

1

You couldn't have asked for better weather. She was sitting with her tour group, admiring the view of the glacier and rummaging in her daypack for a sandwich, when her gaze happened to fall on a bump in the snow crust. It looked like a human face.

It took her a moment to register what she was seeing. Then she was on her feet, screaming her head off, shattering the silence of the ice cap.

The German tourists sitting in a huddle around her almost jumped out of their skins. They couldn't understand what had triggered such a violent reaction in their Icelandic guide, an older woman who up to now had seemed so calm and unflappable.

They were coming to the end of their glacier tour. Yesterday they had gone for a hike on the famously unpronounceable Eyjafjallajökull. It had become a popular tourist destination following the notorious 2010 eruption, when European air traffic had been brought to a standstill by the ash cloud produced by the volcano

under the ice. For a long time afterwards the surrounding landscape had been buried under a thick layer of ash, but now it had mostly blown away or been washed into the soil, and the mountainsides had reverted to a vivid moss-green.

The tour was scheduled to last ten days and take in four ice caps. They had left Reykjavík just over a week ago in specially modified vehicles. Their nights were spent at the best hotels in the south-west so that the Germans, a group of wealthy friends from the car manufacturing town of Wolfsburg, wouldn't have to go without any of their creature comforts. Gourmet lunches on the ice caps were followed by good dinners back at their hotels in the evenings. During the day, they undertook hikes of a moderate length, with rest stops for refreshments. They had been unusually lucky with the weather: every day that September the sun had shone from a cloudless sky, and the Germans kept asking about global warming and the impact of the greenhouse effect on Iceland. The guide was fluent in German – she had studied literature at the University of Heidelberg – and the tour was conducted entirely in that language, apart from those two words in English: *global warming*.

She told them how the Icelandic climate had changed in recent years. The summers had become warmer with more hours of sunlight and – obligatory joke – no one was complaining. Gone were the old, unsettled summers; now you could almost rely on the good weather to last for days, even weeks at a time. The winters had become milder too, with lighter snowfall – though, on the minus side, this did nothing to diminish the gloom of the long dark nights. But the most striking change was to be seen in the glaciers, which were receding at an alarming rate. Snæfellsjökull was a good example: the ice-capped volcano, famous as the

starting point for Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, was a shadow of its former self.

Now they were on the last glacier of their tour, Langjökull, which had also seen better days. In 1997 to '98, she told them, it had lost a whole three metres in height, and recently its area had shrunk by 3.5 per cent. At guide school they'd taught her to trot out figures like these, including the usual spiel about ice caps making up 11 per cent of Iceland's surface area and containing a volume of water equivalent to twenty-five years' precipitation.

They had spent the previous night at Húsafell and set off for the glacier at eleven this morning. It was a very easy group; they were almost all fit and equipped with top-of-the-range walking boots and protective gear. There had been no awkward incidents, no one had fallen ill or complained or made a scene, and everyone seemed set on getting the most out of their trip. Earlier they had hiked along the edge of the glacier before picking their way onto the ice itself. The compacted snow crunched at every step and the surface was covered in trickling streams. She led the way, feeling the cold air rising against her face. There was quite a bit of traffic up here. Seeing all the jeeps and snowmobiles roaring over the ice, the Germans had asked her if glacier driving was a popular sport among Icelanders and she had answered non-committally. Although she was well prepared, they often caught her out with unexpected questions, like the one at breakfast: how many cheeses do you make in Iceland?

She had enrolled at guide school after tourism really began to take off. By then she had been unemployed for eight months. On top of that she had lost her flat, as she hadn't been able to pay off her mortgage in the wake of the financial crash, and the man she was seeing had moved to Norway. He was a builder by trade and,

finding more than enough work there, had declared that he was never coming back to this shitty little island now that a bunch of idiots had managed to bankrupt it. Then someone had mentioned that tourism was the next big thing. With the bottom falling out of the króna, Iceland had suddenly become an affordable destination. At guide school, they taught her that foreign visitors loved Iceland for the landscape, the pure air and the peace and quiet.

They'd said nothing about frozen corpses on glaciers.

The Germans gathered round, following her gaze to what appeared to be a human head, emerging from the ice.

'What is it?' a woman asked, moving closer.

'Is it a man?' asked another.

Though the face was almost covered by a thin layer of snow, they could see the nose, the eye sockets and most of the forehead. The rest of the head and body were buried in the ice.

'What can have happened to him?' a third member of the group wondered aloud. The guide recalled that he was a retired doctor.

'Has he been there long?' someone else asked.

'It looks like it,' said the doctor, kneeling beside the face. 'He didn't freeze to death yesterday.'

Carefully, using his bare hands, he brushed the snow away until the whole face was revealed.

'Don't touch anything,' his wife warned.

'It's all right, I'm not doing any more than that.'

When the doctor straightened up and stepped back, they could all see the man's face, looking as if it had been moulded from porcelain, so paper-thin that it would break at the slightest touch. There was no way of telling how long he had been there, as the ice had treated him kindly, preventing decomposition. He appeared to have been around thirty when he died. His face was broad

across the cheeks, with a large mouth, strong teeth, and deep-set eyes above a handsome nose. His hair was thick and blond.

‘Shouldn’t you notify the police, dear?’ asked the doctor’s wife, turning to the guide.

‘Yes, of course,’ she said distractedly, unable to tear her eyes away from the face. ‘Of course. I’ll do that right now.’

She took out her phone, confident that there would be a signal. She was always careful to stick to areas with phone or radio reception, in case of accidents.

‘We’re not far from Geitlandsjökull,’ she explained to the emergency services, after describing what they had found. As she was speaking, her gaze fell on the flat-topped volcano from which the south-western flank of the glacier took its name. She had read when preparing for this trip that if the ice cap continued to shrink at the same rate, by the end of the century it would have almost entirely disappeared.

2

By the time he finally emerged from the sports bar into the driving snow, he was seriously drunk. He hadn't seen his friend for at least an hour, so he must have gone home. As usual, they'd met up early to watch the football. It had been a good match and afterwards he'd got talking to some lads he didn't know, while Ingi had lapsed into a gloomy silence. Ingi often got like that when he drank: just sat there, not saying a word.

He lowered his head, clutching his jacket tightly around his skinny frame, and set off into the blizzard. The snow immediately started settling on his clothes, and in no time at all he was freezing and cursing the fact he hadn't put on his work overalls, which were thickly lined enough to protect him from anything the elements could throw at him. On winter mornings it could be hard to leave the warm hut for the exposed construction site, but two mugs of coffee, a cigarette and the blue overalls all helped. It wasn't complicated. Simple pleasures – you just had to know how to

appreciate them. Football and a cold beer. Coffee and a ciggie. And thick overalls in winter.

He moved quickly but unsteadily along the pavement, his thoughts as erratic as his footprints in the snow.

He'd thought the guy looked vaguely familiar as they sat chatting at the bar, but it had taken a while for the penny to drop. The lights were low and the guy had been wearing a baseball cap and kept his head down. They'd exchanged a few remarks about the game and discovered that they both supported the same team. In the end, unable to restrain himself, he'd started talking about Öskjuhlíd and asked the man straight out if it had been him he ran into there. Asked if he remembered that evening too.

'No,' the man said. But the glance he shot him from under his cap removed all doubt that it was him.

'It *was* you, wasn't it?' he exclaimed, pleased and incredulous. 'It *was* you! Don't you remember me? I can't believe it! Did the cops ever talk to you?'

Instead of answering, the man ducked his head even lower.

But he wouldn't let go of the subject. He told the man how he'd gone to the police about it several years ago but they hadn't taken any notice of him. The cops had received a million tip-offs and he'd only been a boy when it happened, so maybe it was –

'Leave me alone,' the man muttered.

'What?'

'I don't know what you're on about,' the man said angrily. 'Just leave me alone!' Then he got up and stamped out of the bar.

He'd been left sitting there, hardly able to get over the coincidence that it was the same guy. He was still marvelling at the fact when he staggered outside himself a few minutes later and headed for home. By the time he reached Lindargata, the snow was so

impenetrable that he could barely make out the next street light as he hurried across the road, thinking that he would have to inform the police as soon as possible. Just as he was about to reach the other side, his befuddled senses registered that he was in danger. His surroundings were lit up by a sudden dazzling glare, and over the noise of the wind he heard the roar of an engine approaching at speed. The next moment he was flying through the air, an agonising pain in his side, then he crashed down head first onto the pavement that had been swept clear of snow by the storm.

The booming of the engine receded and everything grew quiet again, apart from the screaming of the wind. But the blizzard went on raging all around him, the stinging flakes pelting his exposed flesh and penetrating his jacket. He couldn't move, his whole body was a mass of pain, his head worst of all.

He parted his lips to call for help but couldn't emit a sound.

Time passed but he was no longer aware of it. He couldn't feel the pain any more, or the cold. The alcohol had dulled his senses. His thoughts drifted back to the man in the sports bar, then even further back in time to the hot-water tanks on Öskjuhlíd hill, where he'd loved to play, and the incident he'd witnessed there as a boy.

He was absolutely sure. They'd met once before.

It had been the same man.

There was no doubt in his mind.

3

Konrad opened his eyes at the sound of his mobile phone ringing. He hadn't been able to get to sleep, but that was nothing new. Pills, red wine, rather aimless meditation – nothing made any impression on his insomnia.

He couldn't remember where he'd put his phone. Sometimes it was on the bedside table, sometimes in a trouser pocket. Once he'd lost it for several days, only to find it at last in the boot of his car.

He got out of bed, went into the sitting room, then followed the sound to the kitchen, where the phone was lying vibrating on the table. Outside, the autumn night was pitch-black.

'Sorry, Konrad, I know I've woken you,' whispered a female voice at the other end.

'No, you haven't.'

'I think you should come over to the mortuary.'

‘Why are you whispering?’

‘Am I?’ The woman cleared her throat. Her name was Svanhildur and she was a pathologist at the National Hospital. ‘Haven’t you heard the news?’ she asked.

‘No,’ Konrád said, wide awake now. He had been going through some of his father’s old papers and this time his insomnia could partly be blamed on that.

‘They brought him in at around eight o’clock,’ Svanhildur said. ‘They’ve found him.’

‘Found him? Who? Sorry, who are you talking about?’

‘Some German tourists. On Langjökull. He was in the ice.’

‘On Langjökull?’

‘It’s Sigurvin, Konrád! Sigurvin’s turned up. They’ve found his body.’

‘Sigurvin?’

‘Yes.’

‘Sigurvin! No, it . . . what are you talking about?’

‘After all these years, Konrád. It’s quite incredible. I thought you might want to see him.’

‘Is this some kind of joke?’

‘I know it’s hard to believe but it’s him. Beyond a doubt.’

Konrád was floored. Svanhildur’s words seemed to be coming from a long way off, as though from deep in some bizarre dream that had faded from his consciousness. They were words he’d never expected to hear. Not now. Not after so much time had passed. But, on another level, it felt as if he had always been expecting this phone call. Waiting for this news out of the distant past that continued to haunt him like a shadow. Yet now that the news had finally come, he was utterly thrown.

‘Konrád?’

'I can't believe it,' he said. '*Sigurvin?* They've found Sigurvin?'
He sank into a chair at the kitchen table.

'Yes. It's definitely him.'

'German tourists, you say?'

'On Langjökull. There were some experts on earlier, saying the glacier's shrunk substantially since Sigurvin vanished. Don't you ever listen to the news? It's the greenhouse effect. I thought you might want to see him before everything kicks off tomorrow morning. The ice has preserved him uncannily well.'

Konrád was dazed.

'Konrád?'

'I'm still here.'

'You won't believe how good he looks.'

Konrád pulled on his clothes in a stupor. He threw a glance at the clock on his way out to the car: it was nearly three in the morning. He threaded his way through the empty streets, heading west towards the centre from his home in the suburb of Árbær, on the eastern edge of the city. Svanhildur had been at the National Hospital for more than thirty years. They'd known each other a long while, having worked on various cases together during his time as a detective in CID, and he was grateful to her now for the heads-up. As he drove, he thought about the glacier and Sigurvin and all the long years that had passed since his disappearance. They had dragged harbours, combed beaches, searched ditches, buildings, cars and volcanic fissures, but it had never crossed anyone's mind to scour the country's ice caps. Konrád thought back to all the people the police had interviewed over the course of the inquiry but couldn't remember a single connection to glacier tours.

He turned onto Miklabraut, the city's main artery, without meeting another car. Although he and Erna had moved into the

small terraced house in Árbær in the early 1970s, he had never really felt at home there. He was a city boy who had grown up in the centre, in the old neighbourhood evocatively known as the Shadow District. Erna had been contented with the move, though, and so had their son, who had gone to a decent school in the new suburb and made friends with whom he invented imaginary worlds in the green area between the ski slope on Ártúnsbrekka and the Ellidaár Valley. Konrád, on the other hand, found the place too suburban, complaining that it was so cut off from everywhere else, it felt like being marooned on an island in Greater Reykjavík. He didn't like the convenience-store culture that he used to grumble was the only culture of any kind in the area. Nowhere in the country, he reckoned, did people eat more Lion bars, judging by the wrappers that littered the streets. When Erna got fed up with his moaning, he grudgingly admitted that the natural beauty of the wooded valley between the Ellidaár rivers went a long way towards compensating for the ugly dual carriageway that sliced across the hillside at Ártúnsbrekka, with its infernal fumes and noise.

He parked in front of the mortuary, which was based in an unassuming house in the hospital complex, and locked the car. Svanhildur was waiting for him by the entrance. She opened the door for him and led him inside in silence, her face solemn. She was wearing her lab coat, a white apron, and some sort of head covering made of netting and cardboard that reminded him of a sales assistant in a bakery.

'They carved out a big block of ice around him and transported the whole lot here,' Svanhildur explained, going over to one of the tables.

The block of ice stretching the length of the table was melting fast. Protruding from it was a body so well preserved that the man

could have died that day, were it not for the oddly hard, glazed texture of his white skin. His arms lay by his sides and his chin had sunk down onto his chest. Meltwater had pooled on the floor, where it was trickling into the drain under the table.

‘Will you be doing the post-mortem?’ Konrád asked.

‘Yes,’ Svanhildur replied. ‘I’ve been asked to examine him once the surrounding ice has melted and the body’s thawed out. I won’t be able to open him up until then. I expect his internal organs will be as well preserved as he is on the outside.’ She paused. ‘It must be a strange feeling for you to see him like this.’

‘Did they fetch him down by helicopter?’

‘No, they brought him in by road. They’ve been searching the area where he was found and I gather that’ll continue for the next few days. Has no one from the police been in touch with you?’

‘Not yet. I’m sure they will be tomorrow, though. Thanks for giving me a bell.’

‘He’s your man,’ Svanhildur said. ‘Beyond any doubt.’

‘Yes, it’s Sigurvin. It’s weird seeing him like this after all these years, as if time had stood still.’

‘While we’ve got older,’ Svanhildur remarked, ‘it’s like he’s got younger by the day.’

‘It’s a hell of a thing,’ Konrád said quietly, as if to himself. ‘Have you any idea how he died?’

‘From what I could see as they were bringing him in, it looks like a possible blow to the head,’ Svanhildur said, pointing. The man’s head was largely free of the ice now and if one bent down, it was just possible to see what appeared to be wounds on the back of his skull.

‘Was he killed on the glacier?’

‘Hopefully that’s one of the things we’ll be able to work out.’

‘Was he lying on his back like that when he was found?’

‘Yes.’

‘Isn’t that a bit odd?’

‘Every aspect of this case is odd,’ Svanhildur said. ‘As you should know better than anyone.’

‘He doesn’t seem to be dressed for a glacier trip.’

‘No. What are you intending to do?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Are you going to make yourself available to the investigation team or are you going to stay out of it?’

‘They can take care of it,’ Konrád said. ‘I’ve retired. You should too.’

‘I’d get bored,’ Svanhildur said. She was divorced and said she sometimes dreaded the prospect of having to give up work. ‘How are you, by the way?’

‘Oh, you know. All right. If only I could sleep.’

They stood there in silence, watching the ice dripping from the body.

‘Have you ever heard of the Franklin expedition?’ Svanhildur asked suddenly, apropos of nothing.

‘Franklin . . . ?’

‘In the nineteenth century, the British sent out a lot of unsuccessful expeditions to look for the Northwest Passage through the sea ice north of Canada. The most famous of them was the Franklin expedition. Have you really never heard of it?’

‘No.’

Svanhildur seemed pleased at this chance to relate the story. ‘Franklin was a captain in the British navy,’ she said. ‘He undertook the expedition with two ships but they became trapped in the ice and vanished along with everyone onboard. But, earlier in

the voyage, three crew members had died and the expedition had stopped at an island to bury them in the permafrost before continuing on its way. About thirty years ago the graves of the three men were exhumed, and their bodies turned out to be so well preserved that they were able to provide rare evidence of conditions at sea in the nineteenth century. Analysis of the three men's remains confirmed one of the theories about the main problem affecting long voyages like the Franklin expedition, which often lasted at least two or three years. It was known that sailors on these voyages would often become weak and confused, then lie down and die for no apparent reason. There are countless painstakingly recorded instances of this phenomenon but scholars have disagreed about the reasons for the men's strange lethargy. One of the many theories is that it might have been caused by lead poisoning, and the bodies found in the permafrost supported this. When they were examined, they revealed elevated levels of lead, consistent with the method of preserving food that was pioneered during the nineteenth century: in other words, tinned food.'

Having finished her account, Svanhildur glanced down at the body again.

'It's just one of those fascinating anecdotes from the world of pathology,' she said. 'The ships carried extensive supplies of tinned food that were contaminated by the lead that leached into the contents from the seams round the lids.'

'Why are you telling me all this?' Konrád asked.

'Oh, just because I immediately thought of the Franklin expedition when they brought Sigurvin down from the glacier. He reminded me of the sailors found in the permafrost. It's like he died yesterday.'

Konrád stepped closer to the body and stared down at it for a long while, marvelling at the preservative powers of the ice.

‘Maybe we should start burying people in glaciers,’ Svanhildur said. ‘Move our cemeteries there if we can’t face the idea of worm-eaten corpses.’

‘I thought the glaciers were disappearing?’

‘Yes, sadly,’ Svanhildur said. As if to illustrate her words, a large chunk of ice broke off and fell to the floor, smashing into a thousand pieces.

Konrád drove home through the unrelieved darkness and got back into bed, exhausted, but sleep still refused to have mercy on him. As he lay there, the memory of the inquiry descended on him like a heavy weight. The thought of Sigurvin in the ice was almost more than he could bear. He couldn’t shake off the image of the man’s frozen face.

He shuddered.

He could have sworn that there had been a strange grin playing on Sigurvin’s mouth as he lay there on the mortuary slab. His lips were peeled back like cracked leather to reveal his teeth, as though he were laughing in Konrád’s face as a reminder of Konrád’s miserable failure to solve the mystery of his disappearance all those years ago.

4

Two days later, the phone rang late in the evening. Normally Konrád would have been startled, as he'd largely stopped receiving phone calls at night and early in the morning since retiring. It was the biggest change he'd noticed, apart from the silence. But now the phone wouldn't stop ringing. This time it was a friend who used to work with him in the police. Konrád had been hoping to hear from her.

'He wants to talk to you,' the woman said. Her name was Marta and she was chief inspector at Reykjavík CID.

'He's not going to confess, is he?' Konrád had read online that a man had been arrested following the discovery of the body on the glacier. It didn't surprise him that it should have been Hjaltalín. The whole circus was starting up again. This time, though, Konrád was determined to stay out of it. Reporters had been pestering him for a quote about the discovery but he'd told them he had nothing to say on the subject. He'd left the police: others had taken over the case.

‘He insists it’s you he wants to see,’ Marta said. ‘He won’t talk to us.’

‘You told him I’ve retired?’

‘Hjaltalín knows that. He wants to talk to you anyway.’

‘What’s he saying?’

‘Nothing new: he’s innocent.’

‘He used to own a big four-by-four.’

‘Exactly.’

‘Which would have been capable of driving onto the ice cap.’

‘Yep.’

‘Are you allowing him visitors? Isn’t he in custody?’

‘We’d make an exception in your case,’ Marta said. ‘You’d be working for us in a temporary capacity – as a consultant.’

‘I have absolutely no interest in getting mixed up in this again, Marta. Not now. Could we talk about it later?’

‘We don’t have much time.’

‘No, I realise that.’

‘I’d never have believed Sigurvin would turn up.’

‘Thirty years is a long time.’

‘Don’t you want to see the body?’

‘Already have,’ Konrád said. ‘He looks like he died yesterday.’

‘Ah, of course – Svanhildur’s been in touch with you. So, are you going to see the prisoner?’

‘I’m retired.’

‘All right, no need to go on about it.’

‘I’ll talk to you later.’ Konrád rang off.

The truth was he couldn’t stop thinking about Sigurvin and the visit to Svanhildur at the mortuary, but he was reluctant to reveal his interest to the former colleagues who’d been in touch over the last couple of days. He’d retired, he told them, and had no

intention of going back, under any circumstances. Over thirty years had passed since they'd begun searching for Sigurvin. Since then Konrád had lost count of the people they'd interviewed, but no one had ever been charged. The investigation had quickly become focused on a man called Hjaltalín, but they'd never managed to prove anything against him. Hjaltalín had consistently denied ever having laid a finger on Sigurvin, and in the end they'd been forced to release him due to lack of evidence. The body had never been found: Sigurvin had simply vanished off the face of the earth.

And now he was lying in the mortuary, looking almost as if he'd only been gone a few days. Svanhildur hadn't been exaggerating when she'd said his body was uncannily well preserved. Although they hadn't embarked on the full post-mortem yet, a few facts had been established. Sigurvin was wearing the same clothes as he had been when he met his fate: trainers, jeans, shirt and jacket. The cause of death appeared to have been a heavy blow to the head with a blunt instrument. The skin had been broken and blood had been found on the back of his skull and on his clothes.

Konrád thought about all the years that had passed since the man died. He had sometimes imagined what the moment would be like; how he'd feel if Sigurvin ever turned up. Although he had long ago stopped searching, he'd never managed to put the case entirely behind him, and the suspicion that one day the phone would ring with the news that the missing man had been found had always been there, lurking just below the surface. Yet, ironically, when the news finally came, he'd found it almost impossible to process. Sigurvin's fate had been a mystery for decades. They hadn't even been sure he was dead, let alone had any idea how

he'd died. Now they knew both the cause and the fact he had died at the time he went missing. They had never known exactly what he had been wearing when he vanished but now they could see for themselves. His body would provide those in charge of the inquiry with a variety of important new details, including a rough idea of the murder weapon. Those vital missing pieces were finally falling into place.

Konrad sat down at the kitchen table with a glass of red wine and lit a cigarillo. He sometimes smoked them when he felt a craving for nicotine, but apart from that he wasn't a big smoker. The phone rang again. This time it was his sister, Elisabet. She asked how he was doing.

'Fine,' he said, sucking down smoke. 'The phone hasn't stopped ringing.'

'I hear that bloody case is blowing up again,' said Elisabet, who was known to all as Beta. Like everyone else, she had been gripped by the news reports about the body.

'Apparently Hjaltalin's trying to drag me into it,' Konrad said. 'They've taken him into custody and he wants to see me. They've told him I'm retired but he won't take no for an answer.'

'Does anyone ever retire from a case like that?'

'That's a question I've been asking myself.'

'Aren't you curious to hear what he's got to say?'

'I know exactly what he'll say, Beta. He'll say he's innocent. The fact the body's turned up won't change a thing. We had nothing on him thirty years ago and we won't find anything now, "because he's innocent". That's what he'll say. I've no idea why he wants to repeat it for my benefit.'

Beta was silent. They hadn't been close when they were young, having been brought up in separate households following their

parents' divorce, but they'd been trying to make up for it ever since, each in their own way, though it wasn't always easy.

'You weren't entirely convinced he'd done it at the time,' she said after a moment.

'No, unlike the rest of them. But he was always our most likely candidate.'

It was common knowledge that Hjaltalín had been the only serious suspect for Sigurvin's murder in 1985 and that, despite a spell in custody, he'd never confessed. The police had failed to prove beyond all doubt that he'd been involved in Sigurvin's disappearance. Yet he was the last person to have been seen with him, and the two men had reportedly quarrelled bitterly just before Sigurvin vanished. Hjaltalín was also known to have threatened him.

'Have they asked for your help with the investigation?' Beta asked.

'No.'

'But they want you to see Hjaltalín?'

'They think he might tell me something he won't tell them. He's refusing to talk to them.'

'Thirty years is a long time.'

'He did a good job of hiding Sigurvin. The reason he got away with it was because we never found the body. The question is whether he'll get away with it so easily this time round.'

'But you had nothing on him.'

'We had various things on him, just not enough. In the end, the prosecutor didn't feel he had a good enough case to take before a judge.'

'Don't let yourself get drawn in again. You've left the police.'

'Yes, I've left.'

'Talk to you later.'

‘OK, bye.’

The discovery was all over the media but Konrád had got the inside story from Svanhildur. Ever since the body was recovered from the ice, four members of Forensics had been stationed on the glacier, conducting a search of the area. Police officers from the little west coast town of Borgarnes had been first on the scene after the German tour group had rung the emergency number. The local volunteer search and rescue team had also been called out, and this had alerted the press to the fact that something was up. The police officers from Borgarnes had made their way onto the ice, despite being inadequately equipped, and had confirmed that the body was that of a man, aged around thirty, who had evidently been there a long time. They had been ordered by their superior not to touch anything, and to keep the tourists well away. At this point, Forensics in Reykjavík had been notified. By then, the Borgarnes rescue team had reached the edge of the glacier in their specially equipped vehicles. They conveyed the Germans down to the hotel at Húsafell, along with their guide, a woman in her early sixties called Adalheidur, who had found the body. That evening, the group had travelled back to Reykjavík. Detectives from CID had questioned the woman closely and spoken to the Germans with her help. An older man, who informed them that he was a doctor, explained that he’d brushed some snow from the man’s face but that otherwise they’d been careful not to touch anything.

In order to minimise disturbance of the evidence, a block of ice weighing almost two hundred kilos had been carved out around the body, then freed and hoisted onto the rescue team’s ice truck. A forensic technician had accompanied the chunk of glacier to Reykjavík, keeping a close eye on anything it produced as it

melted. Later that evening, most of the police and rescue team members had gone down to Húsafell where they had spent the night, leaving four officers behind on the glacier to prevent any unauthorised individuals from approaching the site.

One of the country's top glaciologists, interviewed on the radio in connection with the discovery, was quick to point out that since 1985, when Sigurvin's body had been hidden on the glacier, the ice cap had shrunk by more than seven cubic kilometres. It was now around six hundred metres thick, but experts calculated that during the next quarter of a century the glacier would shrink by almost 20 per cent as a result of global warming.

'And some people are still sceptical about manmade climate change!' Konrád had heard the glaciologist saying in a tone of exasperation on the radio that morning.

'Would the body have been laid on top of the ice or buried somehow?' the radio host had asked.

'Hard to say. It's possible he was dropped into a crevasse. He went missing in February, when freezing temperatures would have made it extremely difficult to dig into the ice. But he would have been covered with snow quickly enough. Another possibility is that a crevasse subsequently opened and swallowed him up, and he remained there until his recent reappearance.'

'Did the ice just melt to reveal him, then?'

'Of course, that will require further analysis, but it sounds plausible. It would be the simplest explanation for why he's turned up now.'

Yet again Konrád's mobile phone shattered the silence of his house in Árbær. This time it was Svanhildur, wanting to know what he was planning to do. She'd heard that Hjaltalín was asking to see him.

‘I don’t know,’ Konrád said. ‘Maybe it wouldn’t hurt to talk to him – to hear what he’s got to say.’

‘Oh, come on! You must be dying of curiosity. This is Sigurvin we’re talking about! Surely that must spark your interest?’

‘Hjaltalín wasn’t even thirty when we arrested him,’ Konrád remarked.

‘I remember it well.’

‘He must be pushing sixty now. I haven’t seen him for donkey’s years.’

‘Do you think he’ll have changed much?’

‘I think he’ll be the same idiot.’

‘You two weren’t exactly best mates.’

‘No,’ said Konrád. ‘Though he seemed to think we were. I don’t know what he wants to talk to me about. The fact is, I wouldn’t trust Hjaltalín as far as I could throw him. He wouldn’t be in custody now if they hadn’t thought he was trying to make a run for it. He was on the point of leaving the country when they arrested him. That was the day after Sigurvin was identified. He claimed it was a complete coincidence.’

‘Are you sleeping any better these days?’

‘Not much.’

‘You know you can always call me if there’s something bothering you,’ Svanhildur said. ‘If you want to chat.’

‘Yes, but I’m fine,’ Konrád said brusquely.

‘All right.’ Svanhildur was about to ring off, then added, as if she couldn’t help herself: ‘You never get in touch any more.’

‘No, I . . .’ Konrád didn’t know what to say.

‘Just call if . . .’

He didn’t respond and they ended the call. He took a sip of wine and lit another cigarillo. He and Erna had sometimes talked

about downsizing and moving away from Árbær. Not to some block of flats for pensioners but to a cosy little place near the city centre. Though not in Thingholt or any of those old streets east of the lake, Erna had said, as there were too many party animals living there nowadays. To the west end, rather. Nothing had come of it, though. He remembered how often they had discussed the Sigurvin case at this kitchen table, and how she had always been there for him, whatever happened.

The table in the sitting room was covered with old papers of his father's that Konrád had been looking through the evening Svanhildur had rung with the news about Sigurvin. They'd been in a cardboard box in the basement and he hadn't given them so much as a glance in decades. It had been getting mixed up in an old case from the Second World War, involving fraudulent spiritualists, that had resurrected his long-buried interest in his father's fate. He had been discovered one evening in 1963, lying fatally stabbed in front of the South Iceland Abattoir on Skúlagata. Despite an extensive investigation, the murder had never been solved. Konrád had banished the incident from his mind during all the long years he had worked as a detective. His father had been a troublesome, vindictive man, who had made enemies on every side. He had done stints behind bars for smuggling, theft and fraud. And that wasn't the half of it. He had also conspired with at least one, if not more, fake mediums during the war. Konrád's mother had eventually fled their home, taking Beta with her, but her husband had refused to let her take their son, who had remained behind, growing up with his father in the Shadow District.

Konrád leafed through the yellowing papers. His interest had been piqued by a handful of newspaper cuttings on spiritualism and the paranormal that his father had kept. Among them was an

article about conmen, and an interview with an Icelandic psychic in a long-defunct weekly newspaper. Another cutting was from a publication by the Society for Psychical Research, discussing the afterlife and 'the Ether World'. The articles dated from about two years before Konrád's father had been stabbed outside the abattoir. They had led Konrád to wonder if, in the final months of his life, his father could have returned to his old bad habits of swindling money out of people through fake seances.