

FABULOUS BOOKS

Sigrún Davíðsdóttir
Not a Single Word

Crime Fiction

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sigrún Davíðsdóttir (b. 1955) is a journalist, broadcaster and writer based in London. She is a correspondent for the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, and comments regularly on Icelandic current affairs in the UK media.

Davíðsdóttir is an author and translator of popular cookery books as well as fiction. Her book for young adults *Silfur Egils* received the Reykjavík Scholastic Prize in 1990.



BIBLIOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

Novels:

Feimnismál (Mál og menning, 2006)

Young adult fiction:

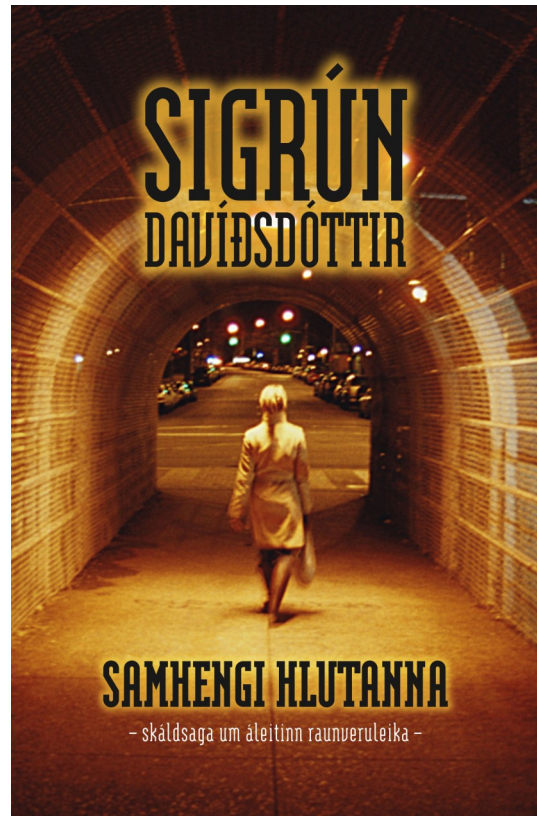
Silfur Egils (Almenna bókafélagið, 1989)

NOT A SINGLE WORD (2011)

Hulda, a journalist based in London, is writing a tell-all exposé on the collapse of the Icelandic banking system. Keen to expose the antics of Icelandic investors and entrepreneurs abroad, she is well on her way to completing her book when she is killed in a traffic accident. Her fiancé, artist and lawyer Arnar, teams up with Hulda's childhood friend and fellow journalist Raggi to finish the job. Together, they pick up where Hulda left off and are soon hot on the trail of the men whose reckless wheeling and dealing brought Iceland to the brink of ruin. They soon realize, however, that some stories will do anything to remain untold.

Not a Single Word is a contemporary story, dealing with the aftermath of the financial crisis in Iceland and its consequences.

469 pp



REVIEW

**** (Four stars out of five) “The author has an fine grasp of describing circumstances and treating believable characters. [Sigrún] holds the reader, and puts things into unexpected, intriguing and exciting context.” (DV newspaper).

SAMPLE TRANSLATION (pages 9-29)

14.12. 2009 (Mon.)

‘You know how I’m always saying that the world is basically a nice place. I take it back!’

Hulda’s laughing voice was accompanied by the sound incessant of traffic.

‘Why? What happened?’ I switched my mobile to speaker and continued struggling with my computer as I talked to Hulda. Her sonorous voice, which always had a hint of drama, echoed in the studio.

‘My bicycle lights have been stolen! Can you imagine? They had disappeared when I came out of the gym. And my helmet too! It was in the pannier.’

‘It’s, of course, very clever to leave all that on your bike in Hackney!’ I said. ‘It’s one thing always to expect the best from people. It’s another to literally issue an invitation to criminals!’

‘Oh well, it’s been ok thus far! But never mind. The lights and the helmet, it’s all gone. But the world hasn’t completely turned against me – at least the panniers are still in place. Anyway, do I need to pick anything up for us on the way home? Otherwise, I’ll just go through Vyner Street as usual.’

‘No, we don’t need anything. I’ll make something out of the risotto from last night. We still have some of these juicy oranges we bought the other day. And the mint. Oranges with sugar and mint. Does that satisfy you?’

‘Of course, my love! You’ll get no complaints from me!’ Hulda said. Always full of joy, always content with whatever came her way.

‘Perfect. I’ll cook when you come home.’

‘And I’ll tell you all about the lecture.’

‘Lecture? What lecture? Didn’t you go to pilates?’

‘Arnar, wake up!’ This was the playfully reprimanding tone she used when she thought I was being just a bit too absent minded. Which didn’t happen all that rarely. ‘Someone’s not listening!’

‘Sorry. I’m trying to connect my new graphics tablet to the computer, you know. Ah yes, before you went to pilates. A lecture on tax havens, right?’

‘Well done! Yes, how tax havens undermine business ethics. I did a short interview with the speaker afterwards. A brilliant American lawyer who was equally at ease giving a 45 minutes talk or giving me a five-minute summary. I’ll use it for the radio.’

‘Great.’

‘By the way, I arrived early for the lecture, so while I was waiting I did a list of all the people we need to buy Christmas presents for and what we might give them. With Rafn and your father, I wasn’t so sure. It has to be something of interest to them. There are some new political biographies. Anyway...’

Her words were drowned by howling sirens. I could picture Hulda wagging her

head as she often did to add emphasis to her words. And so typical of her to use every moment. I tend to work in spurts. She said that artists needed to recharge their batteries, whereas journalists need to work relentlessly.

‘I lost you. What did you say?’

‘Never mind! I’ll tell you all about it later. Bye-bye, I love you!’ Hulda said, not waiting for an answer.

I wasn’t aware of the age gap between us, even though she was seven years younger than me. Although, it seems to be a law of nature that 34-year-old females find it easier to confess their love than forty-something males. And she was definitely better at finding presents for people, though that wouldn’t have anything to do with age. She was better at socialising than I am. She did say I was sensitive to people when I bothered to pay attention to what was happening around me.

I continued my struggle with the graphics tablet, feeling enormously irritated because there was something I couldn’t get right. There are few things I find as infuriating as computers that don’t work.

In the end I was confident I had figured out how to connect the tablet and the computer and feeling rather proud of myself, I looked at the clock. It was almost ten. More than an hour since I had spoken to Hulda. I shrugged my shoulders. She’d probably popped in for a visit somewhere. Both of us were prone to spontaneous changes of plan, though I assumed she would be quite hungry now and that that would make her hurry home.

It was almost 10.30pm when the doorbell rang.

Hulda had obviously forgotten her keys yet again. I hurried along the corridor and opened the door swiftly to startle her. But instead of a laughing and embarrassed Hulda with her bottle-green bike, there were two dead-serious policemen. Two bobbies with their ridiculous helmets.

London 2010

21.3. 2010 (Sun.)

The doorbell almost never rings and certainly not just before midnight on a Sunday evening. Still, I immediately went to the door without thinking about who it might be. Doorbells are so demanding. Or maybe it’s just that I have a tendency to obey in order to avoid trouble.

It was Raggi. His pale blond hair, darkened by the rain, hung down along his face. I always thought he looked like an alien from another planet. It’s the flat face and small eyes, I guess. At the best of times there is nothing impressive about him but now he looked like a dog after a swim. The London rain is often torrential in spring and without an umbrella it’s impossible to avoid getting drenched even with the bus stop so close by.

He had called some weeks ago. At the time, I had felt unable to say no, but I never really thought he would really appear in person. I had no idea if he had sent me an email. I'd avoided opening the mailbox, or indeed the computer.

I stood still in the open door.

'Shit, how it's raining!' Almost knocking me down, Raggi hurried in with a large suitcase and a backpack. 'I was going to text you from Stansted but my mobile didn't connect to the network. Well, I better be careful. I remember I once hit my head against the pedal. You hadn't pulled the bike all the way up.'

I said nothing though it occurred to me to ask if he had been sober or drunk at the time.

'I always have this feeling that the weather abroad must be good all the time.' Raggi, dragging his luggage along the narrow corridor, didn't seem to notice my silence. 'But at least it's warm. The rain, I mean. There was snowstorm in Keflavík when I left. I had hoped to get a view of the eruption at Fimmvörðuháls from the plane but there was...'

I didn't hear what he said. He was already around the corner in the corridor running from the outer door to the door into the flat. His voice is nasal, as if his nose is chronically blocked. And he has this hesitant way of speaking, leaving out words and breaking up sentences. I had never understood how he could be a journalist. But apparently he was better at writing than talking. Or that's what Hulda claimed.

I locked the door to the street, nothing for me to do but to follow him back into the flat, passing my bike that hung in the corridor, just high enough to be out of the way. I closed the door to the flat and caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror by the door. Tall and lanky but not as boyish as when I before. Lately, the ginger curls were graying. Having lost weight, the furrows in my face seemed deeper. And the dark circles under my eyes did nothing for my look. A beaten dog, that's what I looked like, trailing a dog just returned from a swim.

'Did you know about the eruption?' Raggi took off his anorak and hung it up by the door.

I nodded. It would be wrong for Raggi to conclude that I followed what was going on in the world just because I knew about the eruption. My father had called yesterday and told me about it. It gave him something to say.

Raggi looked around.

'I'm always amazed to see all this space. There wasn't much to see when I first came to visit Hulda and you.'

There certainly is nothing luxurious about the flat but most visitors pay attention to it. Together with some designer friends, I had bought the building, which, at the time was the ruin of a factory that had produced waste pipes and fittings. It had taken the best part of a year for them to turn their space into studios while I turned my part into a home and a studio. The flat was the shape of a shoebox and my studio took up more than half of the floor space. The old, iron-framed windows along the North side, overlooking Regent's Canal, were intact. There was a garage door leading from the studio onto the street but the main entrance was at the corner of the house. Leading on from the entrance was the kitchen and next to the kitchen, we had planted a large grey corner-sofa, as well as

a teak coffee table we had found in a skip and two old armchairs that Hulda she had upholstered in bright orange kaki. There was also a spare room and a bathroom with a washing machine. Over a section of the floor was a loft where Hulda's desk still stood. Our bedroom was upstairs as well as a small bathroom.

'Where shall I put my luggage?' Raggi turned towards me.

'Just there,' I said without showing him where. I couldn't bring myself to tell him to put it into the spare room.

He solved the matter by placing it by the hat rack.

'I'd better dry myself.' He disappeared for a moment into the bathroom but was soon back and sat down by the large dining table.

I was slouched by the kitchen sink, having turned on the kettle and pulled out some teabags.

'It would be great to have some tea. I've stopped drinking coffee. Yes, just like a proper Englishman. Only the tweed suit is missing!' He laughed that hurried laugh of his, which combined with the nasal issue to create a whinnying tone. This was just one of the many things I couldn't stand about him. Raggi and I had nothing in common and would never have known each other if it hadn't been for Hulda.

I had turned on the kettle, not to offer him tea but just to have something to do. His sudden presence was oppressive even in this large space.

'It's always so bloody weird to come here. At Liverpool Street there are all sorts of people and then you take the bus and there are only black people and Indians. Something quite appealing about it. So colourful, really cute.'

I murmured something, not bothering to explain that only the poorest people take the bus, the cheapest means of transport, and that it wasn't at all cute that they all happened to be immigrants.

My phone beeped on the table.

'Oh, you have an i-phone. Cool,' Raggi said. 'Aren't they also expensive here?'

'You can get them free if you have a contract.' I didn't check the text. No doubt from my brother Rafn. Recently, he had started texting me now and then, perhaps when he was walking Glói, his dog or in a queue at Melabúðin, if Rut, my sister-in-law needed something for the Sunday lunch. I was touched by his thoughtfulness and also that he didn't mind if I didn't always answer. We had never been terribly close but typically of him, he had offered to come the moment he heard about the accident. In the end, he didn't need to because Hulda's brother came. Rafn sat next to me at her funeral and these December days was always around.

'Are you working on anything in particular?' Raggi asked.

'There is always something.'

Without turning around I sensed him stealing a glance at the studio. The work-in-progress was a computer-controlled video projected onto a wall upon which I had made some drawings. My assistant Yukio, a Japanese art student, was a genius with the video. The studio was too far from the kitchen for Raggi to discern the thin layer of dust covering everything there.

I turned around with the tea mugs.

‘Interesting to see what the artist is working on.’ Raggi stood up, apparently heading for the studio.

‘You can see it later.’ I slammed the mugs on the table. The hot tea splashed over my hands.

‘No need to scald yourself.’ Raggi sat down again and looked at me. I stood at the end of the table, drying my hands on my jeans.

I can’t stand people looking at things I’m working on. Of course that didn’t count for Hulda.

Raggi pulled one of the mugs towards him but then pushed it away and looked at me. ‘Wait a minute. You knew I was coming. When I called, you said I could stay. But it’s somehow as if you weren’t expecting me.’

‘Of course I knew you were coming.’ I had completely forgotten how direct Raggi can be.

‘Arnar, are you... Are you angry because I didn’t come to the funeral?’ he asked.

‘No.’

‘I just couldn’t bear...’

‘Her father told me. That you couldn’t, you didn’t feel able to carry the coffin.’

‘He called me. Of course I said yes.’ It sounded as if Raggi had been waiting to confess to me. ‘Of course I intended to do it. Then, I got cold feet. I just knew I couldn’t. But I *was* going to attend the funeral. I was looking for a place to park the car by the Dome and I couldn’t find a space and then suddenly I was out in Nauthólsvík. I just sat there. It’s all so... unnatural. A childhood friend, my age.’ His eyes rested on me. ‘I can’t even begin to imagine what it must feel like for you. You don’t look well.’

I sort of didn’t know how I felt either except I had constant nausea and felt cold, as if I was coming down with the flu. My aunt, the sister of my father, had wanted to take me to a meeting at the Association for Psychic Research. It helped her when she lost her husband. My mother wanted me to celebrate Christmas with my family. If not in Reykjavik, my mother suggested, we could go to their summerhouse in Skorradalur. Or to their flat in Florida. I had never been there. The thought of a condo for pensioners in Florida gave me the creeps. No doubt, everyone had the best of intentions, but the worst was hearing everyone say that time heals all wounds. Three months had gone by and there was no sign of any healing. I wasn’t working, didn’t do anything. Except let time pass. Very slowly. Before, I had suffered from a chronic lack of time.

‘Did you read the obituary? The one I wrote?’

‘I didn’t read any of them.’

‘I think I couldn’t bring myself to go the funeral because I couldn’t bear to listen to the vicar. He didn’t know Hulda at all. Do you remember what I said when I called you? As soon as I heard about the accident? That the book had to be finished.’

I didn’t take my eyes off the tea mug so Raggi couldn’t interpret my reaction as any sort of consent.

‘She was far enough along with it to...’ Raggi continued.

‘She was far from finished. She said she would need at least a year to finish just the first draft.’

‘She had done a good overview. I know, and of course you know it as well, that she made transcripts of all the interviews she did. She wrote everything down that was of any importance. She thought it would take a year because she was only doing it on the side. She was going to take time off from her journalism for a few months this summer. She would have gotten a lot done. But regarding the funeral. I wanted to explain why I hadn’t shown up. But you went back to London before I managed to get in touch.’

‘It doesn’t matter.’ I cleared my throat.

‘Are you going out?’

‘Going out? No, why do you think that?’

‘Because you are standing. It’s as if you are about to go out.’

I shook my head and took a sip of the tea without putting the mug on the table.

With his foot, Raggi pushed a chair towards me. ‘Would you mind sitting down? It’s really weird talking to you when’re you standing like that.’

For a moment I wanted to resist but instead I sat down, though still holding the mug.

‘You didn’t read the mails I sent you.’

‘No.’

‘But you know why I’m here. I told you when I called you.’

I pressed my lips and shot my chin to the side. Hulda used to say it was a clear indication of me being angry without wanting to show it. I could sense my nausea rising. I had lost a lot of weight and my clothes hung on me like a scarecrow, not that there had been a lot to lose in the first place. The only reason I bothered shaving was because I found being unshaven so uncomfortable. Quite simply, I thought Raggi was insane to suggest finishing Hulda’s book about the collapse of the Icelandic banks in October 2008 and the madness of Icelandic business life in the years running up to it. I found Raggi’s intensity disturbing and remembered his earlier visits only too well, especially the one during which he wasn’t sober for a second. It had been deeply unsettling to have him around in the flat because the only spirit in him was the spirit of alcohol and nothing he said could ever be relied upon.

‘Hulda had drafted the first few chapters, right? The introduction, the privatisation of the banks, the years of 2002-2006. She was just getting into chapters on the individual characters. She was writing about Óttar. I know you followed what she did. She told me you did.’

‘Of course I knew what she was working on but I didn’t follow it in any detail.’ Hulda and I had always discussed our work with each other. But my focus was always first and foremost on my own work. And as it was now I found it difficult even to remember names. I mostly remembered bits and pieces here and there, ripped out of their contexts. Except for the things I didn’t want to remember. Such as a stain of blood on a naked foot, sticking from under a sheet in a mortuary, how the police described the brutal facts

of the accident, Hulda's paleness at the Fossvogur Chapel.

'If you had read the mails. I mean, I explained how the book could be finished. That I could do it. But I'll need your help.'

'I said you could stay.'

'But you need to help me. I can't do this alone, you know.'

'I told you. I didn't follow her work in any detail.' On the phone, Raggi had told me that although many admired Hulda's work there were also those who resented her reports. There would definitely be those who weren't too keen to read her collapse saga. But her acute understanding of what had happened was a strong reason to get the book out.

'We can easily do it.' Raggi pushed his mug aside.

Raggi's drive was suffocating. I cleared my throat again. People often stayed with Hulda and me. Guests came at a certain time, left on a particular date and didn't stay long. 'How long are you going to be here? Aren't you working?'

He shook his head. 'No. That's why I could come.'

'Have you started drinking again?' The question slipped out unintentionally.

'Fired,' he said, apparently undisturbed by my question and the tone. 'The Ring-emporium owns everything in Iceland, including the paper. I used to be a crime-reporter but after I sobered up I was in current affairs. I had some ideas about things to investigate but you can't move without running into something connected to the Ring. I had been with the paper long enough to have some seniority, even had a decent salary. Now they had to cut down. Or so they said. Hired kids wet behind the ears. I and a few others were kicked out.'

'But how do you make a living?' I immediately regretted the question because it sounded as though I cared.

'Well, the short version is that I got three months salary and I had also put some money aside. I also have a half-brother who is in charge of the machinery in a freezing plant in Neskaupsstaður. Never a problem finding something to do.' He shrugged his shoulders and glanced at me as if to check if I was listening. 'Last time I visited you was in July 2008, remember? There was this press trip to Brussels. That was after I went into rehab. I went there after Christmas 2006. I certainly don't remember much of that Christmas. Except that Nanna moved out the day before Christmas Eve. We had only lived together for a few months. You never met her, did you?'

I shook my head, wasn't pining for the details. Hulda had told me about all this at the time.

'After rehab I had to deal with the credit card debt and all this bloody mess so I decided to sell my flat. I had paid off most of the mortgage even though I had paid Herdís out her half. You remember, she was with me when I first visited you. I sold the flat in spring 2007. In the end, there was a bidding war between two Viking raiders, two of the most famous Icelandic businessmen. They wanted the flat for their kids. Actually, it was all rather remarkable. The price reflected the ongoing madness at the time. Hulda and I talked about it this winter. Not long before...'

I nodded, remembering that she had told me about their conversation. One of

the many stories that gained a new meaning after the collapse.

‘That’s why I became a millionaire – just for owning a flat in 101 Reykjavík for nine years. A millionaire on paper at least. When I cleared out the debt, there was a bit left so I put it into a money market fund and then I just rented a room with an uncle of mine. I didn’t want to buy anything right away. I wasn’t going to be fleeced in such an insane property market. Then in November 2007 I was at a birthday party of a friend. His brother was one of the managers at Island Bank and I told him about the sale of my flat and the bidding war. Well, he asked me why I was only drinking Coke and so I gave him the whole story. Late in the evening he pulled me aside, by then pretty incoherent because he was so drunk, and told me to take everything out of the money market fund and sell all my shares if I had any. Everything. Right away. Can you imagine?’

I raised my eyebrows, couldn’t bring myself to be outright rude and tell him this really didn’t interest me.

‘I’ve no idea if he remembered it the day after but I went to the bank first thing Monday morning and moved all my money into Icelandic sovereign bonds. I should have bought euros, of course, but I didn’t think of it at the time. Anyway, I’m ok. Although of course, I’m in the same ridiculous position as every other Icelander, having to take my flight ticket to the bank to get the currency doled out. When I landed at Stansted it dawned on me that here we are all just like some losers from Eastern Europe. One sandwich, 1500 krona! A friend of mine calls the krona a non-currency. It just doesn’t make sense to think in krona! But back to Hulda’s book. It’s just a question of where to start.’ He looked at me with the eyes of a bloodhound that doesn’t lose the trail even when it sneezes.

I bit my lip. I wasn’t going to let Raggi’s insane focus sweep me along. It was like running down a hill. Gravity pulls, regardless of whether you want it to.

‘I’ve been mulling over it. As I said, I think we should start with Óttar, his Russian connections. Because that’s what she was working on. There, in the end.’

I couldn’t think of anything but putting down the mug very slowly, as if it was an action that needed my utmost attention. I inhaled deeply. It had become a habit, eased the nausea somewhat.

‘You know, there are still people in Iceland who think that Óttar was just lucky in Russia.’ He took a sip of the tea without taking his insistent eyes off me. ‘Óttar is no ordinary Icelandic dude. Hulda knew that. The first step is to find out how far she had got with Óttar. I put all the mails she sent me in a file and read it on the plane. She always kept me more or less informed about what she was doing. Then there are the reports she did for the radio, the articles she wrote for the UK media. And of course all the stuff in her computer. And you. You used to be a lawyer. You understand it all. What she was doing, I mean.’

‘Not really.’ I tried to be firm to make Raggi understand that I was absolutely refusing to be involved in whatever it was he intended to do.

‘Hulda always said it really helped talking to you. Even though you’d left the legal practice you still had the legal mentality. That’s what she said.’

I felt a lump in my throat. I could hear Hulda’s voice in Raggi’s words. Hulda knew I wasn’t too keen on being reminded of my former profession but she sometimes

teased me that even though the law had no relevance to what I was doing now – or had been doing until mid December – I still talked like a lawyer, always demanding clarity of speech.

‘I sent an email to this Nick Anderson. He’s at the Daily Telegraph. You know, Hulda was in touch with him. He’s written quite a lot about the Icelanders who were doing business here. Hulda always said it’s generally pretty easy to make contact with English journalists. They’re always interested in meeting people if they think they’ll get something out of it. So that’s where I started. He suggested we meet for lunch tomorrow. You can come along. That will be the first step.’

‘The first step? What do you mean?’ I had my forearms glued to the table and folded my hands so tight that my knuckles turned white.

‘It’s as s I wrote you. If you had read my mails. We should try to finish the book together. Are you just going to give up?’

‘Give up?’ I banged my fist on the table so hard that the mugs danced around. ‘Do you realise what you are talking about?’

‘That means you are giving up?’ Raggi crossed his arms, looking very relaxed.

‘Giving up? I don’t even know where to begin.’

‘Well, tomorrow. Just by meeting this...’

‘Bloody hell, you have no idea what you are talking about.’ I tried to speak slowly to add weight to my words. I needed it to fight his delusion. ‘You are talking about picking up a job that Hulda breathed and lived. For years. She was well equipped to write this book. Not you!’

‘I know, Arnar. I know what you mean. But I think she was far enough into it for us to pull it off together. I can do a lot of the grafting, trace companies and other things that need to be traced, find the people she was in contact with, all that stuff. But you will help me to think it through, to structure it. Stuff like that.’

‘What about the language?’ I leant back, relieved, convinced that this was the killer question.

‘That Hulda wrote the book in English, you mean? Of course my English isn’t as good as hers but I read philosophy in Edinburgh for two years. I didn’t finish. My mom fell ill. I couldn’t bear to be away from her. Fortunately, she recovered. But I was actually thinking that it’s not make or break if we can’t publish it here. It’s also important that the book will be published in Iceland. That’s what Hulda thought. We could start there and just get it translated. I’m sure that publishers will fight over it.’

‘You have no idea what you are talking about. It’s much more complicated than you can even begin to grasp...’

‘No, I don’t think so. I know some guys in publishing back home in Iceland. Once it’s been published there, it can be sold abroad.’

‘It’s not the publishing I’m talking about but the writing. Have you seen the diagrams of the companies that Hulda traced in Luxembourg?’ All my reasonable arguments were swept away by his damned stubbornness. Even though it made no sense. I wasn’t trying to push Hulda away but I couldn’t stand the thought of messing around, in total incompetence, with what she had done so well.

‘Well, no. Not exactly. But she told me all about it. I guess she wrote it all down.’

‘There is a whole army of people investigating it all in Iceland, the Special Prosecutor, the resolution committees and all. Then there is the Serious Fraud Office here in Britain. You can see the fantastic results! No charges brought so far and nothing really clarified even though it’s more than a year since the banks collapsed.’

‘I think Hulda did much more than what you seem to think.’

‘And you think you know all about it?’

‘That’s not what I’m saying. I just happen to think we can do it. Together.’

‘You are not exactly Bob Woodward.’ I didn’t get far with irony. Again this damned lump and the feeling that I was losing my mind. ‘It also... I feel, I think that if I, if we give it a go. I’m not sure I can manage it, not sure where it all ends.’

‘Two weeks,’ Raggi said, very slowly. ‘Will you let me stay for two weeks? Just to see exactly how far along she was. And to figure out how it could be continued. It’s entirely up to you what you do. If you want to be in on it as well. Or if you just want to continue with your work.’

‘Two weeks.’ I took a deep breath, didn’t bother to explain to him I wasn’t doing anything. Raggi was hardly in the door and I already felt he had been here for eternity. Two weeks with Raggi hovering over me with his semi-blocked nose was an incomprehensibly long time. I couldn’t help thinking that this blind obstinacy perhaps resulted from brain damage due to excessive alcohol consumption.

He nodded.

‘Raggi, I’ve no idea what bloody world you are living in! This isn’t some dammed film about a tough investigative reporter!’

‘Come on, of course I know that! I’m not thinking about myself but about Hulda. She had such a keen understanding of it all, how the banks and the big shareholders lived in a parallel universe with different ethics or rather a complete lack thereof. Hulda had plenty of stuff that many people wouldn’t be too happy to read about in a book. Two weeks?’

I jumped up, so suddenly that I felt dizzy. The chair banged onto the floor. I kicked it aside and walked over to the window, with my back to Raggi. In the night-black window panes, the lights on the other side of the canal blended with the reflection of the lights in the kitchen.

‘It isn’t in Hulda’s spirit to let go of unfinished work,’ Raggi said.

I looked back. Raggi slowly stood up, leaning slightly forward as if he expected me to attack him. Even though the dining table was between us.

I kicked the radiator, a spiked tube that ran along the window, as hard as I could. ‘How dare you come here and tell me what Hulda was thinking, what she would have wanted, what she was doing! You don’t know anything! You just go from one thing to another!’ I shouted at Raggi’s reflection in the mirror.

I turned around. Raggi stared at my foot.

‘You can’t just come here demanding some agreement with me! Yes, of course it would, of course I want something to come out of her work. As she herself wanted!’ I

took one step towards the table but my foot was numb. I just managed to grasp hold of a chair, which saved me from falling flat on the floor. ‘The idea that you can master topics that she spent years investigating! Are you completely out of your mind? We don’t even know enough to evaluate if it can be done at all!’ I managed to find my balance, lifted the chair and banged it down. ‘Don’t you understand? She’s dead!’ My words echoed in the living room and the studio.

‘If you don’t try, if we don’t try, her work will have been for nothing.’ Raggi stood straight with his arms folded as if explaining something to a really dumb child. ‘Then her thoughts, her understanding will die. If we try, then maybe. The choice is between ‘perhaps we can do it’ and ‘we can definitely not do it.’

‘Bloody hell, don’t you get it? Have you completely drunk away any sense you had?’ I shook my head, held on tightly to the chair. I felt this piercing pain in my foot. The tears came out like hail. ‘You don’t know... You have no idea what it’s like losing someone.’ My whimpering voice was as alien to me as the yelling earlier.

‘I’ll wipe up the blood.’ Raggi took a small towel by the sink and threw it over to me. ‘Wrap this around your foot. Otherwise there will be blood all over the place. Then find a band-aid. You cut yourself on the radiator.’

I caught the towel and looked down. I was only wearing one sandal. The other one had probably flown off as I kicked the radiator. There was a trail of blood all the way from the oven I had cut the skin on my big toe and the blood welled up. I felt dizzy. I’ve never been able to stand the sight of blood. I looked up slumped into the chair I had been holding onto and wrapped the towel around my foot, trying to avoid seeing the blood.

‘I’m not going to claim I understand how you feel.’ Raggi turned away from the sink with a tea towel he had held under running water and squeezed tightly. ‘But my dad died unexpectedly when I was ten. I found him. I learned the lesson that even after such a shock, things get better.’

I dragged myself to my feet, turned around by the stairs and sat down again to adjust the towel. Raggi was wiping the floor and didn’t look up. What was it that Hulda had always said about him? That he was no angel but that his was a gentle soul, there was nothing evil in him.

‘I know it doesn’t look like it... But I’m grateful.’ I hesitated. It sounded so stilted and formal but I couldn’t find any other words. ‘Grateful to you for coming. That you are willing to try.’

‘No problem.’ Raggi didn’t look up from the cleaning. ‘There isn’t a thing I wouldn’t do for Hulda.’

Upstairs, in the bedroom, I laid down or rather collapsed on my bed, felt for the i-pod and found the Goldberg-Variations. Bach’s harmony is soothing for an agitated mind. These last months, just as I was falling asleep I often jolted, feeling I had forgotten something, lost something. That I needed to remember, needed to search without knowing what I had forgotten or lost. It was deeply frustrating.

Raggi would manage but I was ashamed of myself that I hadn’t shown him the guestroom, the towels and the bed linen. However, my most insistent thought was if I could say the same as Raggi. That there wasn’t a thing I wasn’t ready to do for Hulda.

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