

ALSO BY JO NESBØ

*The Devil's Star*

*Nemesis*

*The Redbreast*

# The Snowman



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ALFRED A. KNOPF NEW YORK 2011

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Part One

# I

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1980

## The Snowman

It was the day the snow came. At eleven o'clock in the morning, large flakes had appeared from a colorless sky and invaded the fields, gardens and lawns of Romerike like an armada from outer space. At two, the snowplows were in action in Lillestrøm, and when, at half past two, Sara Kvinesland slowly and carefully steered her Toyota Corolla SR5 between the detached houses on Kolloveien, the November snow was lying like a down duvet over the rolling countryside.

She was thinking that the houses looked different in daylight. So different that she almost passed his driveway. The car skidded as she applied the brakes, and she heard a groan from the backseat. In the rearview mirror she saw her son's disgruntled face.

"It won't take long, my love," she said.

In front of the garage there was a large patch of black pavement amid all the white, and she realized that the moving van had been there. Her throat constricted. She hoped she wasn't too late.

"Who lives here?" came from the backseat.

"Just someone I know," Sara said, automatically checking her hair in the mirror. "Ten minutes, my love. I'll leave the key in the ignition so you can listen to the radio."

She went without waiting for a response, slithered in her slippery shoes up to the door she had been through so many times, but never like this, not in the middle of the day, in full view of all the neighbors' prying eyes. Not that late-night visits would seem any more innocent, but for some reason acts of this kind felt more appropriate when performed after the fall of darkness.

She heard the buzz of the doorbell inside, like a bumblebee in a jam jar. Feeling her desperation mount, she glanced at the windows of the neighboring houses. They gave nothing away, just returned reflections

of bare black apple trees, gray sky and milky-white terrain. Then, at last, she heard footsteps behind the door and heaved a sigh of relief. The next moment she was inside and in his arms.

“Don’t go, darling,” she said, hearing the sob already straining at her vocal cords.

“I have to,” he said in a monotone that suggested a refrain he had tired of long ago. His hands sought familiar paths, of which they never tired.

“No, you don’t,” she whispered into his ear. “But you want to. You don’t dare any longer.”

“This has nothing to do with you and me.”

She could hear the irritation creeping into his voice at the same time as his hand, the strong but gentle hand, slid down over her spine and inside the waistband of her skirt and tights. They were like a pair of practiced dancers who knew their partner’s every move, step, breath, rhythm. First, the white lovemaking. The good one. Then the black one. The pain.

His hand caressed her coat, searching for her nipple under the thick material. He was eternally fascinated by her nipples; he always returned to them. Perhaps it was because he didn’t have any himself.

“Did you park in front of the garage?” he asked with a firm tweak.

She nodded and felt the pain shoot into her head like a dart of pleasure. Her sex had already opened for him. “My son’s waiting in the car.”

His hand came to an abrupt halt.

“He knows nothing,” she groaned, sensing his hand falter.

“And your husband? Where’s he now?”

“Where do you think? At work, of course.”

Now it was she who sounded irritated. Both because he had brought her husband into the conversation and it was difficult for her to say anything at all about him without getting irritated, and because her body needed him, quickly. Sara Kvinesland opened his fly.

“Don’t . . . ,” he began, grabbing her around the wrist. She slapped him hard with her other hand. He looked at her in amazement as a red flush spread across his cheek. She smiled, grabbed his thick black hair and pulled his face down to hers.

“You can go,” she hissed. “But first you have to fuck me. Is that understood?”

She felt his breath against her face. It was coming in hefty gasps now. Again she slapped him with her free hand, and his dick was growing in her other.

He thrust, a bit harder each time, but it was over now. She was numb, the magic was gone, the tension had dissolved and all that was left was despair. She was losing him. Now, as she lay there, she had lost him. All the years she had yearned, all the tears she had cried, the desperate things he had made her do. Without giving anything back. Except for one thing.

He was standing at the foot of the bed and taking her with closed eyes. Sara stared at his chest. At first she had thought it strange, but after a while she had begun to like the sight of unbroken white skin over his pectoral muscles. It reminded her of old statues on which the nipples had been omitted out of consideration for public modesty.

His groans were getting louder. She knew that soon he would let out a furious roar. She had loved that roar. The ever-surprised, ecstatic, almost pained expression as though the orgasm surpassed his wildest expectation each and every time. Now she was waiting for the final roar, a bellowing farewell to this freezing box of a bedroom, divested of pictures, curtains and carpets. Then he would get dressed and travel to a different part of the country, where he said he had been offered a job he couldn't say no to. But he could say no to this. This. And still he would roar with pleasure.

She closed her eyes. But the roar didn't come. He had stopped.

"What's up?" she asked, opening her eyes. His features were distorted, all right. But not with pleasure.

"A face," he whispered.

She flinched. "Where?"

"Outside the window."

The window was at the other end of the bed, right above her head. She heaved herself around, felt him slip out, already limp. The window above her head was set too high in the wall for her to see out. And too high for anyone standing outside to peer in. Because of the already dwindling daylight all she could see was the double-exposed reflection of the ceiling lamp.

"You saw yourself," she said, almost pleading.

"That was what I thought at first," he said, still staring at the window.

Sara pulled herself up onto her knees. Got up and looked into the yard. And there, there was the face.

She laughed out loud with relief. The face was white, with eyes and a mouth made with black pebbles, probably from the driveway. And arms made of twigs from the apple trees.

“Heavens,” she gasped. “It’s only a snowman.”

Then her laugh turned into tears; she sobbed helplessly until she felt his arms around her.

“I have to go now,” she sobbed.

“Stay for a little while longer,” he said.

She stayed for a little while longer.

As Sara approached the garage she saw that almost forty minutes had passed.

He had promised to call her now and then. He had always been a good liar, and for once she was glad. Even before she got to the car she saw her son’s pale face staring at her from the backseat. She pulled at the door and found to her astonishment that it was locked. She peered in at him through steamed-up windows. He opened it only when she knocked on the glass.

She sat in the driver’s seat. The radio was silent and it was ice-cold inside. The key was on the passenger seat. She turned to him. Her son was pale, and his lower lip was trembling.

“Is there anything wrong?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “I saw him.”

There was a thin, shrill tone of horror in his voice that she couldn’t recall hearing since he was a little boy jammed between them on the sofa in front of the TV with his hands over his eyes. And now his voice was changing, he had stopped giving her a good-night hug and had started being interested in car engines and girls. And one day he would get in a car with one of them and also leave her.

“What do you mean?” she said, inserting the key in the ignition and turning.

“The snowman . . .”

There was no response from the engine and panic gripped her without warning. Quite what she was afraid of she didn’t know. She stared out the windshield and turned the key again. Had the battery died?

“And what did the snowman look like?” she asked, pressing the accelerator to the floor and desperately turning the key so hard it felt as though she would break it. He answered, but the response was drowned by the roar of the engine.

Sara put the car in gear and let go of the clutch as if in a sudden hurry to get away. The wheels spun in the soft, slushy snow. She accelerated harder, but the rear of the car slid sideways. By then the tires

had spun their way down to the pavement and they lurched forward and skidded into the road.

“Dad’s waiting for us,” she said. “We’ll have to get a move on.”

She switched on the radio and turned up the volume to fill the cold interior with sounds other than her own voice. A broadcaster said for the hundredth time today that last night Ronald Reagan had beaten Jimmy Carter in the American election.

The boy said something again, and she glanced in the mirror.

“What did you say?” she said in a loud voice.

He repeated it, but still she couldn’t hear. She turned down the radio while heading toward the main road and the river, which ran through the countryside like two mournful black stripes. And gave a start when she realized he had leaned forward between the two front seats. His voice sounded like a dry whisper in her ear. As if it were important no one else heard them.

“We’re going to die.”

## Pebble-Eyes

Harry Hole gave a start and opened his eyes wide. It was freezing cold, and from the dark came the sound of the voice that had awoken him. It announced that the American people would decide today whether their president for the next four years would again be George Walker Bush. November. Harry was thinking they were definitely heading for dark times. He threw off the duvet and placed his feet on the floor. The linoleum was so cold it stung. He left the news blaring from the clock radio and went into the bathroom. Regarded himself in the mirror. November there, too: drawn, grayish pale and overcast. As usual, his eyes were bloodshot, and the pores on his nose large black craters. The bags under his eyes, with their light-blue alcohol-washed irises, would disappear after his face had been ministered to with hot water, a towel and breakfast. He assumed they would, that is. Harry was not sure exactly how his face would fare during the day now that he had turned forty. Whether the wrinkles would be ironed out and peace would fall over the hunted expression he woke with after nights of being ridden by nightmares. Which was most nights. For he avoided mirrors after he left his small, spartan apartment on Sofies Gate and transformed into Inspector Hole of the Crime Squad at the Oslo Police HQ. Then he stared into others' faces to find their pain, their Achilles' heels, their nightmares, motives and reasons for self-deception, listening to their fatiguing lies and trying to find a meaning in what he did: imprisoning people who were already imprisoned inside themselves. Prisons of hatred and self-contempt he recognized all too well. He ran a hand over the shorn bristles of blond hair that grew precisely seventy-five inches above the frozen soles of his feet. His collarbone stood out under his skin like a clothes hanger. He had trained a lot since the last case. In a frenzy, some maintained. As well as cycling he had started to lift weights in the fitness room in the bowels of the Police HQ.

He liked the burning pain, and the repressed thoughts. Nevertheless, he just became leaner. The fat disappeared and his muscles were layered between skin and bone. And while before he had been broad-shouldered and what Rakel called a natural athlete, now he had begun to resemble the photograph he had once seen of a skinned polar bear: a muscular but shockingly gaunt predator. Quite simply, he was fading away. Not that it actually mattered. Harry sighed. November. It was going to get even darker.

He went into the kitchen, drank a glass of water to relieve his headache and peered through the window in surprise. The roof of the building on the other side of Sofies Gate was white and the bright reflected light made his eyes smart. The first snow had come in the night. He thought of the letter. He did occasionally get such letters, but this one had been special. It had mentioned Toowoomba.

On the radio a nature program had started and an enthusiastic voice was waxing lyrical about seals. "Every summer Berhaus seals collect in the Bering Strait to mate. Since the males are in the majority, the competition for females is so fierce that those males that have managed to procure themselves a female will stick with her during the whole of the breeding period. The male will take care of his partner until the young have been born and can cope by themselves. Not out of love for the female, but out of love for his own genes and hereditary material. Darwinist theory would say that it is natural selection that makes the Berhaus seal monogamous, not morality."

I wonder, thought Harry.

The voice on the radio was almost turning falsetto with excitement. "But before the seals leave the Bering Strait to search for food in the open sea, the male will try to kill the female. Why? Because a female Berhaus seal will never mate twice with the same male! For her this is about spreading the biological risk of hereditary material, just like on the stock market. For her it makes biological sense to be promiscuous, and the male knows this. By taking her life he wants to stop the young of other seals competing with his own progeny for the same food."

"We're entering Darwinian waters here, so why don't humans think like the seal?" another voice said.

"But we do, don't we! Our society is not as monogamous as it appears, and never has been. A Swedish study showed recently that between fifteen and twenty percent of all children born have a different father from the one they—and for that matter the postulated fathers—think. Twenty percent! That's every fifth child! Living a lie. And ensuring biological diversity."

Harry fiddled with the radio dial to find some tolerable music. He stopped at an aging Johnny Cash's version of "Desperado."

There was a firm knock on the door.

Harry went into the bedroom, put on his jeans, returned to the hall and opened up.

"Harry Hole?" The man outside was wearing blue overalls and looking at Harry through thick lenses. His eyes were as clear as a child's.

Harry nodded.

"Have you got fungus?" The man asked the question with a straight face. A long wisp of hair traversed his forehead and was stuck there. Under his arm he was holding a plastic clipboard with a densely printed sheet.

Harry waited for him to explain further, but nothing was forthcoming. Just this clear, open expression.

"That," Harry said, "strictly speaking, is a private matter."

The man gave the suggestion of a smile in response to a joke he was heartily sick of hearing. "Fungus in your apartment. Mold."

"I have no reason to believe that I do," said Harry.

"That's the thing about mold. It seldom gives anyone any reason to believe that it's there." The man sucked at his teeth and rocked on his heels.

"But?" Harry said at length.

"But it is."

"What makes you think that?"

"Your neighbor's got it."

"Uh-huh? And you think it may have spread?"

"Mold doesn't spread. Dry rot does."

"So then . . . ?"

"There's a construction fault with the ventilation along the walls in this building. It allows dry rot to flourish. May I take a peep at your kitchen?"

Harry stepped to the side. The man powered into the kitchen, where at once he pressed an orange hair-dryer-like apparatus against the wall. It squeaked twice.

"Damp detector," the man said, studying something that was obviously an indicator. "Just as I thought. Sure you haven't seen or smelled anything suspicious?"

Harry didn't have a clear perception of what that might be.

"A coating like on stale bread," the man said. "Moldy smell."

Harry shook his head.

“Have you had sore eyes?” the man asked. “Felt tired? Had headaches?”

Harry shrugged. “Of course. For as long as I can remember.”

“Do you mean for as long as you’ve lived here?”

“Maybe. Listen . . .”

But the man wasn’t listening; he’d taken a knife from his belt. Harry stood back and watched the hand holding the knife being raised and thrust with great force. There was a sound like a groan as the knife went through the plasterboard behind the wallpaper. The man pulled out the knife, thrust it in again and bent back a powdery piece of plaster, leaving a large gap in the wall. Then he whipped out a small penlight and shone it into the cavity. A deep frown developed behind his oversize glasses. Then he stuck his nose deep into the cavity and sniffed.

“Right,” he said. “Hello there, boys.”

“Hello there who?” Harry asked, edging closer.

“*Aspergillus*,” said the man. “A genus of mold. We have three or four hundred types to choose among and it’s difficult to say which one this is because the growth on these hard surfaces is so thin it’s invisible. But there’s no mistaking the smell.”

“That means trouble, right?” Harry asked, trying to remember how much he had left in his bank account after he and his father had sponsored a trip to Spain for Sis, his little sister, who had what she referred to as “a touch of Down syndrome.”

“It’s not like real dry rot. The building won’t collapse,” the man said. “But you might.”

“Me?”

“If you’re prone to it. Some people get ill from breathing the same air as the mold. They’re ailing for years, and of course they get accused of being hypochondriacs since no one can find anything and the other residents are fine. And then the pest eats up the wallpaper and the plasterboard.”

“Mm. What do you suggest?”

“That I eradicate the infection, of course.”

“And my personal finances while you’re at it?”

“Covered by the building’s insurance, so it won’t cost you a krone. All I need is access to the apartment for the next few days.”

Harry found the spare set of keys in the kitchen drawer and passed them to him.

“It’ll just be me,” the man said. “I should mention that in passing. Lots of strange things going on out there.”

“Are there?” Harry smiled sadly, staring out of the window.

“Eh?”

“Nothing,” Harry said. “There’s nothing to steal here anyway. I’ll be off now.”

The low morning sun sparkled off all the glass on the Oslo Police HQ, standing there as it had for the last thirty years, on the summit of the ridge by the main street, Grønlandsleiret. Although this had not been exactly intentional, the HQ was near the high-crime areas in east Oslo, and the prison, located on the site of the old brewery, was its closest neighbor. The police station was surrounded by a brown withering lawn and maple and linden trees that had been covered with a thin layer of gray-white snow during the night, making the park look like a deceased’s shrouded chattels.

Harry walked up the black strip of pavement to the main entrance and entered the central hall, where Kari Christensen’s porcelain wall decoration with running water whispered its eternal secrets. He nodded to the security guard in reception and went up to the Crime Squad on the sixth floor. Although it had been almost six months since he had been given his new office in the red zone, he still often mistakenly went to the cramped, windowless one he had shared with Officer Jack Halvorsen. Now Magnus Skarre was in there. And Jack Halvorsen had been interred in the ground of Vestre Aker cemetery. At first the parents had wanted their son to be buried in their hometown, Steinkjer, as Jack and Beate Lønn, the head of Krimteknisk, the Forensics Unit, had not been married; they hadn’t even been living together. But when they found out that Beate was pregnant and Jack’s baby would be born in the summer, Jack’s parents agreed that Jack’s grave should be in Oslo.

Harry entered his new office. Which he knew would be known as that forever, the way the fifty-year-old home ground of the Barcelona football club was still called Camp Nou, Catalan for “New Stadium.” He dropped into his chair, switched on the radio and nodded good morning to the photos perched on the bookcase and propped against the wall. One day in an uncertain future, if he remembered to buy picture hooks, they would hang on the wall. Ellen Gjelten and Jack Halvorsen and Bjarne Møller. There they stood in chronological order. The Dead Policemen’s Society.

On the radio Norwegian politicians and social scientists were giving their views on the American presidential election. Harry recog-

nized the voice of Arve Støp, the owner of the successful magazine *Liberal* and famous for being one of the most knowledgeable, arrogant and entertaining pundits in the country. Harry turned up the volume until the voices bounced off the brick walls, and grabbed his Peerless handcuffs from the new desk. He practiced speed-cuffing the table leg, which was already splintered as a result of this new bad habit of his. He had picked it up in the FBI course in Chicago and perfected it during lonely evenings in a lousy apartment in Cabrini-Green, surrounded by arguing neighbors and in the company of Jim Beam. The aim was to bang the cuffs against the arrestee's wrist in such a way that the spring-loaded arm closed around the wrist and the lock clicked on the other side. With the right amount of force and accuracy you could cuff yourself to an arrestee in one simple movement before he had a chance to react. Harry had never had any use for this on the job and only once for the other thing he had learned over there: how to catch a serial killer. The cuffs clicked around the table leg and the radio voices droned on.

"Why do you think Norwegians are so skeptical about George Bush, Arve Støp?"

"Because we're an overprotected nation that has never fought in any wars. We've been happy to let others do it for us: England, the Soviet Union and America. Yes, ever since the Napoleonic Wars we've hidden behind the backs of our older brothers. Norway has based its security on others taking the responsibility when things got tough. That's been going on for so long that we've lost our sense of reality and we believe that the earth is basically populated by people who wish us—the world's richest country—well. Norway, a gibbering, pea-brained blonde who gets lost in an alley in the Bronx and is now indignant that her bodyguard is so brutal with muggers."

Harry dialed Rakel's number. Aside from Sis's, Rakel's telephone number was the only one he knew by heart. When he was young and inexperienced, he thought that a bad memory was a handicap for a detective. Now he knew better.

"And the bodyguard is Bush and the U.S.A.?" the host asked.

"Yes. Lyndon B. Johnson once said that the U.S. hadn't chosen this role, but he had realized there was no one else, and he was right. Our bodyguard is a born-again Christian with a father complex, a drinking problem, intellectual limitations and not enough backbone to do his military service with honor. In short, a guy we should be pleased is going to be re-elected president today."

"I assume you mean that ironically?"

"Not at all. Such a weak president listens to his advisers, and the

White House has the best, believe you me. Even though from that laughable TV series about the Oval Office one may have formed the impression that the Democrats have a monopoly on intelligence, it is on the extreme right wing of the Republicans, surprisingly enough, that you find the sharpest minds. Norway's security is in the best possible hands."

"A girlfriend of a girlfriend has had sex with you."

"Really?" said Harry.

"Not you," Rakel said. "I'm talking to the other guy. Støp."

"Sorry," Harry said, turning down the radio.

"After a lecture in Trondheim. He invited her up to his room. She was interested, but drew his attention to the fact that she'd had a mastectomy. He said he would give that some thought and went to the bar. And came back and took her with him."

"Mm. I hope expectations were fulfilled."

"Nothing fulfills expectations."

"No," Harry said, wondering what they were talking about.

"What's happening this evening?" Rakel asked.

"Palace Grill at eight is fine. But what's all this garbage about not being able to reserve tables in advance?"

"It gives the whole place cachet, I suppose."

They arranged to meet in the bar area first. After they had hung up, Harry sat thinking. She had sounded pleased. Or bright. Bright and cheery. He tried to sense if he had succeeded in being pleased on her behalf, pleased that the woman he had loved so much was happy with another man. Rakel and he had had their time, and he had been given chances. Which he wasted. So why not be pleased that she was well, why not let the thought that things could have been different go, and move on with his life? He promised to try a bit harder.

The morning meeting was soon over. As head of the Crime Squad, Politioverbetjent—POB for short—Gunnar Hagen ran through the cases they were working on. Which were not many, as for the time being there weren't any fresh murder cases under investigation, and murder was the only thing that got the unit's pulse racing. Thomas Helle, an officer from the Missing Persons Unit of the uniformed police, was present and gave a report on a woman who had been missing from her home for a year. Not a trace of violence, not a trace of the perpetrator and not a trace of her. She was a housewife and had last been seen at the day-care center where she had left her son and daugh-

ter in the morning. Her husband and everyone in her closer circle of acquaintances had an alibi and had been cleared. They agreed that the Crime Squad should investigate further.

Magnus Skarre passed on regards from Ståle Aune—the Crime Squad’s resident psychologist—whom he had visited at Ullevål University Hospital. Harry felt a pang of conscience. Ståle Aune was not just his adviser on criminal cases; he was his personal supporter in his fight against alcohol and the closest thing he had to a confidant. It had been more than a week since Aune had been admitted with some vague diagnosis, but Harry had still not overcome his reluctance to enter hospitals. Tomorrow, Harry thought. Or Thursday.

“We have a new officer,” Gunnar Hagen announced. “Katrine Bratt.”

A young woman in the first row stood up unbidden, but without offering a smile. She was very attractive. Attractive without trying, thought Harry. Thin, almost wispy hair hung lifelessly down both sides of her face, which was finely chiseled and pale and wore the same serious, weary features Harry had seen on other stunning women who had become so used to being observed that they had stopped liking or disliking it. Katrine Bratt was dressed in a blue suit that underlined her femininity, but the thick black tights below the hem of her skirt and her practical winter boots invalidated any possible suspicions that she was playing on it. She let her eyes run over the gathering, as if she had risen to see them and not vice versa. Harry guessed that she had planned both the suit and this little first-day appearance at the Police HQ.

“Katrine worked for four years at the Bergen Police HQ, dealing mainly with public-decency offenses, but she also did a stint at the Crime Squad,” Hagen continued, looking down at a sheet of paper Harry presumed was her CV. “Law degree from University of Bergen 1999, the police academy and now she’s an officer here. For the moment no children, but she’s married.”

One of Katrine Bratt’s thin eyebrows rose imperceptibly, and either Hagen saw this or he thought this last scrap of information was superfluous, because he added, “For those who may be interested . . .”

In the oppressive and telling pause that followed, Hagen seemed to think he had made matters worse; he coughed twice with force and said that those who had not yet signed up for the Christmas party should do so before Wednesday.

Chairs scraped and Harry was already in the corridor when he heard a voice behind him.

“Apparently I belong to you.”

Harry turned and looked into Katrine Bratt’s face. Wondering how attractive she would be if she made an effort.

“Or you to me,” she said, showing a line of even teeth but without letting the smile reach her eyes. “Whichever way you look at it.” She spoke Bergen-flavored standard Norwegian with moderately rolled *r*’s, which suggested, Harry wagered, that she was from Fana or Kalfaret or some other solidly middle-class district.

He continued on his way, and she hurried to catch up with him. “Seems the Politioverbetjent forgot to inform you.”

She pronounced the word with a slightly exaggerated stress on all the syllables.

“But you should show me around and take care of me for the next few days. Until I’m up and running. Can you do that, do you think?”

Harry eased off a smile. So far he liked her, but of course he was open to changing his opinion. Harry was always willing to give people another chance to wind up on his blacklist.

“I don’t know,” he said, stopping by the coffee dispenser. “Let’s start with this.”

“I don’t drink coffee.”

“Nevertheless. It’s self-explanatory. Like most things here. What are your thoughts on the case of the missing woman?”

Harry pressed the button for Americano, which, in this machine, was as American as Norwegian ferry coffee.

“What about it?” Bratt asked.

“Do you think she’s alive?” Harry tried to ask in a casual manner so that she wouldn’t realize it was a test.

“Do you think I’m stupid?” she said and watched with undisguised revulsion as the machine coughed and spluttered something black into a white plastic cup. “Didn’t you hear the Politioverbetjent say that I worked at the Sexual Offenses Unit for four years?”

“Mm,” Harry said. “Dead, then?”

“As a dodo,” said Katrine Bratt.

Harry lifted the white cup. He pondered the possibility that he had just been allocated a colleague he might come to appreciate.

Walking home in the afternoon, Harry saw that the snow was gone from the streets, and the light, flimsy flakes whirling through the air were eaten up by the wet sidewalk as soon as they hit the ground. He

went into his regular music shop on Akersgata and bought Neil Young's latest even though he had a suspicion it was a stinker.

As he unlocked his apartment he noticed that something was different. Something about the sound. Or perhaps it was the smell. He pulled up sharp at the threshold to the kitchen. The whole of one wall was gone. That is, where early this morning there had been bright flowery wallpaper and plasterboard, he now saw rust-red bricks, gray mortar and grayish-yellow studwork dotted with nail holes. On the floor was the mold man's toolbox and on the countertop a note saying he would be back the following day.

He went into the sitting room and slipped in the Neil Young CD, then glumly took it out again after a quarter of an hour and put on Ryan Adams. The thought of a drink came from nowhere. Harry closed his eyes and stared at the dancing pattern of blood and total blindness. He was reminded of the letter again. The first snow. Toowoomba.

The ringing of the telephone interrupted Ryan Adams's "Shakedown on 9th Street."

A woman introduced herself as Oda, said she was calling from *Bosse* and it was nice to talk to him again. Harry couldn't remember her, but he did remember the TV program. They had wanted him to talk about serial killers, because he was the only Norwegian police officer to have studied with the FBI, and furthermore he had hunted down a genuine serial killer. Harry had been stupid enough to agree. He had told himself he was doing it to say something important and moderately qualified about people who kill, not so that he could be seen on the nation's most popular talk show. In retrospect, he was not so sure about that. But that wasn't the worst aspect. The worst was that he'd had a drink before going on the air. Harry was convinced that it had been only one. But on the program it looked as if it had been five. He had spoken with clear diction; he always did. But his eyes had been glazed and his analysis sluggish, and he hadn't managed to draw any conclusions, so the show host had been forced to introduce a guest who was the new European flower-arranging champion. Harry had not said anything, but his body language had clearly shown what he thought about the flower debate. When the host, with a surreptitious smile, had asked how a murder investigator related to flower arranging, Harry had said that wreaths at Norwegian burials certainly maintained high international standards. Perhaps it had been Harry's slightly befuddled, nonchalant style that had drawn laughter from the studio audience and contented

pats on the back from the TV people after the program. He had “delivered the goods,” they said. And he had joined a small group of them at Kunstnernes Hus, had been indulged and had woken up the next day with a body that screamed, demanded, it had to have more. It was a Friday and he had continued to drink all weekend. He had sat at Schrøder’s and shouted for beer as they were flashing the lights to encourage customers to leave, and Rita, the waitress, had gone over to Harry and told him that he would be refused admission in the future unless he went now, preferably to bed. On Monday morning Harry had turned up for work at eight on the dot. He had contributed nothing useful to the department, thrown up in the sink after the morning meeting, clung to his office chair, drunk coffee, smoked and thrown up again, but this time in the toilet. And that was the last time he had succumbed; he hadn’t touched a drop of alcohol since.

And now they wanted him back on the air.

The woman explained that the topic was terrorism in Arab countries and what turned well-educated middle-class people into killing machines. Harry interrupted her before she was finished.

“No.”

“But we would so much like to have you. You are so . . . so . . . rock ‘n’ roll!” She laughed, with an enthusiasm whose sincerity he could not be sure of, but he recognized her voice now. She had been with them at Kunstnernes Hus that night. She had been good-looking in a boring, young way, had talked in a boring, young way and had eyed Harry hungrily, as though he were an exotic meal she was considering; was he *too* exotic?

“Try someone else,” Harry said and hung up. Then he closed his eyes and heard Ryan Adams wondering, “Oh, baby, why do I miss you like I do?”

The boy looked up at the man standing beside him at the kitchen counter. The light from the snow-covered yard shone on the hairless skin drawn tightly around his father’s massive skull. Mommy had said that Dad had such a big head because he was such a brain. He had asked her why she said he *was* a brain and not that he *had* a brain, and when she had laughed, she had stroked his forehead and said that was the way it was with physics professors. Right now the brain was rinsing potatoes under the tap and putting them straight into a pan.

“Aren’t you going to peel the potatoes, Dad? Mommy usually—”

“Your mother isn’t here, Jonas. So we’ll have to do it my way.”

He hadn't raised his voice, yet there was an irritation that made Jonas cringe. He never quite knew what made his father so angry. Or, now and then, even *whether* he was angry. Until he saw his mother's face with the anxious droop around the corners of her mouth, which seemed to make Dad even more irritable. He hoped she would be there soon.

"We don't use them plates, Dad!"

His father slammed the cupboard door and Jonas bit his bottom lip. His father's face came down to his. The square, paper-thin glasses sparkled.

"It's 'those' plates, not 'them' plates," his father said. "How many times do I have to tell you, Jonas?"

"But Mommy says—"

"Mommy doesn't speak properly. Do you understand? Mommy comes from a place and a family where they're not bothered about language." His father's breath smelled salty, of rotten seaweed.

The front door banged.

"Hello," she sang out from the hall.

Jonas was about to run to her, but his father held him by the shoulder and pointed to the unladen table.

"How good you are!"

Jonas could hear the smile in her breathless voice as she stood in the kitchen doorway behind him while he set out glasses and cutlery as quickly as he could.

"And what a big snowman you've made!"

Jonas turned in surprise to his mother, who was unbuttoning her coat. She was so attractive. Dark skin, dark hair, just like him, and those gentle, gentle eyes she almost always had. Almost. She wasn't quite as slim as in the photos from the time she and Dad got married, but he had noticed that men looked at her whenever the two of them took a stroll in town.

"We didn't make a snowman," Jonas said.

"You didn't?" His mommy frowned as she unfurled the big pink scarf he had given her for Christmas.

Dad went over to the window. "Must be the neighbors' boys," he said.

Jonas stood up on one of the kitchen chairs and peered out. And, sure enough, there on the lawn in front of the house was a snowman. It was, as his mother had said, big. Its eyes and mouth were made with pebbles and the nose was a carrot. The snowman had no hat, cap or scarf, and only one arm, a thin twig Jonas guessed had been taken from

the hedge. However, there was something odd about the snowman. It was facing the wrong way. He didn't know why, but it ought to have been looking out onto the road, toward the open space.

"Why—" Jonas began, but was interrupted by his father.

"I'll talk to them."

"Why's that?" Mommy said from the hall, where Jonas could hear her unzipping her high black leather boots. "It doesn't matter."

"I don't want that sort roaming around our property. I'll do it when I'm back."

"Why isn't it looking out?" Jonas asked.

In the hall, his mother sighed. "When will you be back, love?"

"Tomorrow sometime."

"What time?"

"Why? Have you got a date?" There was a lightness of tone in his father's voice that made Jonas shiver.

"I was thinking I would have dinner ready," Mommy said, coming into the kitchen, going over to the stove, checking the pans and turning up the temperature on two of the burners.

"Just have it ready," his father said, turning to the pile of newspapers on the countertop. "And I'll be home at some point."

"OK." Mommy went over to Dad's back and put her arms around him. "But do you really have to go to Bergen tonight?"

"My lecture's at eight tomorrow morning," Dad said. "It takes an hour to get to the university from the time the plane lands, so I wouldn't make it if I caught the first flight."

Jonas could see from the muscles in his father's neck that he was relaxing, that once again Mommy had managed to find the right words.

"Why is the snowman looking at our house?" Jonas asked.

"Go and wash your hands," Mommy said.

They ate in silence, broken only by Mommy's tiny questions about how school had been and Jonas's brief, vague answers. Jonas knew that detailed answers could evoke unpleasant questions from Dad about what they were learning—or not learning—at the "excuse of a school." Or quick-fire interrogation about someone Jonas mentioned he had been playing with, about what his parents did and where they were from. Questions that Jonas could never answer to his father's satisfaction.

When Jonas was in bed, on the floor below he heard his father say good-bye to his mother, a door close and the car start up outside and fade into the distance. They were alone again. His mother switched on

the TV. He thought about something she had asked. Why Jonas hardly ever brought his friends home to play anymore. He hadn't known what to answer; he hadn't wanted her to be sad. But now he became sad instead. He chewed the inside of his cheek, feeling the bittersweet pain extend into his ears, and stared at the metal tubes of the wind chime hanging from the ceiling. He got out of bed and shuffled over to the window.

The snow in the yard reflected enough light for him to make out the snowman down below. It looked alone. Someone should have given it a cap and scarf. And maybe a broomstick to hold. At that moment the moon slid from behind a cloud. The black row of teeth came into view. And the eyes. Jonas automatically sucked in his breath and recoiled two steps. The pebble-eyes were gleaming. And they were not staring into the house. They were looking up. Up here. Jonas drew the curtains and crept back into bed.