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**Colder**

Thriller

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## **2923 NIGHTS**

I see you go  
forevermore  
on a rope  
of darkest light

As though  
it were recent  
that all my days  
were turned to night

I tend the empty  
rooms I wander,  
paint your faces  
in spray of white

Forced to live  
to breath, to dream  
though it seems  
beyond my might

## FRINJER

True power over life and death means allowing someone to carry on breathing every now and then. That's what she remembered of her dream when she opened her eyes.

Quarter to five. It was another two hours before her alarm would go off, but she wouldn't get back to sleep. Luzy struggled out of the clammy bed; the heating was warm, the room was freezing cold. She brewed coffee, fried eggs and bacon. Time dripped away while she tried not to think about the date. The first cigarette tasted as bitter as they all had for the past eight years. Wind raged against the windows from the darkness outside. It felt as if the house were ducking down. A storm was approaching from south-south-west and would continue to build, said the met office. She showered with the temperature set close to scalding, then pulled on her uniform, laced up her boots, buckled on the belt with Maglite, radio and gun.

Then she sat back down, waited.

As she left the redbrick house on Halemwai she decided it was time she bought some furniture of her own. A blue sofa perhaps. She used to like blue, didn't she? Or was it red?

On her way to the car, icy sheets of water washed away the night. The village was still dozing now the tourists had left. Luzy drove through the dense forest of Dusterwald. Towers of cloud loomed in the sky. Behind the wall of rain she caught faint glimpses of sea. The island sat in the North Sea like the dropping of a giant seagull; at its widest point it was just two kilometres from east to west. It took twenty minutes to traverse the length of it by car.

On Sanghughwai she had to slam her foot on the brakes when a pheasant marched across the road, head held high, crest wafting in the wind, alone in the rain. It wasn't worth lighting a Camel on the short drive to Nebel, the main town. Though *town* was perhaps

somewhat of an overstatement with just two thousand souls on the whole of Amrum. She turned off behind Remmer's boarded-up fish shop and knew even before she saw the patrol car that Jörgen had got to the station long before her, today. As Luzy reached for the handle he yanked the door wide open, warbling his own cockeyed version of *Happy Birthday*.

Jörgen was a barrel of a man. The Mars bar into which he had stuck a burning sparkler looked like a disposable lighter in his hand. Not a single centimetre of his face was without a freckle; when he laughed, his entire body shook.

He pulled Luzy into the dry, he couldn't wait to give her the present. It was flat and wrapped up man-style. She immediately knew what it was. The island's Saint Clemens cemetery was home to the *talking gravestones*, as the locals called them. They bore the weathered life stories of long-gone whalers, Greenland explorers and spice captains; the fear and trembling of their families, the fortunes and sorrows encountered on distant shores. In summer, Luzy often sat under the ancient ash with its brilliant green foliage. There she gazed at the geest heathland, the salt marshes and across the sea to the island of Föhr, letting time drift like a weary sailor.

Recently, she had told Jörgen about her favourite inscription.

*Hope was robbed from me.*

*And yet hope I did.*

Thus read the engraving on the stone of ship owner Oluf Jensen, whose son was sold at a slave market in Algiers two-hundred-and-fifty years ago, following the capture of his galleon by Ottoman pirates. Before dying in old age, Jensen got to embrace his son again, the inscription read. In some lives, everything turned out OK.

Just not in hers.

Jörgen had got the photo mounted in an excessively opulent frame with ornamental gold trim, more suited to a Habsburg palace than her little house. But Luzy knew how much pleasure it had given him, so the picture would have pride of place next to the seat by the

window. She had only moved in at the beginning of the month; she imagined the view from there in summer, with the stone wall covered in wild roses.

Jörgen was so wide, her arms barely reached around his waist when she hugged him.

"Jeez, I would have liked to go out for a drink with you this evening," Luzy heard him mutter. "But my mother has got the flu, I have to go and look in on her."

That was a ruse of course; there would be a surprise party for her, like last year.

"Oh well. Fifty isn't a birthday, it's a condition."

"Tell that to my granny's godmother, she had triplets at fifty."

"Last time they were still twins," she commented as she picked a fax up from the desk.

"What's this?"

"Strange business – a bloke with a fake passport took a room at the Deichgraf," Jörgen told her.

The Red Army Faction was long past its peak of activity, but the hotels and guest houses were still obliged to pass the registration details of their guests to the police for checking.

"Has he left already?" she asked.

"Yep, cleared off on the late ferry. Red Renault. I've got the reg, it's a hire car from Elmshorn. The fax arrived after knocking off time, I've only just run the check."

The last attack had been three years ago. Sometimes Luzy wondered whether the terror group even still existed.

"How long did he stay at the hotel?"

"Just one night."

Jörgen hadn't stopped grinning since she'd arrived.

"German?" she asked.

"Seems so."

"And the passport – a duplicate?"

"No, the Frankfurt address doesn't exist. Or rather, it's the address of a tram depot."

Jörgen's grin was so wide his eyes had disappeared behind the raised cheeks. On Saturday, Luzy had watched *Batman* at the island cinema. Jörgen was the Joker without make-up.

"Is there a personal description?" she asked.

"Was about to find out."

He rang the hotel, then said: "Early forties, skinny bloke. Supposedly looks like a salesman for funeral outfits. I'll pass it onto Niebüll."

Niebüll was home to their police headquarters; Amrum's station only consisted of the two of them. During the holiday season, two extra officers were drafted in from non-tourist regions, but they had long since returned to the mainland. During autumn and winter there wasn't enough to do here for four. The silent months, Jörgen called them. Damage to property, motoring offences, every now and then a teenager with dope, occasionally shop theft. And for the drunks there was the sobering-up cell.

Three years ago, Bente Reents, who had beaten his wife black and blue.

Called by the neighbour, they had arrived outside the house in the dark. Jörgen had still been fiddling with his belt while she had stormed in. By the time he'd appeared it was all over and Luzy was reaching into the freezer for a bag of peas to cool her knuckles. Jörgen had talked to Reents for a long time and had then written in the report that he had slipped during his arrest and fallen down the stairs. The whole island had found out; since then, Luzy was greeted by every local with a smile. After Reents had been released from the clinic, Luzy had dropped in on his wife several times a week until she was sure he was staying away from the house and the divorce was going ahead. Luzy and Jörgen had never spoken about it again.

The window panes rattled under the force of the storm. A nudge from Jörgen fetched her back to the present.

"Time to head out."

Luzy drove the patrol car. The wipers could barely cope with the mass of water. Wind force nine, perhaps ten, she estimated. When it got to twelve the ferry had to cease operating.

"Isn't this weather just lovely!" Jörgen gushed.

"I'm worried about you."

"Why?"

"Is that still a grin or are you suffering from facial paralysis?"

"I went for a walk with Grietje yesterday evening," he burst out.

Jörgen had been in love with Grietje since their kindergarten years. In her clear eyes the vastness of the sky was reflected. She had married a guy from Cuxhaven; he was useless and it had taken her twelve years to realise it. Since last winter, she was back on the island, which was unusual. People said on Amrum you are born and buried, or you leave and never come back. Grietje now worked in the boutique in Süddorf.

"She was wearing one of those thingamies," he told her.

"She went for a walk in her nightie?"

"Course not. One of those stylish hoodies, you know the kind. She looked like Michelle Pfeiffer."

Only she wasn't Michelle Pfeiffer. She was Melanie Griffith and it wouldn't be long before she fell for some other waster because he had a dimple in his chin. That was what she should tell Jörgen. But she couldn't get herself to burst his bubble.

"We kissed."

"Wow."

"Twice. And tomorrow she's going to cook something with pasta."

He said this as if it settled everything. Eternal union, sealed with macaroni.

They drove through the woodland. Just after Nebel, it formed a tunnel for a few seconds of their journey. This early in the morning it was so dark that Luzy had to switch on the main beam. On the road through Wittdün they saw old Mrs. Möllersen with her dog – a

bat-eared ankle-biter that would have risen into the air on his lead like a kite – clamped firmly under her arm. To the left was the new-build in which Luzy had rented two rooms before she'd moved to Norddorf, into the gingerbread house with the newly thatched roof. Discovering the beauty of Wittdün's high street was not one of the pleasures awaiting future generations of archaeologists. But not far from here, beyond the dyke, stood the imposing properties of Hamburg's wealthy, who spent double of what Luzy earned every month on their gardeners alone.

*One man. Just one night. Fake passport.*

*No, not the Red Army Faction.*

*They wouldn't make a mistake like that, using a tram depot address. Following their break-ins into the country's registry offices they have plenty of blank passports, and they only ever use addresses of apartments they're actually renting.*

They arrived at the ferry port. The bay was protected from the wind, but the sea foam was piling up so high it looked like it had been raining washing powder. The elemental force of the waves as they smashed against the quay sent the spray high into the air before it poured down over the concrete in thunderous grey-white cascades. Again and again, the storm lunged at the island, a wall of water raced towards Luzy and Jörgen, head-on and almost horizontal now, mixed with hail that hammered onto the windscreen like buckshot. To the left she could just make out the yacht harbour, a series of lurching shadows. She pictured the game of yo-yo the sea must be playing with Tjark's fishing boat. He had almost certainly slept on board, worried his *Emma* could tear loose, and now he was gripping onto his mug of coffee. But Tjark was tough. The day he had lost three fingers in the net winch he had gone to the pub for a drink as usual.

Gunnar, their colleague from Föhr, was already waiting in the radar vehicle that was shared between the two neighbouring islands.

*"Bi sok üülag wedern jaaget am nään hünj ütj föör dör!"* he huffed when they jumped

into the car soaking wet.

On Föhr the language was called *Fering*, on Amrum it was *Öömrang*. To Luzy it sounded like Micronesian, but she understood the odd snippet by now – something about not chasing your dog out the door in weather like this. And the habit of interpreting people's facial expressions still stood her in good stead.

"*Baangboks*" – wuss – was all Jörgen replied.

"So," Gunnar looked at Jörgen with a meaningful look, "did you have a pleasant evening yesterday?"

Gunnar wouldn't have enjoyed the banter half as much if Luzy wasn't able to follow.

"I read a book by that Wittgenstein chap," Jörgen quipped. "What about you?"

"My sister was on the phone to our cousin in Nebel, who heard from her brother-in-law that his brother went out at ten to take the dog round the block, where he met a neighbour who swears she saw you and Grietje by the dyke. Apparently you were so busy smooching you didn't even notice when your hat was blown off your head."

"Rubbish, complete rubbish," Jörgen countered. "Especially the bit about the hat. Hats are for wimps like you."

It did her the world of good to laugh with them, today especially.

"Luzy, what do you reckon? How long will it last? I say she's going to run off with a long-distance lorry driver from Copenhagen before the first snow falls. Wanna bet?"

Gunnar emphasised the Z in her name, although he knew that she hated it and it should be pronounced softly. But that was as much part of the banter as the Camel they smoked together.

"Didn't you also swear on the bible that humans only use half a percent of their brain?"

"I should have bet with him on that," Jörgen chipped in.

"Should have, could have."

They fooled around until it was time for the ferry to cast off. Even this gigantic vessel



was dancing on the swell. When Gunnar walked up the ramp he had to hold on to the railing to avoid falling flat on his face. Jörgen hadn't drawn Gunnar's attention to her birthday. Luzy was glad of that. He could tell how much she struggled with it, not just this one, but each one in the eight years that they'd known each other. He'd never asked her why. Nor had he ever wanted to know why a police officer of her rank would ask to be transferred here of all places. Perhaps he was scared of the answer.

*Actually, he did ask her about her birthday.*

*That winter three years ago. After Bente Reents.*

During the holiday season they usually positioned the radar car by the lighthouse, where the posh liked to burn rubber. But at the end of October there were mainly just locals left on the island. It had been a long and tiring summer. People had better things to do with their hard-earned cash than donate it to the state coffers. Luzy parked the car in the tight bend on Waasterstigh road, where nobody went faster than fifty unless their name was Niki Lauda. She switched off the wipers and turned the radio on. They listened to schmaltzy pop songs for a while, letting their thoughts drift while gusts shook the car.

*I had to escape, the city was sticky and cruel, maybe I should have called you first but I was dying to get to you... I drove all night to get to you.*

Two cars passed by, Swantje and Pieter with his wife. They slowed down to walking pace and greeted them, appreciating the service to the island. Jörgen said something, but it was more like a whisper, as if he was no longer sitting next to her but standing by the cross-mark fire up in the dunes, shouting into the storm.

*One night, one day.*

*Took the late ferry.*

*Skinny bloke.*

Suddenly she saw the raptor-man flying towards her with his knife, mighty, suspended

in mid-air for an eternity, certain of his prey, looking down with those eyes that had seen the final seconds of many lives. Then the disbelief when Luzy had rolled onto her back beneath him and death darted towards him from her hand at more than a thousand kilometres per hour – but for her as leisurely as dawn on the Arctic Circle – until her time had crashed into his and shattered, and pain had blazed through Luzy's body as the neon had burst into a fiery torrent, and the life of the raptor-man had poured over her, turning her into a creature of blood.

Then the news. Further demonstrations had taken place in several Eastern German cities. In Leipzig alone, three-hundred-thousand people had taken to the streets, demanding free elections and freedom of travel. The previous evening, Egon Krenz's appointment as successor to Erich Honecker had prompted sit-ins. There had been renewed mistreatment of demonstrators by Stasi troops. Helmut Kohl spelt out conditions for Economic support from West Germany: If the ruling SED party was willing to relinquish its leadership claim, much would be possible and everything imaginable.

The GDR was even further away than Jörgen – news from the other side of the world.

Until he virtually shouted into her ear.

"And what should I wear?"

"For the pasta? Jeans of course."

"No, when I take Grietje to the fire service ball."

"Something red, like every sensible human being."

"Red makes me look pale."

"Jörgen, believe me, if she's really interested, you could turn up dressed as a potato and it wouldn't matter."

"Well, that would certainly show off my hips."

They both jumped when the radar responded. Twenty above the limit. Luzy turned on the wipers and set off. The car was too far ahead to recognise the registration, but it certainly wasn't anyone from here. After Nebel they overtook and Jörgen poked the signalling disc out

into the rain. When they'd stopped, they played a quick round of rock, paper, scissors. Luzy lost. She got out and walked to the Audi behind them. It had a Cologne registration. The minute it took her to run back to the radar car with the Audi's driver and install her on the back seat was enough to make her wish Amrum was roofed over.

"Goodness me, at the travel agent's they told me this was the place to come for an autumn beach holiday," the woman chirped.

Trying to bond with a little joke was always a good strategy. While Jörgen recorded her details the woman delivered the classic tripartite: *Was I really going too fast? My speedometer must be broken. Can't you turn a blind eye just this once?* When the fluttering lashes didn't bear fruit either, forty Deutschmarks changed hands. The few metres back to her car inflicted final ruination on the woman's Parisian outfit.

They returned to their position on Waasterstigh road, wound back the seats and hunkered down. Wild geese crouched doggedly out on the marsh, hail scoured the car's paintwork. They listened to pop songs in which everything turned out for the best. No other vehicles came past for three hours. Then Sven's wife stopped beside them. He'd tipped over in his tractor. He wasn't injured, but they had to secure the accident site and organise a tow truck. Slightly more challenging was Smit's Doberman, which had chewed through its lead again and was roaming around Nebel. Nobody knew the dog's name. Everyone just called him *Tus* – tooth. He'd already bitten his way round half the island. He should have been put down ages ago, but old Smit didn't have anyone else, it would have been cruel to do that to him. They bought a kilo of mince and stuffed six sleeping pills into it. Worked a treat as always.

She clocked off at five but remained on call; this switched between them every few days. At home she ran a bubble bath, relishing the feeling that rippled through her as she stepped into the hot water. She closed her eyes and listened to the Beatles.

*When you left I had no chance to say I love you.*

*And every day since then feels old instead of new.*

To distract herself, Luzy thought of the woman they had caught speeding earlier. Lawyer, specialising in smart-arse comments, with a passion for buttercream cake, she guessed. She had some expertise on that front, she was carrying about fifteen kilos too many herself. Or perhaps more? Luzy was as round as the zero in her age; her scales lead a very solitary existence.

*And that's the pain I'm going through.*

The expected phone call from the Seeigel village pub came at around seven. Ali claimed she was having trouble with a drunk customer. To avoid spoiling everyone's fun, Luzy struggled back into her uniform and boots. Normally she would have walked the short distance, but she'd had enough water for one day. It was already dark; fighting against the storm, she had to prize open the car door with both hands. When she entered the Seeigel a few minutes later she let it all wash over her – the singing, the party horns, the banner that read *To the next fifty!*. She even managed to look surprised. So many had come, all good people; she knew a story about each of them. Ali had become a friend long ago. Her real name was Albertine, but anyone who called her that risked a ban. Luzy could drop in on her any time, day or night. Ali always had a coffee, a silence and a hug for her.

Everyone watched expectantly as Luzy unwrapped the present they'd all chipped in for. It was a painting by a local artist, *Sunrise over North Point*; a reference to her surname Morgenroth. It was cheesy, but beautiful.

Jörgen climbed onto a table. His speeches were feared for their length; Luzy spotted some people rolling their eyes as they prepared to retreat inwards.

"Don't panic! I'm not going to waffle on. I'm far too thirsty for that. Luzy, before you arrived, I had another colleague from the mainland. He hopped it during his first winter. When you came, we placed bets on how long you'd last here with us. I said: *She's staying for good*. Well, people – I bought myself a guitar with the winnings."

"Pity there wasn't enough to pay for some lessons too!" Arne called out.

"Hey, at least I've progressed beyond playing the comb." Everyone laughed.

"I could rabbit on for days about all the things I like about you," Jörgen continued.

"But don't worry, I'll just say this: Best of all is that you never play the boss card. And I'll bet anyone, in thirteen years, that's if I ever reach the ripe old age that you have, you'll be speaking Öömrang better than us locals – including my late maternal cousin once removed.

*Dü beest nian frääm, dü beest ian faan üs. An dü beest man best frinj."*

*Nian frääm – you're not a stranger, you're one of us. Frinj – friend.* That much she understood.

Now she was glad she wasn't spending the evening on her own.

Meatballs, pickled herring and shrimp sandwiches were handed round, then they danced – Nena, Spider Murphy Gang, Heinz Rudolf Kunze. But Luzy would always be a Beatles fan. She leant against the bar with a glass of lemonade. The TV was showing silent images from Moscow; Gorbachev had aged decades in four years. Luzy watched Grietje and Jörgen dancing to Grönemeyer's *Flugzeuge im Bauch*. She noticed how intimate the two were. His large hands were delicately placed around her Barbie doll waist, her head was resting against his giant chest as if it had been resting there since kindergarten. Suddenly, Luzy knew that it was for real between them – for good – as sure as Jörgen had known it about her, and tears welled up inside her because she was so happy for him.

¶ Then Jörgen started larking about and she laughed. Ali joined her and put her arm around her.

"I have no idea why you're always so sad," Ali told her. "Perhaps one day you'll tell me, or not. But you're an Eskimo woman. When you laugh, it's like watching the sun rise. That only happens once a year at the North Pole too."

Jörgen came over.

"Sorry Ali, I'm going to whisk her away, we have some urgent business to attend."

He was pretty plastered already, his cheeks were flushed dark red.

They took her car, it was only a few kilometres to the shooting range in Nebel. It was a ritual, on both their birthdays. Jörgen turned the radio up to full volume and sang along to *99 Luftballons*. The building was little more than a shack, with a pervasive smell of gun oil and sweat. Luzy liked her service pistol, a Walther P5 that felt solid and comfortable in her hand. The shells were ejected to the left – a bonus for left-handed people like her. Though all this was pretty irrelevant on Amrum of course.

"May the force be with you," Jörgen declared.

She placed her feet too closely together, didn't fully extend her left arm. As she emptied the magazine, she fired every bullet wide and sent the last one into the ceiling.

Jörgen's turn. His stance was catastrophic, his hand – after eight beers with schnapps – no longer steady. But it was still enough to beat her by a mile.

"Call me Luke Skywalker!" he laughed.

They heard the phone ring in the club room. Nobody aside from Ali knew where they were. Luzy was instantly gripped by a chill of the kind she hadn't experienced in eight years. She ran to the phone and answered.

"Tamme has disappeared," Ali told her.

He worked on the ferry.

"What do you mean, disappeared?"

"When they docked, he was no longer on board."

Tamme was Ali's brother. Luzy heard her voice crack.

[...]

## NINE FLOORS

Luzy pressed the button for the ninth floor and shot round when she heard a metallic clicking sound behind her. But Kieling had only lit a cigarette and had let the lighter lid snap closed. Her sudden movement made him flinch, his left shirt cuff slid up and Luzy saw his jewel-encrusted watch. At the same moment she thought of the telephone boxes around Bonn from which Kleinröder made his night-time calls.

The elevator stopped on the first floor. When the door opened onto an empty corridor, Luzy pressed the button to close the door again, but nothing happened. She realised they had got in the wrong elevator.

Although the Solomon was a secular hotel, it still provided a Shabbat elevator for its religious guests. She hadn't noticed it yesterday. Consumed with anger at Kleinröder, she had only conducted a cursory check.

Thirty-nine activities, the Melachot, were prohibited to Jews on their holy day. These included the pressing of switches that close an electrical circuit. In a Shabbat elevator you couldn't select the required floor; it stopped on each floor, serving every level without the guests having any control over this. As Luzy knew from her first Israel mission, the door remained open for exactly fifteen seconds. It was going to take them three minutes to reach the ninth floor.

"We're changing to a different elevator," she announced and led the way.

The man in black teleported himself directly in front of her.

Uziel was the name of the man who invented Israel's best-known firearm, meaning *God is my strength*. Before the tango could demonstrate that, Luzy had already whisked her Sig Sauer out of the holster and fired four bullets to prove that killing wasn't a question of faith.

While the tango wavered between pressing his hands on the chest wound and using

them to stem the jet of blood spouting from his neck, a quick backward glance told Luzy that the door of the Shabbat elevator was already closing again. Kieling stood behind her, frozen to the spot. She unceremoniously kicked his feet from under him, causing him to fall backwards and block the door with his flabby body.

Luzy briefly considered fleeing downstairs with him via the stairwell. But she didn't know how many tangos were waiting there and whether Kieling's bodyguards were still alive. And even if they were, she would be bringing death to the ground floor, straight to the big wedding party that was going on in the main bar.

She darted to the tango, snatched his Uzi, shot him in the head and leapt back into the elevator.

"Into the cabin! Now!" she yelled at Kieling.

He crawled back inside at a snail's pace. Luzy knelt down. With the Sig Sauer on the left and the Uzi on the right, she waited for the next attacker, but the corridor remained empty until the door closed. She unscrewed the silencer from the barrel of the Uzi. She wanted to make as much noise with the weapon as possible, perhaps the others on the top floor would hear it, though it was a slim hope. Thanks to the infernal noise from the wedding party – the DJ's next choice had fallen on Gloria Gaynor, who was now belting out *I Will Survive* – the shots probably hadn't even been heard down in the lobby.

She yanked the radio from her belt.

"Solomon 1 to 2: Tangos in the stairwell, I need backup. I repeat: Tangos in the stairwell, I need backup."

She had no reception in the cabin.

*I shouldn't have sent the Shin Bet away.*

*I should have taken the four bodyguards upstairs with me.*

*I should have checked the whole hotel properly.*

*Then I wouldn't have taken the Shabbat elevator.*



Kieling stared up at Luzy. She saw no fear in his eyes, just confusion.

"Lie down on your front against the side wall," she barked. "Face away from the door. Fold your hands over your head and stay down."

Kieling didn't budge, paralysed by shock.

Luzy shouted at him loud enough to out-compete Gloria, who's smash hit was also booming out of the elevator speakers. Kieling obeyed her command at a pace that would have made a sloth feel impatient.

Second floor.

Before the door slid open, she got on the ground beside Kieling, head to toe, so close she could feel his legs shaking.

There were two. They fired immediately, but only succeeded in perforating the back wall of the cabin. With the Uzi raised in preparation, Luzy drew a straight line across them at mid-body height, from one to the other. As they collapsed, she had time to contemplate their experienced, calm, hard faces which told of their many victorious fights.

And of the defeat in this one, their last.

She still had four rounds in her Sig Sauer, she sacrificed two for the tangos' brain stems. Then she was back on her knees. Luzy laid down the Uzi to operate the walkie-talkie.

"Solomon 1 to Solomon 2: Tangos in the stairwell, I need backup. Tangos in the stairwell, I need backup."

But all she could hear was Gloria Gaynor, who was still surviving. Luzy couldn't get the stupid song out of her head and caught herself humming along to it.

The door closed again.

¶ An untrained person would be close to death with a pulse of almost two-hundred-and-thirty, and she knew that the continuous fire of this assault gun in her chest would also kill her before long. Her heart was no longer able to take in enough blood, was pumping too little of it through her body. To avoid losing consciousness, she slowed her breathing, treating her

muscles to some precious, clean oxygen, and managed to get herself into a half-way functioning state again before they reached the next floor.

*We don't want to be revered, we want to be feared*, Roni had said to Max when he had admired her during the Krav Maga training.

She thought of Max and the others, and the birthday present they had handed her today – a hideous bedside rug. They had bought it on their free evening in Jerusalem and got a weaver in the Souk Khan al-Zeit to embroider the name *Kleinröder* onto it.

When the door opened, she thought for a moment the corridor was empty and for a split second she had the ludicrous hope it might be over. But then a tango with a knife flew towards her from the left. He seemed to be suspended in mid-air for an eternity, a predatory bird in the second before it captures its prey, solemn and majestic, with eyes that had seen the final breath of many lives.

But she had already spun onto her back and sent the two remaining projectiles of the Sig Sauer underway. The lead had no more than a paltry fifty centimetres to travel, but it did this at such a dawdling pace that Luzy had time to ponder how the raptor man's ribcage was going to be penetrated at a thousand kilometres per hour just below the sternum.

Then his full weight crashed down on her. It was as though his eighty kilos caused the neon light in the cabin to burst into a torrent of sparks. Darkness engulfed her. Until the pain searing through her body fetched her back.

She grabbed the Ka-Bar that he had rammed into her left flank as a final act, pulled it out of the wound and slit his throat, so close in front of her that his blood gushed all over her face. For a while Luzy was blind. She pushed the dead man off her and wiped her eyes clear. The elevator door was just closing.

Gloria was still gamely singing on.

Suddenly the pain was gone; all that remained was a feeling of numbness. Was her kidney lacerated? Or was it just a tissue wound?

*That doesn't matter now. Concentrate.*

*You can focus for hours, days, years.*

She patted down the tango, pulled his gun from the holster under his black corduroy jacket – a Česká, ugly but practical – and heaved herself up with a groan. She slid the knife into her belt.

"Is it over?" she heard Kieling whisper.

"It's only just begun," she replied through gritted teeth.

Her fingers were clenched around the Česká. She felt like a piece of wood, a useless toy like the one belonging to the little boy on Chain Gate Street.

*I need to get rid of that Kleinröder rug.*

*They meant well, but what am I supposed to do with it?*

The elevator stopped on the fourth floor.

*Breathe! Breathe! Breathe!*

Chirping civilians sauntered about on the corridor. When they saw Luzy they performed a graceful backward step, beautifully synchronised, like in a square dance. Then they ran.

No tango.

Couldn't somebody just shut Gloria up?

She was sweating heavily, her breathing was shallow, her mouth completely dry. Her hands were an icy white and Luzy wondered whether it was due to blood loss. She placed her hand on her left ribs, but although it was all sticky there, it wasn't wet.

The door closed again.

She had neither the strength nor the focus to hold the Uzi in one hand and the Česká in the other.

*Would the Uzi be best?*

*Uzi rhymes with Luzy.*

*Can sauntering civilians chirp?*

Fifth floor.

Three shadows, swaying figures like in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. It was only when two of them turned into red torches that she realised she was holding the Uzi, not the Česká, and was firing an entire salvo at them.

In that same instance, the image came into focus and she saw the third tango in high definition. He was dancing through the bullets in such a light-footed manner that he reminded her of a whiteface circus clown, surrounded by children hurling marshmallows at him. He was young, about thirty, and handsome, in a different situation Luzy would have found him attractive. He had long sinewy fingers and for a split second he seemed to be waving at her, before he performed an elegant pirouette.

Then he was gone, like a phantom spirit, and all that remained were the two tangos. As if resting, one of them sat against the wall, acting like he still had a head. The other was kneeling on the nylon carpet, pawing around for the Uzi beside him. Two long, curly strands of hair were hanging into his face like sidelocks.

Luzy had lost all sense of time. But she knew that her weapon magazines were empty and that they had no chance of survival unless she managed to get hold of that Uzi before the elevator doors closed again.

"Block the door!" she yelled at Kieling.

He didn't hear her, or didn't want to hear her, lost in his own tunnel of fear.

*Where is whiteface?*

She sprinted forward, but instead of covering the four metres in a second, it was as if she were wading through treacle, a thick syrupy mass that clung to her, making her heavier and heavier. Luzy felt disorientated, as if lost in the maze of *The Shining*. She came to when she was holding the Uzi of the tango in her hand, but had no recollection of having knelt down. He was still alive. She shot the scream off his face.

Only now did she notice the third corpse, with a revolver clasped in each limp hand.

*Death on the Yarkon.*

It wasn't whiteface.

Luzy heard the elevator door closing.

She turned around, sloth-style. She saw Kieling in the cabin, with the dead raptor man beside him, and enough blood on the floor to rival a slaughterhouse. A second later she was lying between the door panels, blocking them with her body.

*I Will Survive. Yes, yes I get it.*

*Why didn't I lay the empty Uzi in the light barrier?*

"Are you injured?" she heard a strange voice ask.

"I don't know," Kieling whimpered.

"Then you're OK," the strange voice observed and whispered to Luzy: *Tell your wimp of a body to stop pissing about and unlock the reserves.*

As if the elevator was a time machine, she saw raptor man flying towards her again, felt the pain as he pushed his knife into her, slit his throat with the Ka-Bar again and again, swallowed his blood.

Then the door opened – floor six.

She jammed the stock of the Uzi against her shoulder and flinched when the door closed without her having to dance the tango.

Finally, a new song was being played.

*Stayin Alive* by the Bee Gees.

Hardly an improvement.

Luzy closed her eyes for an instant and when she opened them again everything was in black and white.

They were on the seventh floor. A dark-haired woman was waiting for the elevator, a classic beauty in an evening gown who reminded Luzy of 1940s Hollywood. She was wearing

a sash round her waist like Jennifer Jones in *Duel in the Sun*.

The only thing missing was that crazy hat.

There was a floor-to-ceiling mirror behind Jennifer Jones and Luzy impassively contemplated the figure which presumably was her. She'd been cast in a different film; she was now playing the lead role in *Carrie*, her face a rust-red mask with enormous staring white eyes. Her hands, her naked arms, the tank top, her hair, everything was drenched in blood. She had turned into a nightmarish creature, alien and terrifying.

Then she saw the girl with the bow in her hair. She was playing with the shoe polishing machine, switching it on and off.

On, off, on, off.

Jennifer Jones screamed when she saw the blood-soaked creature in the elevator cabin, but all Luzy could hear was the bass run in *Stayin' Alive*, which she liked, even though the high-pitched warbling irritated her. She wanted to tell the little girl and the woman to run away, but although she moved her lips no words came out and she could see in the mirror how absurd it looked.

As if the action in the film had jumped forward because the projector was faulty, a tango with a fuzzy Arafat beard abruptly appeared in the scene. He yanked up his gun, no more than a metre from Luzy, whose muscles remembered what they had to do even though her brain was far too tired to grasp it.

As if by magic, his Česká was now pointing at him and no longer at her. Bewildered she saw him fall, in his forehead a hole the size of the Kepler crater, and she racked her brain whether it was her who had pulled the trigger.

A second later she was catapulted against the back wall of the cabin, staring into the muzzle flash of a second tango. She couldn't understand why a steel press was crushing her chest.

Everything was in colour again, the white silk gown of Jennifer Jones, the red dahlia

blossoming in time lapse over her heart, the hand she was reaching out imploringly towards the little girl, her last glance.

The girl ran towards her mother, too fast for Luzy to follow with her eyes. But she intuited the bullet trajectory as the tango spun round to aim his Česká at the screaming girl.

*Duck down – please, please duck down! Now!*

When the child's hair was whirled up by the bullet's vortex it seemed for a split second as if the miracle had happened. But then a milky spray gushed out of her head and she fell down dead onto her mother, and the tango was hurled into the corridor because Luzy was shredding his anatomy until her firing pin had no more cartridges to hit.

He turned as he fell, a smile frozen on his ugly mug. He looked as happy as if a high-end prostitute had sat down naked on his face in his final seconds.

The elevator door closed. She heard something that sounded like the grunt of an animal and saw the Luzy-Lucifer creature kneel down beside Kieling. A bullet had hit his leg artery, he was losing more blood than Jesus on Golgotha. She watched in wonder as the Luzy-Lucifer creature pulled the scarf from Kieling's neck, tied it around his thigh and used the Ka-Bar as a rod to apply a tourniquet.

She saw the Luzy-Lucifer creature fall, watched as it attempted to prop itself up against the cabin wall, saw it slip again and again on the blood-soaked floor. She remembered how Roni had showed her the Western Stone in the Wailing Wall.

*Some believe that God creates the world anew every day with this stone. And that our soul leaves the body every night and we are reborn at first daylight.*

*In that case I can die now and wake up again tomorrow.*

The door opened on the eighth floor.

The tango stepped into the light barrier and Luzy found herself staring at the whiteface clown, whose face wasn't in fact white but a sun-tanned brown. His hair was neatly parted along the middle, as if he'd merely been strolling through the corridors. His thin lips were

smiling. There was a tiny mole next to his aquiline nose, like a beauty spot, strange on a man. He scrutinized her with large, searching eyes; respectfully, it seemed to her.

She raised the empty Česká and pulled the trigger, again and again, until the gun fell from her limp hand. Whiteface casually shot Kieling in the head, killed him as if he was squishing a mosquito, gazing at her all the while.

Luzy closed her eyes. Opened them again.

But it wasn't a mirage.

Till was standing in the corridor. He was staggering, gleaming red. Till lifted his gun to eliminate whiteface. Without her noticing him move, whiteface was suddenly kneeling in the dead angle by the door and sealed Till's mouth with lead. Till fell, dropping the weapon as he breathed out.

Luzy knew she was screaming, but heard no sound.

Whiteface bent down to her and whispered into her ear.

"True power over life and death means allowing someone to carry on breathing every now and then."

She woke up on the ninth floor, saw the corpses lying in the corridor.

Then she was floating in the salty waters of the Dead Sea, searching for the three stars in the sky, but the Shabbat seemed unending.

Until she sank.