. However, it did inspire Uncle Sam to zoom out so that Habersaat and the wall behind him were in full view. Rose gave a start when he pulled the pistol out and pointed it at the two superior officers standing right in front of the cameraman. You'd be forgiven for thinking they both had a very dark belt in judo or a similar sport with advanced falling technique because both men flew instantaneously to the side in a roll worthy of the best circus performer. Birkedals assertion that he'd checked first to see if it was a dummy was revealed for what it was now. This is it, mumbled Assad as Habersaat without the least hesitation put the pistol up to his temple and fired. The recording just caught the head being hurled to one side together with the undefined white and red mass that lashed to the left of the room. Then the man collapsed as the camera also fell to the floor. Carl turned to Rose but she was no longer there. Where did she go? asked Carl. Assad pointed over his shoulder to the staircase. It was too much for her after all. There you have it, then, said Assad without the least sign of emotion. Turns out Habersaat was left-handed. How could someone get through something that terrible so casually and analytically? 7 September 2013 By the way the man's voice was trembling on the phone, he revealed himself to be not only nervous but totally shaken and unsure of himself. Pirjo noticed it immediately. He could be worth his weight in gold. Your name is Lionel, you say. That's a nice name, she said. What can I do for you? Yes, as I said, my name is Lionel and I'd like to be a singer. Pirjo smiled. Another one of those. Great. I know my voice is good but the minute I have to prove it to someone else I clam up. That's why I'm calling. There was a short pause. He just needed to collect himself. She thought it best then not to ask him if he even had the voice to fulfill the dream. Have you tried to shut the world out, Lionel? To find nature inside you and let your primeval force direct calm, concentration, and happiness through singing? I don't really know... I've heard this so many times before, you see. When you want something so badly, as I understand you do, it's easy to be thrown off-balance. You swing, so to speak, against your own energy. I think that's what's happening to you when your voice clams up. But do you experience the same sort of insecurity when you do other things, Lionel? Because if that isn't the case, then I have to advise you to seek out one of the bioacoustic treatment methods or maybe even grounding body fission, which I can refer you to once we've ascertained what would be best and safest for you. That sounds complicated, but if it works, then... Listen to me, Lionel. Spiritual growth is difficult but there are methods to achieve it and develop a more specific, collective karma. It demands a lot of work, of course, but it's good to remember the bodhisattva vow We will not rest until each and every being has been saved from suffering, and that's how it will be for you in your case. To put it briefly, I'm sure we can find a passable way for you, too. There was a deep sigh, Lionel was caught in the net. Yes, it would be expensive. Sitting there, as stoic as a vestal before the eternal fire, keeping guard over the lives and lifestyles of weak people, was where Pirjo was at her best. Her insufficient upbringing may have emphasized that you should never take someone for a ride, but why have scruples about that when from time to time you could lift a person's life up toward higher levels by choosing to have your thumb on the scale? When people called her asking for a little insight into the road to a better future, why shouldn't they have it? When they fed her with information about their trivial day-to-day lives, banal dreams, and sad hopes, and she subsequently interpreted it so that they had something to look forward to, what could be wrong with that, if they only made the right effort? Hadn't she seen several times what it could mean when her clients received something to prop them up? And wasn't it true that a few people on earth were better skilled to predict things and organize the fates than others? It was certainly a skill she had. Atu had convinced her of that long ago. Pirjo smiled. These phone advice sessions were, in all their simplicity, ingenious and lucrative, and, what was better, it was her idea and all her own income. On Mondays she was the psychologist on one number and on Wednesdays she took on the role of the therapist on the other line, which she'd suggested they should call when the results of the first conversation needed further attention. A voice generator meant that on Mondays

she sounded light and ethereal and on Wednesdays professionally dark and authoritative. You'd really have to know better to figure out what she was up to. It certainly wasn't possible to recognize the voice. These two telephone lines with a call rate of thirty Danish kroner per minute to respectively the Light of the Oracle and the Holistic Chain were Pirjo's pension savings, and for that reason she was the only person from the nature absorption assembly who Atu allowed to run their own business while being associated with the Nature Absorption Academy. But Pirjo had altogether secured many privileges for herself, all of which she'd earned because Atu had lots of things to be thankful to her for. And one last thing, Lionel: What do you really want to get out of your singing talent? He hesitated for a moment and hesitation always made Pirjo frown. You want to make music because it's an important part of you, isn't that right? Yeah, that too. So, that's the way it was. It was just the usual. You want to be famous, perhaps? Yes, I think so. Who doesn't? She shook her head. There were nineteen to the dozen of this type of idiot these days. And what will you do with this fame? Is it because you want to earn lots of money? Yes, please, that would be great. But it's more the girl thing, I think. You often hear that it's easier for singers in that area. Okay, it was even one of those as well. He would truly be worth his weight in gold. So you don't find it so easy with the opposite sex, she attempted to say with some empathy. You live alone, then, I assume. Did he giggle? Hell no, I'm married. It gave Pirjo a start, as if he'd pressed a button directly linked to the nerve endings in her spine. Equal measures of distaste and chemical reaction hit her brain. She'd spent years trying to fight that vulnerable side of herself, and at the moment not a day went by without it rebounding. You're married, you say? Yes. We've been married for ten years. And your wife is totally aware of the scope of your plans, is she? Scope? No, hell no. She just likes it when I sing. *Revue de presse* Praise for *The Hanging Girl* Adler-Olsen wields a one-two punch of psychological suspense, as his trademark parallel plot follows the remorseless killers' manipulations while the humorous, sometimes touching rapport between Mrck and Assad threatens to steal the show. A must for procedural devotees and fans of Scandinavian mysteries. *Booklist* (starred review) All the requisite Adler-Olsen hallmarks are on display here: the easy camaraderie of the investigative team; great moments of humor; and Mrck's crotchety disposition. It helps to read the series in order, but these books are so good that it's no hardship to start at the beginning. *Bookpage* An intriguing read for devoted fans. *Library Journal* Simultaneously sardonic and funny. *Sacramento Bee* This book is not for the faint of heart, but for readers who enjoy dark humor and wisecracking heroes and heroines, you'll love *Department Q*. *Suspense Magazine* It can be hard to distinguish Scandinavian crime writers there are a lot of them, and their names have consonant clusters and umlauts and all that jazz but Jussi Adler-Olsen is a name to know. In a crowded genre, Adler-Olsen is an outlier. *GQ.com* More Praise for Jussi Adler-Olsen's *Department Q* series If you like the dark humor, wisecracking, and layered betrayals of Raymond Chandler, then read Adler-Olsen's *Department Q* series. *Men's Journal* A tense, pleasurable read. *USA Today* [A] sordid tale inspired by actual events during a dark period of Danish history. Ah, but there is more, so much more in this frenzied thriller. *The New York Times Book* Adler-Olsen merges story lines...with ingenious aplomb, effortlessly mixing hilarities with horrors... This crime fiction tour de force could only have been devised by an author who can even turn stomach flu into a belly laugh. *Publishers Weekly* (starred review) This series has enough twists to captivate contemporary mystery readers and enough substance and background to entertain readers with historical and literary tastes. *Library Journal* (starred review) When your series relies on cold cases, it's not always easy to craft plots that have both historical interest and an air of urgency, but it's something Adler-Olsen is very good at. *Booklist*