

Collaborators

i

He drove out of Aalborg. On the passenger seat was a package from the film shop and two bottles of *hof*. He crossed the bridge into Norresundby. At the light by the Shell station he took the opener from the glove box and pulled the top off one of the hofs. He began sipping the beer as he drove out past the airport. To his right stretched a field of stones, each stone scored with Bronze Age runes, stones set deep into the grass, grouped in ovals. There was no traffic. He brought the cheap Phillips cassette player from under his seat and placed it next to the white paper bag from the film shop. He pushed the play lever, and the machine started with something German he had recorded by microphone from his radio at home.

Monday, before Christmas. Single thin lines of trees divided the fields. A wire mesh fence stretched around the airport perimeter. The air was warm for December. The wind had stopped pushing at the Volkswagen earlier in the morning, as he had driven toward Aalborg.

Now, at Brovst, he stopped at the *kro* and sat by himself at the bar. Hanne served him a *snaps* and they talked before he drove off. The usual Tuesday *ingebel* – the widow’s ball – was canceled in Hellerup because of Christmas, and they wouldn’t be able to dance again until after the holidays. She went to the back to make sure they were alone. She returned, reached under the counter, and gave him two *julebryg* to take with him. Christmas beer.

Brovst was quiet. He drove slowly until he saw that the two police cars were parked, empty, in front of the municipal building. The road was very straight and flat, and the car pushed out its loud throaty exhaust. It was still before noon. As he left Brovst he could see the Limfjord as it approached to the left, flat and colorless under the dark blues and whites of the winter sky. The sun was low and bright.

He drove the last twenty kilometers. Hellerup was big enough for a separate bypass, but Andrew followed the highway into town. As he approached the first shops he met traffic and slowed. Hellerup was always busy on Monday, especially on a sunny

day before Christmas. Like all the other shopkeepers, even the bookseller displayed spindly evergreens for sale on the sidewalk, brought down on the ferry from Oslo to Skagen and delivered town to town along the Limfjord. He drove slowly down Vesterbrogade. He passed the grocery and turned left at the bus station. If he drove straight after the turn, he would pass the old church and continue to Løgstør, just over the Limfjord bridge. Instead, just at the retirement home, he turned right and drove past the post office to the furniture store. His apartment was one of two on the second floor.

In the living room two identical armchairs faced each other across the room on the thin carpet. A kitchen was sectioned off.

He carried the beer in his coat pockets and the white paper package in his hand. He dropped the empty bottle into the plastic trashcan and walked into the back room. He threw his jacket onto the bed and came out to the kitchen. The changing bag and developing tank were already on the counter. He opened one of the *julebryg* and, holding the bottle high on the neck, took a short drink. He lifted the bag of developer from the paper sack.

His American cigarettes were made in Switzerland. The ashtray advertised a beer he never drank. For a minute he read the back of the orange paper bag of developer. The heavy black mixing tank was in the sink and he brought over the stirring rod. He let the water run hot, then filled the tank to a yellow paint mark inside. Careful with his ashes, he smoked while he stirred in the developer. When the last crystals had dissolved, he checked the mixture with the thermometer and put it in the refrigerator.

He went out, hooking the lip of the second Christmas beer tightly between two fingers. He closed the door and quickly walked down the steep stairs, leaning back and touching the rail. The sun was still bright but the air was beginning to cool. He started the Volkswagen and reached into the glove box for the Nikon.

He drove back onto Vesterbrogade. He turned at the Grand Hotel and started out toward Klimstrand. After a kilometer he passed the high school on his left. A little later he left the last of the cottages and drove onto the dirt road to the sea. The stiff, thick heather ran close to the side of the road. The dark greens and blacks stretched over the small hills on both sides until the road ended at the beach, fifty meters from the sea.

He shut off the engine and sat in the car finishing the beer. The water from the storm had finally receded and the pools on the beach had dried. Behind him the sun had passed the highest point of the day, and it spread an even, diffused light. The sky was a dark stone blue; a few very white clouds billowed up thick over the sea.

He slipped the empty bottle into the map pocket of the Volkswagen, then he took the camera and walked out over the sand. A steep bank of rough heather rose at his left. Wind had come up from the northeast so he kept the lens cap on the Nikon. New stones and wood had turned up in the storm, and the corners of the three German bunkers rose at new angles from the wet sand near the water. His boots were wet up to his ankles. He turned out to look over the Skaggerak and he lit a cigarette.

He walked west along the beach and soon came up to a dozen people gathered into small groups, couples with children, old people alone, turned toward the sea. Far out on the sandbar rested a great rust red expanse of metal, broad and high, clear metal shining through against the southern sun. The bow of a freighter. It listed on a huge platform, stubbornly motionless as the waves blew past it.

A spot of color, something yellow, appeared past the edge of the red metal where the water pounded off. The rubber raft moved slowly out from behind the platform, cresting on the waves, then for a moment sinking. Andrew sighted through the long lens. Three men sat in the raft, pinned to the sky, waves flattened in the foreground. One man was orange and black in wetsuit and tank. As Andrew advanced the film, the man in the wetsuit silently slipped backwards off the raft into the wind-driven water.

Haller was standing with a small pad of paper but he took no notes. Andrew came up and they shook hands.

"Whose ship is it?" Andrew said.

"She's no ship at all," Haller said, "but maybe someday she will be a ship if those Germans decide how to free her."

"Was the rest lost in the storm?"

"The stern is in Esbjerg. The tow ship is returning."

"I thought you might need photographs."

"No, we were already here this morning."

"I brought a very long lens, much longer than Nils has."

"Nils has prints already for tomorrow. They're very fine."

Back in his apartment he developed two rolls of film. The roll just taken from the Nikon was two-thirds exposed, twenty-four frames, shots of the town. The other black-and-white roll had sat in the camera bag a month, since his Swedish trip in November. He didn't remember shooting the roll, and he pulled it from the fix after just a minute and held it to the window. Except for a few at the end, the negatives were thin, but could be printed. Some landscapes, a few faces, nothing he remembered.

In a few more minutes he poured out the fix and ran the wash hose in from the kitchen tap. When the water was just cool on his fingers he dropped the film into the black tank and lit a cigarette. There was still some liverpaste in the refrigerator. He sliced some dark bread very thin on the cutting wheel and spread one with liverpaste. He cut small pieces of the cucumber onto the top. On the other piece he spread the last of the mackerel salad. He carefully crushed out the end of his cigarette and quickly ate the *smørrebrød*, with cold water from the refrigerator bottle. He took the film from its wash and hung it with paper clips from the string over the bathtub. He cut the carbon from his cigarette, relit it, and went back out.

The furniture store took up most of a small triangle in the commercial area one block south of Vesterbrogade. Painted parking lines angled into the street from each side of the triangle. He left the Volkswagen in the sun and walked the street toward the Løgstør road. He stopped at the post office and found nothing in his box, a local ad, a new men's store opening. He walked toward town, passing the retirement home, the clinic. In the *købmand* window Karl was arranging a new display of big green akvavit bottles.

He came slowly up to the town, smoking. He walked to the *pølse* bar at the bus station and bought a *luxus*, covered with fried onions and soft cucumbers. He sat on the bench outside to eat the sausage. Women with children and shopping bags came in on the bus from Aalborg. Some of the children were given *pølse* or packaged ice cream. They were as quiet as their parents this time of year.

At two-thirty it was late afternoon. In the low south, toward the west, the sun still glinted somewhere off the Limfjord, nine kilometers south. Andrew finished the sausage as he crossed Vesterbrogade. Through the window of the tourist bureau he saw

that one of the fluorescent tubes was lit. Taped in the window were two of last season's pamphlets, displayed front and back.

The door was latched so he knocked. After a minute Johanssen came out from the back office, wiping his mouth with a paper napkin. He smiled through the glass as he reached down to turn the latch.

"Yes, and hello, Andrew, will you have a *smørrebrød*?"

"Yes, OK, what are you having?"

"Shrimps." In Hellerup only Johanssen and a few others spoke English with no struggle.

Andrew followed Johanssen to the back and sat at a desk littered with papers and empty envelopes. In the corner, by the door to the alley, stood a small, waist-high refrigerator. Johanssen made two *smørrebrød* with butter, tiny shrimps and pieces of lemon. He reached into the ice compartment of the tiny refrigerator and brought out *akvavit*, the bottle dull with frost. He gave Andrew a sandwich and a *snaps* glass, then sat at his own place and poured the *akvavit*, filling both glasses.

They said *skål*, and watched each other's eyes while they drank. Johanssen looked down to the clutter on his desk.

"You've been away?" he asked.

"A few times in the last weeks," Andrew said.

"Back to Sweden?"

"No, just here. To Aarhus once. Well, twice to Aarhus. Randers."

"With the camera?"

"Always with the camera."

"Another?" Johanssen looked behind, where he could reach the sink and the green frosted bottle.

"Thanks. But first let me go next door." He was out of his chair.

"No, wait." Johanssen went back to the refrigerator and brought out a *hof*. "I have some. Maybe you will share this with me too." He found glasses. He was coughing, something in his throat.

Saying *skål* they drank more of the *snaps* and a little beer. Johanssen said he had driven out to see the ship.

"Herr Johanssen, I see that your window is more empty than ever. You should remove those brochures. It would be much neater. You could see out."

"Yes, I shall have to do that." Johanssen smiled, then slowly brought back his glass to his lips. He coughed hard and quickly had to put down the beer.

"Do you still have more of the posters?"

"The last ones I took just this week to Esbjerg when I drove down. The bureau there will see that they are distributed."

"Why at Christmas?"

"They will go up in April, near the Harwich ferry. I won't be in Esbjerg again before spring."

Johanssen poured another akvavit. He followed the rim of his glass with a fingertip. "Last year I bought eleven of your photographs. They worked very nicely."

"Yes." They said *skål*, and Johanssen raised his eyes to see Andrew's. He followed with the last of his beer. The two *snaps* glasses and Andrew's beer glass sat empty and shining near the middle of the desk, among papers, unopened envelopes, brochures from Skagen, Odense. For the first time Andrew took out his cigarettes. He offered one to Johanssen.

"I can't; don't you hear me coughing?"

Andrew lit a cigarette while Johanssen spoke.

"Two of the photos I used in the posters. The second printing of the poster was much better than the first."

"Yes."

"Five more of your photos, different from the posters, I used for the brochures. There, on the shelf, maybe a thousand remain. And of course more can be printed in several weeks."

"Yes. But do you remember that on one page you printed the schedule for the Ebeltoft boats?"

"Of course."

"Did you know that the schedule is changing?"

"No, in fact I did not."

"It may be that you should reprint your brochures very soon."

"Yes, thank you, I see that you're right."

“And you will need new posters.”

“No. New posters, I think, shall wait until next year.”

“The English and Germans, you know, have good memories. What they saw last year will not appeal to them this summer.” Andrew smoked the cigarette.

“That may be true, but the separations are too expensive for me to have made. And you know, of course, that I still have not used four of your shots. You will remember that two of those were among the very best of all the eleven.” Johanssen couldn't control another cough.

“Your throat may be bad, but your memory is better than ever.”

“It's a polyp making me cough.” Johanssen said. “They're sending me to Copenhagen.”

He very carefully pronounced the English word for the city.

iii

It was dark enough outside that no light crept in around the thin black plastic sheet taped over the bathroom window. He had bought liquid print developer, easy to mix, and enough fixer was left from the week before. It took a few seconds to prepare the stop bath.

He had placed three eight-by-ten trays on the plywood board, which balanced on three edges of the bathtub. He slowly poured in the chemicals. He set the ten-by-fourteen tray in the bottom of the tub and ran in the wash hose. The hanging negatives were dry. He cut them and slid them into glassine envelopes.

The old black Leitz enlarger sat on a rough wooden shelf. He plugged the enlarger into the big Gralab timer and replaced the ceiling bulb with a safelight.

He went to the kitchen to turn off the light, then came back into the bathroom and shut the door. Black strips of felt were glued around the inside of the doorframe, and the door shut tight. He pushed a towel at the bottom of the door to close out any ambient whiteness.

He switched on the enlarger bulb and took one of the sleeves. He held a negative strip to the bulb of the enlarger and chose an exposure. With the strip in the negative

carrier he blew the exposure clean with canned air, then pushed the negative carrier into the enlarger. The easel was dark until he opened the aperture of the enlarger lens. This roll showed him the forest Svinklov after the snow a week before. The snow was black in negative, but two children posed, their snowsuits white. He had found them playing by the windmill at one of the roads near the beach. On the easel their thin smiles were black in negative. The snow and sky were black. They held each other's hands, as he had asked.

It was a difficult exposure. In the first print he couldn't burn in enough shadow detail without blackening the trees. The bulb was wrong too. Someone in the building was drawing off electricity, and he tried the print again, adding another five seconds to the fourteen that was usual with his consistent negatives. To burn in the snow he used the cover of an old paperback, a French mystery in English, with a small round hole cut out of the heavy paper.

He worked with the print a half hour, then chose other exposures. Most were from Hellerup. Christmas trees on Vesterbrogade, old people shopping the *købmand*, the white stepped church tower off the Løgstør road. Finally he worked with a shot of the beached ship, taken with the long lens, in which the frogman swam near the raft. He burned in the North Sea waves.

While the prints washed in a pan on the bottom of the bathtub he left the darkroom for the other roll, still hanging from the string by a paper clip. The light of the kitchen window came through the negatives and showed him very little. The first ten were landscapes, badly exposed. The last two exposures showed a dark face, the eyes closed. The white lines of definition bled into the black emulsion. A very bad focus.

iv

On Christmas Eve he woke late and spent time over breakfast, strong coffee and sliced French bread with thin wafers of chocolate. It would be cold, and he brought out his heavy coat, on the hook in the closet since Sweden. In the coat pocket he carried a new bottle of *snaps* from the freezer and two packs of cigarettes. In his hands were Christmas presents and keys.

The usual cars were on the street. Both mail trucks were in. When he crossed the street, towards Vesterbrogade, he saw Karl's van going south to the Limfjord, after the *købmand* had shut early. The other shops would close soon for the two days of Christmas.

His hands turned red quickly on the steering wheel. The Volkswagen was driving well and he took the corner by the Grand Hotel fast, accelerating hard in second. A cigarette hung from his mouth as he raced up the road, by the kindergarten with its modern wood and steel climbing toys, by the high school a kilometer out, just beyond the edge of town. A playing field, then dormant sugar beet fields. He drove fast up the road and soon reached his turn.

He kept his tires on the banks above the ruts, doing well on the curves. The fields were divided by single rows of angled trees, all leaning to the southeast, pointing now precisely at the low bright winter sun. Farmhouses were white plaster with dark beams, yellow plaster and beams, the houses' names painted over the doors. Thin smoke floated from the chimneys. The fields were textured in long furrows and the soil was bleached. The road turned away from single trees and groups of trees, nothing that could be called woods. The mounds of heath approached and receded irregularly. Before him at a curve sat a blonde child on a pony. All children were blonde.

Andrew stopped slowly. He rolled down his window and yelled over the noise of the car. "Hey, Chris."

"Hi, Andrew, give me a smoke." The child approached, clicking his tongue at the rough-haired Icelandic pony.

"No," Andrew said. The boy came over, bareback on the pony. He leaned over the pony's heavy neck, holding the reins, and Andrew handed him the cigarette.

"What are you, ten?"

"I'm twelve last month and you know it; you gave me books."

"Which ones have you read?" He was yelling over the noise of the car.

"I started the one about South America."

"South Carolina. Am I late?"

"What?" The pony was anxious at the noise.

He rolled up the window and raced the boy to the house, Chris riding hard and bouncing on the pony, no stirrups to post from. The pony cantered through the heath,

high above the Volkswagen, taking short cuts and crossing the road in front of the car, back and forth, needlessly. They came up to the house.

Ben's red van stood in the sun at the edge of the big circular drive. Two cats slept on the van's roof. The dogs came out at the noise of the car, Mary and Vince, with Mary's pups behind. Chris jumped off the pony to grab a pup, then remounted and galloped back up the road. Turning back fast, he circled his pony around the drive. Andrew pulled up behind the van. He brought out the presents and walked to the door with the dog Vince. Ben was there with a beer. Andrew gave Ben the bottle of *snaps* and balanced the presents on a stack of dry boots sitting at the door. He pulled off his own boots and took Ben's warm beer, an everyday beer, a *hof*. Jenne came up with his moccasins and took the *hof* out of his hands for an *julebryg*, light smoke still rising through the foil where she'd just uncapped it. She herself drank at the *hof*. "Merry Christmas," she said. Danes still translated their everyday greetings for Andrew.

"Merry Christmas."

"*Glaedelig Yul!*," laughed Ben, happy and red.

Jenne picked Andrew's presents from among the dry muddy boots. Ben's was a book, her own a scarf or mittens. Chris and Gretel's gifts were tins of some kind. Tiny Gretel came up, hardly walking, and Andrew lifted her high into the living room.

Later, Andrew drove Chris and Gretel up to the sea. As they walked from the car, Gretel sat on Andrew's shoulders and had to hold one of his fingers. Andrew smoked with the other hand.

Wind always blew from the sea. Today the waves drew up high and fell straight down, dark grey. The German bunkers, always sunk at different angles, had come in some from the sea. Window openings rose out of the sand, angles of doors too. Andrew headed across the hard sand, Chris quiet and Gretel tightening her grip. Chris held Gretel by the window while Andrew slid through the door to lift her through from inside. Chris scuttled after Gretel through the window.

Cold, smooth sand filled one corner inside the bunker but sloped down smooth to the door, where Andrew and Chris squatted on their heels, leaning on walls at right angles to each other and watching Gretel sit straight-legged on the rise of the sand, playing with pebbles, bad amber. Inside and out, the angles of the bunker were sharp,

but water had carved patterns like snakes in the concrete. Chris and Andrew shared a cigarette.

They talked about the bunkers. "Torlund at the bakery was a collaborator," Chris said.

"A collaborator. How do you know?"

"Anna Torlund told me. He's her grandfather."

"You'll get in trouble saying that. He'll poison your *wienerbrød*."

"Are you coming back?" Chris's accent was almost British.

"Sure, I always come back, don't I?"

"You only left once." Chris didn't want more of the cigarette.

"You'll come see me before I'm back," Andrew said.

"No, you know we only go to Cambridge."

"Your grandmother."

"It's her money."

"It's not her money. It's Ben's just as much. From your great-grandfather.

Besides, I thought you liked her."

"I guess. I don't like Cambridge. There's no horses, and we shop all day or stay inside."

"I even know where Icelandics are, just like your ponies, almost in Boston."

"You live too far from there."

"Come see me. Steal Ben's wallet and jump a bus. Sixteen hours. And warmer."

"I know your address."

"Great. But no Icelandics, cows mostly."

"Same as here."

"Same as here."

Johanssen came for Christmas eve lunch, already drunk and quiet.

"You know he's going to die," Jenne said in the kitchen.

"He wants to find his wife. Valhalla."

"He doesn't believe that stuff," Jenne said. "None of us believe anything anymore."

"Was Torlund a collaborator?"

"Of course. Why do you think no one buys there?"

"I always have."

"That's right, only English."

"American."

They sat at the table, with Jenne nearest the kitchen, always jumping up. They toasted with aquavit, even Chris. Jenne poured a drop into Gretel's juice.

The modern Danish farmhouse, sixty years old, was decorated from Aarhus and Copenhagen. The beams inside were treated dark and the newly plastered walls showed complete regularity from Ben's single-mindedness. An even light shone into all the corners, over all the canvas and chrome furniture. Ben and Johanssen discussed the new law requiring farm owners to plant their fields. Germans and Americans were buying all the farms. Jenne helped Gretel with her food.

"Have you heard from your children?" Ben asked Johanssen.

"Max wrote for my birthday, that was August."

"Don't you have a daughter?" Jenne asked.

"No daughter. Max." He paused a minute.

"And sometimes Andrew."

They all smiled, and they toasted Andrew with beer and *snaps*.

In his toast, Andrew offered to drive Johanssen to Copenhagen for his tests.

v

Johanssen was waiting with a strapped leather suitcase on the sidewalk outside the tourist office. Christmas was a day past. Raindrops sprouted on the windshield as they approached the Limfjord in the Volkswagen, just out of town, late afternoon and dark. On the bridge the rain changed to snow. The streets in Løgstør were turning white.

They drove without talking; the car was loud but smooth. At one empty crossroad a sign read Konges Tisted. Johanssen said, "The King's Pissing Place. He stopped there maybe once."

"Spoken like a true tour leader."

Fifteen minutes later they came into Hobro. "Have you photographed in Mariager?" It was a few miles east, off the road.

"Johanssen, you've got my Mariager shots on your wall. Mariager is photo spot number one for the turistas. As you know."

"Yes, and I'm sure you've eaten at the *kro*?"

"Too many Germans when I was there."

"You need to go off season. They're my friends. Go and tell them about me."

"Nothing to tell, Johanssen, right?"

"Right, Andrew, nothing to tell. But tell them anyway. Please."

"I'll go for lunch tomorrow. Are they open?"

"They're like me. Always open. We knew each other in the occupation."

They drove in light snow and rain. A long hill led them down into Hobro and its stone streets, a town from a commemorative Christmas plate.

"Tell me about Torlund."

"Only a man, Andrew."

"Why does he stay in Hellerup? No one buys there. How can he live?"

"Everyone comes before the sun. The kids like him; he's nearest the strand. And the *kro* buys there."

"The other collaborators."

"Don't talk so much about collaborators. Everyone is a fucking collaborator."

They came to Ebeltoft in time for the ferry, but the three lines of cars were already long. Andrew counted the trucks. "Maybe we'll get on."

They left the car, walking through thin snow to the receiving center. Johanssen moved quickly, coughing only lightly into a handkerchief. They bought shrimp sandwiches and took them back to the Volkswagen, where Andrew had a plastic bag of Christmas beers. He let the snow build on the wiper blades as they waited for the boat. The wet snow spotted the small, flat windshield, then covered it. They knew the ferry had arrived when cars ahead of them started up. Only after the car in front started its engine did Andrew turn on the wipers.

The next day, back from Copenhagen, Andrew stopped at the Mariager *kro* for lunch. He met Johanssen's friends and took their picture.