**English excerpt**

**Extinction**

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PART ONE

*Every morning, he stands beside my bed; he says nothing, just stands there quietly, staring and waiting.*

*I close my eyes and open them again, but he doesn’t go away.*

*He’s a little boy with a very old face and eyes that shine with fear.*

*I know what he’s scared of: that I’ll forget him. That I’ll shut my eyes and go back to sleep and pretend he doesn’t stand there every single morning.*

*In the darkness I can hear his breathing, I know he wants something from me.*

*He leans across my bed and whimpers, and the sound is somehow cracked and dreary.*

*I think of how he used to wake me, try to hear his high-pitched voice.*

*Daddy. Daddy…*

*Now he says nothing. He just stares and whimpers.*

*I don’t know what he wants and it makes me tired.*

*I tumble out of bed. I walk through the empty rooms and out onto the balcony. It’s still dark. Everything is quiet. People are sleeping. The nausea swells in my chest and I hunch over and try to breathe slowly.*

*I straighten up stiffly and gaze at the horizon, the strip of red sunlight over the hill.*

*Why do we love them so much, our dead children?*

*Why won’t they stop coming?*

*Sometimes I hope he will stop standing by my bed, that I’ll be spared the sound of his tiny shuffling footsteps at night, that he will stop standing in the bathroom with that burn on his face and his terrified gaze.*

*At the same time, I hate the thought that sooner or later he must be forgotten. People tell me: “It’ll be good for you to move on, Jonathan.”*

*But if I forget him now, no one will think of Eden. No one else can hold him tight. He has no one but me. “It isn’t constructive,” they say, grief. But I don’t call it grief. I call it love. My love wants something more.*

*It’s my duty to spot Eden out on the square in the morning, sitting crouched between the cars as if he’s spent the whole night roaming restlessly around the streets, freezing.*

*It is my damned, beloved duty to wake in my bed and look up into that wrinkled face as he whispers.*

*Daddy?*

*Are you awake?*

1

Once a week, we used to drive to the cemetery and walk between the graves to his stone. Justine, Asta and I, the remnants of our little family. We no longer lived together. The girls had moved into a duplex with a view of the river and the flat plain, and I was alone, for I was plagued with a churning restlessness that I couldn’t shake off, and was no longer fit to be among folk.

We had decided that, no matter what, we would visit his grave together once a week, just the three of us, and the funny thing was that, as we approached his plot, the distance between us vanished. We were drawn closer together and when we stood in a little cluster before his stone and spent several minutes in perfect silence, we were one; and then, I thought, it was as if a magnetic force were pulling us towards something that no longer existed.

We didn’t say very much, there wasn’t much left to say, but we stood there in silence and stared at the stone, and afterwards it felt good to walk back to our cars, hug each other briefly and whisper:

“See you next week.”

And so it continued through the whole of that year until one day, something got in the way and the routine was broken.

Eight months after Eden’s funeral, I met the detective again at a shopping mall in Sandvika. She was standing in a shoe shop holding a Wellington boot. Marit Eng had spotted me, so I went over to her.

“Did you hear they’ve found water rats in Sandvik River?” I asked, attempting a smile. “Big as dogs, they say. They live off rubbish and food people throw into the river at night. I hear their teeth are as big as a guard dog’s.”

“Jonathan,” she said in surprise. “How are you?”

Eng was in her late thirties, a trim, athletic detective with a pair of remarkable dark eyes. She had investigated the arson that killed my son.

“Perfectly fine,” I lied, with a shrug.

She leaned towards me over the rack of boots, head cocked. I liked her and to start off with, I’d been completely confident that she would ultimately manage to solve the case and ensure that the culprits were arrested, convicted and locked up.

That isn’t what happened. It wasn’t her fault, of course – I knew that – but all the same, when I caught sight of her in the shoe shop, I felt a surge of anger and disappointment, and it was a struggle to rein in my emotions.

Her alert gaze ran over my face.

“It must take time,” she said, “to get over something like that.”

Again I shrugged.

“Losing a child,” she said. “They say it’s the worst thing.”

“They do say that.”

I looked at the boot in her hands.

“Are you going for a hike?”

Eng held my gaze firmly without wavering.

“It’s for my daughter. She’s going to spend a week at a camp in the mountains.”

It was as if the words shamed her.

I nodded.

“How old is she?”

“Eleven.”

“Almost the same as mine. My daughter. Asta. She’s twelve.”

Eng swallowed, glanced at the floor and then back up at me again.

“I’m sorry,” she said abruptly.

“Why?”

“As a detective,” she began, “the only thing you want to do is solve cases, and the cases that don’t get solved, that can’t be brought to trial…”

I scrutinised her sharply defined features. A dark lock of hair fell across her forehead and she brushed it aside.

“It bothers you and keeps on bothering you right up until the moment the case is solved,” she said, in a firm voice; but then a hesitant air came over her. “It’s the worst, you see... knowing. Knowing who it was, but not being able to… hold them… well, accountable.”

I pitied her then.

I made a gesture, as if absolving her.

“I know you did what you could.”

But when I was sitting in my car in the multi-story car park once more and found myself unable to start the engine because my hands were shaking so damned hard, it wasn’t my concern for Eng, for her personal defeat, that I was thinking of.

It was the men who set fire to my house and killed my son.

It was them I was thinking about.

Ernst Damm and Jacob Øyen.

The grey-haired heroin addict and dope importer, jailbird, swindler, blackmailer and child-murderer Ernst Damm and his savage side-kick, waddling psychopath Jacob Øyen.

The police’s main line of enquiry had remained unchanged throughout the investigation: Damm was behind it. He had a motive: he hated my father and hated the Svane family and was trying to blackmail us. Damm was capable of planning and carrying out serious criminal activity. After the death of his wife, he was determined to burn down everything that we possessed.

Marit Eng and the police prosecutor were in so little doubt about this that a remand order was sent to the court in Bærum.

But there wasn’t a single solid piece of proof against Damm, only suspicious behaviour and flimsy circumstantial evidence. There were no witnesses to link Damm to the fires, no phone calls, no audio recordings, no surveillance videos, no DNA.

There was no evidence to indicate that Damm was involved.

And yet we knew. The police knew. My father Adrian knew. My sister Ella knew. My brother Bendik knew. There was no doubt.

But the police had no concrete proof against Øyen and Damm – and both of them had vanished.

I started the engine and drove out of the car park, through the tunnel and out onto the E18. As I passed Høvik Church, the spring light slanted sharply through my windscreen and I had a feeling there was something wrong. I looked down at the speedometer: 120.

What the hell was I playing at?

I slowed down and switched back into the right-hand lane.

There were roadworks at Strand and the speed limit was reduced to 60.

After the fire, I abandoned any thought of rebuilding the house. At night, I pictured the blazing house, pictured myself running through the rooms and searching, searching, calling out among the burning furniture, in through doorways, calling his name but never finding him, even though I knew he was lying in there somewhere, unconscious, I just didn’t know where, and then the fire caught hold of my jacket and I fell through the floor and everything went black and I had only the vaguest sensation of being dragged through the door and out into the garden.

I moved into something smaller and simpler: a two-room apartment in Lysaker Brygge. When Asta wasn’t staying the night, every other weekend, I was mostly alone and I liked the fact that there wasn’t too much to take care of.

After the Lysaker roundabout I turned off onto Dicks vei and drove through the broad-leaf forest towards the block where I lived. This was no man’s land for me: I had no history here, knew nobody. That was exactly the way I wanted it – a place that reminded me of nothing at all and placed no demands on me. In the bright, functional flat, I was starting afresh, as they say. That was the idea.

I drove past the fountain and down the hill to the car park, found my spot, number 17, then took the lift up to the third floor, opened the apartment door and went into the kitchen. I poured the coffee beans I’d bought at the mall into the grinder and embarked on the process of making a really good cup of coffee. The grinder made a terrible rumbling noise, but it was over in a matter of seconds. In the silence and the light from the window, I prepared the espresso pot.

That evening I watched a film on TV. I fell asleep halfway through and when I awoke, the programme had changed. I switched off and got up, stiff from the awkward position I’d been sleeping in.

I had a peculiar feeling that there was someone in the flat.

I looked around the dim living room, then went out into the kitchen. It was silent. I could hear the hum of a washing machine in the neighbouring apartment. I went into the bathroom and brushed my teeth, then went into my bedroom. But the sense of unease lingered. I looked out of the window. On the square directly below my window a man stood out in the cold rain. He had a cap pulled down over his eyes. He didn’t move. He stood still, just letting the rain fall down on him, soaking wet and motionless.

There was a tightness in my throat, I felt an urge to bang on the window.

He seemed frozen solid out there, unable to move, and the crazy thought struck me that if I just rapped on the window, I could wake him from some trance, some deep sleep, and then he would return to everyday life, to the rain – he could tear himself from the reverie he had fallen into and go back home to his wife and children, to the dog that was waiting for its evening walk; everything would be fine.

2

The first time I heard about the incident in Marbella, I’d been back at work full time for a year. It was Arlo Gray, my editor, who first told me about Lekmann, and back then, in mid-March 2022, I hadn’t the faintest idea that my entire world would soon revolve around that name. *Lekmann. Lekmann*. In the end, it swirled around in my head like an earworm.

I was sitting in the canteen at *Dagens Økonomi* with Arlo, drinking coffee and discussing organized crime on the Costa del Sol. Arlo had just heard a lecture by a Swedish author about the black economy on the Costa del Crime. According to the author, a sizeable group of Nordic criminals had established a kind of colony down there.

Arlo knew that my family had a large holiday home in the mountains southwest of Puerto Banús, and that my sister Ella had done a brisk trade in refurbished holiday homes there through a small branch of Svane Eiendom.

I felt obliged to shoot in an explanation.

“I haven’t been down there for several years. All I know is that my sister Ella and her daughters love it, and that the market is picking up. But the place is a hellhole for people like me…”

Arlo gave me a quizzical glance.

“25 degrees Celsius,” I continued, “blazing sunshine from dawn to dusk, ice-cold white wine by the pool, designer boutiques and gourmet restaurants with fabulous Andalusian cuisine. That lifestyle goes against the grain for guilty old white geezers like me. We’d rather have cold rain and a melancholy landscape.”

Arlo smiled. He had an English father and a Norwegian mother but had grown up in rain-drenched Blackpool, where his parents ran a small printing press. At the age of 20, Arlo had come to Norway on a “Norwegian nostalgia tour”. In Trysil, he met an all- Norwegian girl, Gunhild, whom he adored at first sight. Arlo ended up staying in Norway, where he trained as a journalist. He married his fair Gunhild and had three children with her. Bit by bit, he became a Norwegian, taking mountain hikes with his family in the summer and cross-country skiing in the winter. He still had a northern English accent and a talent for black humour – an underappreciated quality in a manager of a modern media company.

Now he gazed out of the window and for a few seconds, we sat in silence listening to the rain hammer against the big pane.

“Jonathan… there’s something I want to ask you about,” he said, without shifting his gaze.

“There’s a Norwegian story from Marbella too. I found myself thinking about you during the lecture. You know, because of everything you went through in Bærum in 2019.”

I observed Arlo’s face, with its brown eyes and the eyebrows that framed his face with an overgrown border. A vision of our burnt-out home in Jar flashed before my eyes: the ash-covered ruins, the smoke rising from the remains of the foundation wall, charred furniture amid gaping pipes and concrete, a bathtub, a bedframe. A small trainer lay among the heaps of charcoal. It was raining.

“It’s the story of a young investor. Ove Lekmann.”

“Never heard of him.”

“I don’t suppose you have. Lekmann travelled to Spain to meet his old university teacher. Kåre Grav Pedersen was a professor of Economics who retired from academia and did very well out of cryptocurrency investments. He lived in a huge villa outside Marbella, which he shared with a young wife and all the household staff.”

I took a sip of coffee.

“What does that have to do with me?”

“Just listen,” Arlo said. His gaze was sharper now and for a second, I had the feeling he’d spent quite some time considering how to present this story to me.

Then he told the tale of Ove Lekmann.

In November 2019 the young investor had travelled to Marbella to seek advice from Grav Pedersen – it apparently involved a complicated investment in a crypto firm. Lekman got the advice he was after and met up with some pals in Buerto Banús. He strolled along the promenade. He visited Marbella Old Town. On the fourth day, Ove Lekmann got into a taxi bound for Malagá Airport. But he never checked in on Norwegian flight DY1665. A week later, his mobile phone and credit cards were found on the beach east of Puerto Banús. But Lekman had vanished.

Two weeks afterwards, two detectives from Oslo Police Department took a flight south and joined forces with Marbella’s seasoned Norwegian liaison officer, Trygve Liland, to find out what had happened to the Norwegian.

“One week later they returned to Oslo without finding out anything whatsoever.”

“I have a feeling that isn’t the end of the story.”

Arlo looked down into his cup and studied the dark liquid for a few seconds before raising the cup to his lips and draining the dregs of his coffee.

“Not quite.”

For four months, no one heard a peep out of Lekmann, and his family tried to resign themselves to the idea that he might be dead. But then, two weeks ago, the liaison officer, Liland, happened to go to Nikki Beach to talk to a Norwegian informant. Liland was sitting in the bar, drinking an espresso and waiting when a peculiar-looking chap came over to him.

“The guy stared really hard at Liland, as if he had a cut on his face.”

I closed my eyes and tried to picture the situation as Arlo continued talking.

“Liland asked in Spanish if there was anything he could help the man with. But the stranger just looked at Liland with this wild, desperate expression on his face. Liland thought he looked like a rough sleeper… in a crumpled black suit… it felt as if he’d come from some unknown realm. Liland was about to call for the waiter but the stranger… well, he grabbed hold of Liland and clung to him, whispering: ‘*I know who you are*.’”

“Heavens.”

“*I know you’ve been looking for me. I’m Ove Lekmann but I don’t know where I’ve been.*”

“Hang on a sec,” I said, “How do you know all this?”

Arlo shook his head and smiled one of those vague smiles of his.

“Well, the thing is… this happened when you were on leave.”

“Okay?”

“Which is why Kathinka Seter went down there.”

“I see. What did Kathinka find out?”

“Not a lot. She spoke to Liland, but… Kathinka came home with the detectives. She kept in touch with Liland but didn’t get to speak to Lekmann.”

Arlo continued his tale from Marbella. Lekman was examined by a doctor and psychiatrist but couldn’t remember where he had come from, what he’d done or what we was doing in Spain. The only thing he remembered was his name. Ove Lekman.”

“So I guess you’ll be sending Kathinka back down there.”

Arlo shook his head.

“Kathinka’s heading to Donbas.”

A sly smile slid across Arlo’s face, and I realised he wanted to get me down there, as quickly as possible, to dig into this “mysterious disappearance” and write a piece for the weekend edition.

In a few minutes, he’d ask if I could go to Marbella and cover the Lekmann story and I knew I would hesitate and ask for time to think it over. *Was I ready for a trip like this?* I thought later, back at my flat; but when I woke next morning at the crack of dawn, I’d decided this was exactly the kind of thing I needed to do. It was, I thought at the time, a chance to start over.

3

I was cycling home along Sollerud Beach. Among the birch trunks by Vækerø Farm, a man stood peering across the fjord with a pair of binoculars.

My gaze slid across the water. A yacht lay out there.

A woman. Another man. A lover. A wound. A smouldering rage.

We imagine the world, create connections between fragments and piece them into a whole. The spring sunlight glittered on the surface of the water, and the white paint of the yacht.

I cycled on. The cycle path narrows by the boatyard and is full of small stones. A greyish-black dog was scurrying between the covered boats. There aren’t many strays in Norway, but this dog was ownerless, I was sure of it, perhaps because one paw was dragging badly or because its coat was so dirty and covered in patches of mud and dust.

My gaze lingered too long on the dog so I failed to see the rock in front of me until the steering wrenched sharply to one side, the wheels swerved and I was hurled over the handlebars.

As I flew through the air between handlebars and ground, film images played through my head. I was lying on a stretcher. Through the plastic of the body bag I could see ambulance workers wheeling me through a door, into a room with a vaulted ceiling. The stretcher was placed along a wall and the ambulance workers left, their voices vanished and I was alone in the dark room, unable to move, unable to scream. I had a distinct feeling that nothing would change now. They could move me, put me in a coffin, lower me into the ground but I would see everything, register all the details, be a witness, and it would never end. All this I saw as I soared through the air then landed on the ground and skidded across the gravel towards a block of concrete that served as a barrier between the cycle path and the marina.

Only when I got back to my flat and was sitting in the bath washing the blood out of my hair did I realise that it wasn’t about me, my death. That wasn’t what the film in my head was about. It was Eden. His death was with me all the time. I thought about him all the time, all day, all night, as I cycled and watched the mutt scurrying between the boats, as I fell, as I dived through the air. I thought about him ceaselessly. He was never not there; he never loosened his grip on my thoughts.

*During the winter holiday when Eden turned six, we went on a lads’ trip, he and Adrian and I, to Fleischer’s venerable hotel in Voss. My relationship with Justine was difficult. I was restless, drank a bit too much, worked too hard and played at pretending everything was fine. I suspected Justine had found someone else, but I didn’t want to talk to anyone about my problems. Least of all my father. I didn’t trust the people around me.*

*We ate lamb shank in the winter garden and skied on the slopes of Myrkdalen Fjellandsby. Adrian bankrolled the entire trip. He thought it was “priceless to have some quality time with my boys”. I let him babble away. I wanted this to be a nice holiday for Eden. Adrian and I had placed all our ancient conflicts behind us and had reached a calmer phase in our relationship. He, the capitalist. I, the critic. We accepted each other, especially after a few glasses of good red wine.*

*Eden had great fun with Adrian. He enjoyed my father’s fantastic temperament, his coarse jokes and his fabled optimism.*

*At night, we slept soundly in our beds.*

*One night, I woke with a start to find the room in total darkness. I turned to look at Eden’s bed. He wasn’t there. I leapt out of bed and went into the bathroom. It was also empty. I put on my dressing gown and went along the corridor and down to reception. A young woman sat behind the desk.*

*“Have you seen my son?”*

*“What?”*

*“My son? Eden?”*

*“Sorry?”*

*The receptionist looked at me confusedly.*

*“How… how old is he?”*

*“Only six.”*

*I looked at her. She had been asleep, that was why she was ashamed.*

*“Oh.”*

*She hurried out from behind the desk and we walked together through the old, sleeping hotel and searched for Eden everywhere.*

*We whispered his name.*

*The receptionist switched on the candelabras in the abandoned dining room. The damask tablecloths hung dog-eared over the edges of the table. The rococo chairs leaned sleepily against each other. We peered under the tables, behind the heavy curtains. Eden was nowhere to be seen.*

*We went down the spiral staircase to the swimming pool and walked through the male changing rooms. A crumpled red towel lay between the showers. It smelt of soap and chlorine.*

*And there, in one of the loungers, he sat and slept. His pale face was squashed against the edge of the chair.*

*“Eden.”*

*I whispered his name several times.*

*“Eden?”*

*The receptionist had tears in her eyes.*

*“Is he okay?”*

*I seized him by the shoulders and then he woke up, and smiled and stared up at me in confusion.*

*“What are we doing here?”*

*I didn’t know what to say.*

*The next morning, Adrian told one of his incredible stories.*

*“I walked in my sleep once too!”*

*Eden looked at him in surprise.*

*“Did you really?”*

*“Well, yes, but…”*

*“When you were little?”*

*“I was 45.”*

*Eden smiled even more broadly.*

*“45. And where were you?”*

*“At a fantastic hotel in the Alps – on a business trip. 30 people staying at Bürgenstock Hotel in Obbürgen, Switzerland. Sheer luxury. You sit in the sauna with a glass of bubbly and look out over the peaks of the Alps.”*

*Adrian grinned.*

*I’d never heard about this trip, much less that Adrian had sleepwalked.*

*But Adrian leaned back in his chair contentedly, unzipped his ski jacket and peered at us with a sly smile.*

*“Oh, it was so damned embarrassing...”*

*“Tell! Tell!”*

*Adrian raised his hands in surrender.*

*“Okay. After an excellent dinner in the restaurant, we had a few cocktails in the bar and then I got tired and went to my room. I lay down and fell asleep the second my head hit the pillow, and slept my sweetest ever slumber. But after a few hours I must have got up. Perhaps I went to the toilet to pee but instead of going back to bed, I went out into the corridor. The only problem was, I was still asleep. And I hadn’t the faintest idea that I was sleepwalking. And here, perhaps, I should explain one little detail to you,” he said, prodding Eden’s arm.*

*“What?”*

*“The thing is, I can’t bear to sleep with anything on, no PJs, no nothing. I have to be in my birthday suit.”*

*Eden gave him a puzzled look.*

*“Birthday suit?”*

*“Stark naked.”*

*“You don’t wear anything at all?”*

*“Hate it. I’m always the way God made me.”*

*Eden pictured it for himself. A grimace crossed his face.*

*“Oh.”*

*“Quite. So I strut down the corridor without a stitch of clothing, get into the lift and take it down to the bar, as if I was wide awake.”*

*“Oh no.”*

*Eden’s eyes widened.*

*“Then I walk straight into the lion’s den. Because there by the bar, stands Ella, my daughter, and three veeeery good Norwegian clients we’ve brought along to Switzerland with us to make an extra special impression on them –Berit Brufos, Magdelena Torstenson and company director, Jasmina Malt.”*

*“Three women?”*

*“Yes, sir. And Ella.”*

*“And what…?”*

*Adrian shook his head.*

*“Well, no. So… they turn away and squeal and I wake up abruptly and haven’t a clue what’s going on. Like – where the devil am I? Why am I here? And I look down at myself, see, and I realize I’m stark naked.”*

*He grabbed Eden’s hand.*

*“Help!”*

*Eden hiccupped*

*I shook my head.*

*“Why have I never heard this story before?”*

*Adrian laughed.*

*“You haven’t?”*

*“But Grandad – what did you do?”*

*Adrian made a helpless gesture.*

*“What the devil could I do? I covered my privates and ran back to my room as fast as my legs would carry me.”*

*“But you didn’t have a key.”*

*“Quite correct, young man. But it sorted itself out… I found a helper… everything sorted itself out… and the next morning at the breakfast table, I went up to the three women – and Ella – and apologised, of course, and we had a good long laugh about it.”*

*“Weren’t they cross?”*

*“Far from it. They thought it was funny as hell. And in fact, we became even better friends during that trip. And you know what? In the end, we signed one of Svane Eiendom’s biggest ever contracts.”*

*“Wow.”*

*“Exactly.”*

*Adrian laughed loudly again.*

*“It was totally wow.”*

*“How much money did you make out of it, Grandad?”*

*“Masses,” Adrian laughed, patting Eden on the head.*

*We spent the whole day on the slopes and ate a good dinner at the hotel that evening. We drank a fine burgundy. But that night I couldn’t sleep. I lay and stared over at his bed and every time I nodded off, I’d wake after a while and look around the room. One time, Eden was standing by the door, but when I sat up in bed, he padded back to his duvet, went to sleep and didn’t even realise he’d been up.*

*Eden had never walked in his sleep before, but after that time at Fleischer’s Hotel, he started sleepwalking regularly, often several times a week. He’d often just do a round of his bedroom, or go out in the living room, and he generally found his way back to bed by himself. That was the best way. I was keen not to wake him because then he’d get confused. For some reason or another, after Eden was gone, I often found myself thinking about what happened that night at Fleischer’s Hotel.*

*Are we different at night?*

*Does some unknown thing control us?*