

SKAGEN TARGET

THE FIRST CONNECTIONS

THE NORDIC PROTOCOLS

JOHN ERIKSEN



Copyright © 2026 by John Eriksen

All rights reserved.

Cover art: Blake Addicot/unsplash

Editorial: Edition Svanen/Friedrich Steindorf

Edition Svanen

K. Sewekow

Droste-Huelshoff-Str. 35

22609 Hamburg, Germany

john-eriksen.net

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Written in

WORDSTAR

✻ Formatted with Vellum

CONTENTS

1. The Approach	1
2. Skagen	22
3. The Trail	39
Books by John Eriksen	57

CHAPTER 1

THE APPROACH

Copenhagen, March 2000

The conference in the ballroom of the Radisson SAS Royal Hotel had already been going on for two hours. During that time, Detlev Klüver had shaken twenty-three hands and started seven conversations, each of which had petered out before he found his footing. The men around him spoke English with Danish, Norwegian and Dutch accents. They talked about things he knew in outline but not in detail. Offshore foundations. Grid connection costs. The Danish approval model. He had asked questions where he could, and had come away from each conversation with the feeling that he had revealed more of his ignorance than he had intended.

He had left the ballroom and gone into the lobby, then on to the restaurant, where he was standing by the window with a glass of mineral water. He had set it down half an hour ago and left it there. He looked out at the Tivoli. In March it was still closed, the rides motionless, the paths empty. Only the outlines were visible in the dark — the roller coaster, the towers, the bare trees along the main avenue. Behind him, one hundred and thirty delegates from eight countries were

discussing grid infrastructure, subsidy models and the question of whether the North Sea could become Europe's power station within a generation.

Klüver himself had spoken before dinner, for exactly twelve minutes on energy policy and coastal development in Schleswig-Holstein. The applause had been moderate. A few listeners had nodded. Most had continued chatting with their table neighbours. He knew the feeling, and he had learnt to brush it aside. The road to the top in Schleswig-Holstein was long and required patience. More patience, however, than he had in him.

"You were talking about offshore earlier."

The voice came from his left. It came without the usual preamble that preceded every conversation at such events. Klüver let a moment pass before turning. Then he looked at the man standing next to him.

He was in his early forties, wearing a dark suit without a tie and holding a glass of red wine in his left hand. His face was narrow and his eyes were light grey. He looked at Klüver with the expression of a man who already knew what he was going to say.

"Phillipe Duchamp," said the man, holding out his hand. "I work for a shipping company in Ostend. We do port logistics, offshore services and heavy transport at sea."

Klüver shook his hand. "Detlev Klüver. I'm a member of the state parliament for the North Frisia constituency."

"I know," said Duchamp.

They stood side by side, looking out at the dark Tivoli. "What exactly interested you about my presentation?" asked Klüver.

Duchamp slowly swirled the glass of red wine in his hand without drinking from it. "You said that Schleswig-Holstein could become the pioneer of offshore wind energy in Germany if politicians set the right course. That's an interesting way of putting it."

"An apt one, I think."

"Perhaps." Duchamp set the glass down on the windowsill. "May I ask you a question, Mr Klüver?"

"Please, go ahead."

"Do you know how many approval procedures a single offshore wind farm currently has to go through in German waters? Even before the first pile is driven into the seabed?"

Klüver didn't know the exact number, but he knew the general idea. "I reckon there are too many."

"Eighteen different authorities," said Duchamp. "At federal and state level, plus maritime spatial planning, plus environmental impact assessments that take an average of four years. The Danes approved Horns Rev in two years. The British are currently building the first commercial farm in the Irish Sea." He paused briefly. "And we're still standing here talking about visions."

Klüver looked at him. "You say 'we'?"

"I have an office in Hamburg and a contract with the Port of Hamburg. I have certain interests along the Elbe, even though I'm Belgian." Duchamp smiled slightly, for the first time in this conversation. "And my interests are the same as yours, Mr Klüver, at least as far as offshore is concerned. I need ports equipped to handle heavy loads. I need approval procedures that are completed in two years, not eight. And I need politicians who understand that this business is going to be big, very big. The question is whether Germany will build offshore wind farms. The question is who will profit from it."

Behind them, laughter rose from a group of Danish delegates. They were regaling each other with a story in a language Klüver couldn't follow. He turned back to the man by the window.

"What exactly do you expect from me?" he asked.

"Nothing concrete yet," said Duchamp. "I just wanted to get to know you. I've been hearing your name for a year now in contexts that interest me. For example, when people talk about coastal development, port policy, or the debate on wind power subsidies in the state parliament." He reached into the

inside pocket of his jacket and placed a business card on the windowsill, next to his untouched glass. "If you ever have time for a meeting, I'd be delighted."

Klüver looked at the card. It read: Phillipe Duchamp, Maritime Logistics Group, Oostende, with a telephone and fax number.

"I'll see," he said.

Duchamp nodded, picked up his glass and walked back into the room. Klüver remained standing by the window and watched him go. He moved calmly and without haste, always turned slightly to one side so as not to bump into anyone. Klüver put the business card in his pocket.

Back in his room on the fourteenth floor, the card lay on the desk next to his conference folder. The rooftops of Copenhagen spread out below him, copper and grey in the darkness, the Tivoli directly beneath, its lights out, its paths empty. Klüver thought of the number Duchamp had mentioned. Eighteen agencies. He knew people in at least eight of them.



Kiel, Brunswiker Straße, just before six in the morning

Detlev Klüver hadn't slept. It hadn't been a conscious decision; it had simply happened that way. It sometimes happened to him when his mind kept working whilst his body had given up. He'd lain in bed until half past three, then he'd got up. He'd made himself a coffee in the kitchen, and now he was sitting at the kitchen table with his second cup, looking out of the window at the street. Only the streetlamps were lit, and the first grey light was appearing over the rooftops of Brunswiker Straße.

The business card lay on the table in front of him. He'd taken it out of his jacket pocket when he'd got home. It had been lying there ever since, because he didn't want to put it away or throw it away.

Phillipe Duchamp, Maritime Logistics Group, Oostende.

He drank his coffee and thought. Beneath the meeting with Duchamp lay a question that had been there far longer. Longer than that evening at the Atlantic, longer than his years in the state parliament. Perhaps as long as he himself, if he was honest.

The question wasn't whether he would do it. The question was why it had taken him so long for someone to ask.

He remembered when he had been twenty-three years old. Back then, he was new to the district executive committee and had seen Uwe Barschel up close for the first time. Barschel was Minister-President of Schleswig-Holstein — the strongman of the northern CDU, the man everyone in the party believed would one day reach Bonn. That had been at a party conerence in Lübeck in the spring of 1983. The hall had smelled of wet coats and cigar smoke. Barschel had entered the room with a certain aura. It was the natural ease with which he took possession of the room, without doing anything to achieve it.

Klüver had stood at the edge of the room and watched as Barschel shook hands. He remembered names without effort and, in every conversation, gave the impression that the person in front of him was the only one in the room. Then he would move on to the next person, without the previous one feeling slighted. It was a technique, he now knew, but it didn't look like one.

At last, Barschel had noticed him. Klüver had had the feeling that the politician had spotted him before, perhaps some time ago. He had left him standing there to see how he would react. Now he was coming towards him, hand outstretched and with a smile that wasn't forced — because Barschel knew that a forced smile always gave itself away.

"Klüver," he had said. "From North Frisia. I've heard your name."

"Oh, really? From whom?" Klüver had asked. That was wrong, it flashed through his mind, because it was too direct. And one didn't meet Barschel with counter-questions. But the politician had laughed, briefly and apparently genuinely. "From people who pay attention to such things." He had held his hand for a moment longer. "Hang in there, Klüver. It will be worth it. Politics needs people who know what they want." Then he had walked on.

Klüver had carried those words with him for the rest of the evening. After all, Uwe Barschel had said it, and everything Barschel said in those years carried the weight of a verdict.

Four years later, Klüver had cut Barschel's photo out of the newspaper and framed it. It wasn't the official portrait, but a press photo from October 1987. Even then he looked worn out, but still radiated confidence. It had been taken two weeks before his death. This photo was the last public image in which Barschel still looked like Barschel, before everything came crashing down. Klüver had framed it and put it in the drawer because he couldn't bring himself to hang it up. But he didn't want to throw it away. The drawer was the only place where both were possible at the same time.

Klüver had thought long and hard about what Barschel had actually done wrong. It had preoccupied him during the months of the affair — the surveillance scandal that had destroyed Barschel's career, driven him from office, and eventually, in a Geneva hotel bathroom, ended his life. The affair had been widely reported in all the media and his name was like a wound within the Schleswig-Holstein CDU. Most of his party colleagues had said: He went too far. He crossed the line. He did things one simply does not do.

Klüver had never believed that. Barschel hadn't overreached when he ordered surveillance on his SPD rival Björn Engholm — dirty politics, but not unheard of. He had failed

to keep a close enough check on who knew what he was doing. Klüver was struck by the thought that the Minister-President had relied on misplaced loyalty. Those had been the mistakes, he was convinced; they were not moral ones, but technical ones.

And then there was the question of how he had died. It remained unanswered: whether he had taken his own life, or whether someone had helped him do so. Or had it even been murder? Klüver wondered whether it made any difference at all. Once you were as deep in the mire as Barschel, there was apparently no way out.

He had sworn not to make that mistake. The mistake of sinking so deep that the way out was blocked. If you went about it properly, there was always a way out. You just had to lay it out in advance, before you went in.



He stood up and put the coffee cup in the sink. It had grown lighter outside; the grey had lifted. The first car drove past on the road, someone on their way to the early shift. A normal morning in Kiel, early April, eight degrees, a light westerly breeze blowing in from the fjord.

He thought of his mother, who had been living in a care home in Husum for three years. Most days, she no longer knew who he was when he visited her. On some days she still remembered, and on those days she always asked the same thing: How far have you got, Detlev? And he would say: Far enough, Mum. And she would nod, with an expression that seemed to say: I know that's not true. But accept that it's the best he can give her.

He thought back to the past, to Schobüll near Husum, where the family had lived. One Sunday afternoon on the mudflats, three dark cars were parked in the car park, with men standing beside them holding briefcases. His father had walked two steps behind his mother. He had looked out at

the sea as if there were an answer there that he had never found. His mother had stopped and looked at the men by the car park. Her expression had a look for which, as a child, he had no name. Even now, at thirty-seven, he had no better word for it than: determination. The determination of a woman who knows that the world owes her something. She seemed to have decided to take it for herself. If not for herself, then at least through her son.

Being good isn't always enough, she had said, her gaze still fixed on the men. His father had never said anything like that. His father had worked at the Husum shipyard until his retirement. He didn't talk about it.

Klüver picked up the business card from the table and held it in his hand for a moment, then slipped it into the inside pocket of his jacket. That was where it belonged until he'd decided what to do with it. But actually, he'd already made up his mind.

He got dressed, left the house and drove the short distance to the state parliament. He wasn't thinking of anything in particular, but then he began to draw up a list in his head.

Point one: call Duchamp back, today, before he changed his mind. He wouldn't do that. But he wanted to rule it out.

Point two: find out how the customs authorities in Flensburg and Kiel communicated with each other. He could get that information through an acquaintance at the Ministry of the Interior.

Point three: set up a structure through which funds could flow without ever mentioning his name. For that, he would need a tax adviser who didn't ask too many questions and whom he could pay enough to ensure he didn't ask the crucial questions in the first place.

Point four wasn't a point yet. Point four was a feeling. He pushed it aside for the moment. It was an uneasy feeling. But

it wasn't a point. Detlev Klüver, a member of the state parliament from North Frisia, had an appointment at nine that he wouldn't miss.

A week later, he pulled into the service station car park. He didn't spot the BMW straight away, as he hadn't expected to find it amongst the lorries. Phillipe Duchamp had written to him saying they should meet on the west side at eleven o'clock. Klüver had set off an hour early. He'd driven along the A7 motorway towards Hamburg, then taken the A1 towards Bremen. Passing Osnabrück, he entered the flat countryside of Lower Saxony, which lay beneath a uniformly grey sky that morning. He reflected on the drive. What did he want from Duchamp, and what did this man want from him?

He parked between two articulated lorries with Dutch number plates and got out. He looked at the structure. The bridge spanned a hundred metres across both carriageways, supported by two red steel pylons that soared almost forty metres into the sky. It was a strange structure. He found it neither beautiful nor ugly, functional yet built with a certain ambition that now seemed somewhat tired. Beneath his feet, the tarmac vibrated slightly from the heavy lorries.

Duchamp was already sitting at a table by the window, on the side from which one could see the carriageway heading north. In front of him stood a plastic coffee cup. The coffee was dark and weak, as it usually was at motorway service stations. He hadn't taken off his coat. When Klüver sat down, Duchamp pushed a second cup towards him, which he had evidently brought with him.

"Thank you," said Klüver.

"I didn't know how you take it."

"Black is fine."

A heavy goods vehicle drove past below them, slowly and

accompanied by escort vehicles with orange lights. Duchamp glanced down briefly, then back at Klüver.

"I appreciate directness," said Klüver, "so I'll start with that. You didn't ask me here to talk about approval procedures."

Duchamp took a sip of coffee and set the mug down. "No."
"What then?"

"I run other things alongside my logistics business," said Duchamp. "More discreet. More profitable. And I need someone in Schleswig-Holstein who understands how certain things work. Not someone who just goes along with it. Someone who makes sure the framework is right."

Klüver looked at him. "The framework."

"Yes. It's about the port authorities and the customs authorities. The question of which ships are inspected, how often, and how thoroughly. The question of which investigations are given priority and which drag on for months until interest wanes." Duchamp folded his hands on the table. "These are political questions, Mr Klüver. Not legal ones."

Klüver drank his coffee. It tasted of burnt beans and plastic. He took his time before answering, because he knew that the next few seconds were important. "What are you transporting?" he asked at last.

"Whatever the market demands."

"That's not an answer."

Duchamp looked at him for a moment, then nodded slightly, as if Klüver had passed a test. "All right. Cocaine, mainly. From South America to Northern Europe, via Danish waters. There's some smuggling involved too — counterfeit goods, electronics. But no weapons, nothing harder than what I've mentioned." He paused briefly. "I'm telling you this because I think you're a man who'd rather hear the truth than a story."

Klüver set down his cup and looked out of the window. Down in the car park, a lorry driver got out of his cab and lit a cigarette.

"You're right," said Klüver. "I prefer the truth." He turned back to Duchamp. "And the truth is: what you're describing will cost me everything if it goes wrong."

"Yes, that could be the case," said Duchamp.

"And what are you offering me in return?"

"A share of the profits that won't appear in any accounts. And connections you couldn't build up in twenty years of political work. The people who have these connections don't talk to politicians." He leaned forward slightly. "I know men in Rotterdam, Copenhagen and Hamburg who make things happen in the ports. One day, these men will decide which ports in Schleswig-Holstein will become offshore transshipment hubs over the next thirty years, and which will not. I can ensure that you are the politician sitting in on those decisions."

Klüver remained silent. Below them, a coach rumbled past, heading towards Hamburg. The mistake couldn't be his ambition, he thought. The mistake would be carelessness. "I have one condition," said Klüver.

Duchamp waited.

"I don't exist in this business. I have no name, no account; there's no connection to be made. Whatever you pay, it passes through three hands before it reaches me. None of those hands knows where it comes from." He looked Duchamp straight in the eye. "And if anything goes wrong, then you're the one who's gone wrong. I'm the politician who reacts with outrage and demands an immediate investigation."

Duchamp studied him for a moment. In that instant, Klüver realised that the Belgian was reassessing him. He didn't seem suspicious, but showed a kind of recognition he hadn't expected. "Agreed," said Duchamp.

He held out his hand. Klüver shook it, briefly and firmly.

On his way to the toilet — he wanted to break the conversation briefly, and the coffee had been bad — Klüver stopped in front of a laminated sign above the washbasin. It showed a cartoon sparrow, the 'Motorway Sparrow', and underneath, in

curving script: *A dirty sparrow is one who doesn't realise that cleanliness brings only joy.*

He shook his head, then washed his hands and looked at his face in the mirror.

When he returned, Duchamp had placed a thin envelope on the table. "A preliminary overview. Routes, time slots, the names of the relevant authorities in Kiel and Flensburg. Have a look at this and burn it immediately afterwards."

Klüver took the envelope and slipped it into his inside pocket without opening it.

They parted ways in the car park. Duchamp drove south in an unremarkable Opel Vectra with Belgian number plates. Klüver sat in his BMW for a moment, his hands on the steering wheel, before starting the engine.

The bridge pylons loomed in his rear-view mirror as he drove towards the slip road. It seemed to him like a gate that could only be passed through in one direction.

Flensburg, 30 March 2000

The A7 was clear that Thursday morning, and Klüver drove at speed from Kiel to Flensburg. The lunch with Hartmut Brandstetter required a certain amount of preparation — more about attitude than content.

In Flensburg, the sky was silver-grey and the water of the fjord even greyer. A few seagulls were circling above the harbour. It looked as though the season had already opened, even though there were hardly any yachts in the harbour. Klüver drove along the harbour quay and parked the BMW on a narrow strip in front of the Hotel Hafen Flensburg.

Brandstetter was already sitting in the restaurant, at a window table overlooking the fjord. He stood up as Klüver entered. They shook hands and sat down. Brandstetter was fifty-five years old and slightly taller than Klüver. He had

short-cropped grey hair and the toned physique of a man who had been going to the swimming pool twice a week for thirty years. He was wearing a dark suit without a tie. Formal enough for the Flensburg police, casual enough for lunch with an old acquaintance.

"You've hardly changed," said Brandstetter.

"Neither have you. But that's just what men of our age say out of politeness."

Brandstetter laughed. "Probably."

A waitress approached, friendly, and handed them the menu. Brandstetter waved her away. "I'll have the plaice. As always when I'm here."

"Then I'll have the plaice too," said Klüver, "and a bottle of mineral water."

"The same for me."

The waitress took their order and disappeared. Brandstetter looked across the table and asked about the journey. Klüver said the motorway had been almost empty.

"We're noticing that here in the region too," said Brandstetter. "The spring traffic hasn't started yet."

"That's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about," said Klüver casually. "But that can wait. Tell me, how are you? How's your wife?"

"Fine. She's taking it all in her stride. She'd like to get out more often, but her knee, you know. She says it'll get better with the weather. I say it'll stay like this. We argue a bit about it sometimes."

"That sounds just like you two."

"Yes." Brandstetter looked out over the fjord for a moment. A seagull dived down, hit the water, and flew back up with an empty beak. "And you? How's your mother?"

"She's in a care home in Husum. Most days she barely recognises me."

"That must be hard," said Brandstetter.

"Hard for her. For me, things are more or less sorted. She's being looked after, the staff are good and the

setting is peaceful. You can hardly expect more than that."

The waitress brought the mineral water. They poured it, raised their glasses briefly and drank.

"So," said Brandstetter, "the spring traffic."

"Yes." Klüver set his glass down. "They've been complaining to my committee: the tourist boards from Sylt, St. Peter-Ording and Husum. They say the random checks over the last two years are costing them business. Not only are there too many checks near the border, but they claim too many Danes are being stopped. Random checks on early holidaymakers aren't exactly a promotional campaign for the west coast."

"That's rather tendentious, though."

"It is tendentious, yes. But the tourism advisers are in every constituency, and the Economic Committee sends me recommendations that I'm supposed to pass on."

Brandstetter leaned back. "Detlev. You know how random checks were introduced. We set it up after 1995 because border controls were abandoned and the north was wide open to anyone who cared to look. If you in the state parliament give me the mandate to scale it back, I'll scale it back. But then please don't show me BKA statistics two years later saying that heroin seizures on the A7 have plummeted."

"Nobody is asking you to scale anything back. I'm just asking whether the priorities can be shifted. Let's say, for the peak travel season from early to mid-April. You focus more on speed and less on the cargo. We're talking about a week or two. The tourism people will feel that the state government is listening to them, and the statistics will even out over the quarter because you'll bring the priorities back in May."

Brandstetter looked at him. In thirty years of service, he'd had enough men at the table to be able to gauge their tone, and Klüver's tone was now that of a man making a request. Brandstetter heard it for what it was. "I'd have to check that with Kiel."

"Of course."

"And it would have to fit in with our district planning. I can hardly just order it; I have to justify it."

"I'll send you the submission from the Economic Committee. It's official, with a signature and a reference number. You'll have your justification in black and white."

"Good." Brandstetter reached for his water glass, drank slowly and set it down. "For one or two weeks."

"The second week of April would be the decisive one. If you then prioritise speed, you'll be doing the tourism people a huge favour. The second week is the one with the most travel."

"I'll take that on board."

"Thanks, Hartmut."

The fish arrived: two large, browned fillets on white porcelain, with parsley potatoes and remoulade sauce. Brandstetter picked up his knife and fork with the ease of a man who had been visiting this restaurant for years. They ate in silence for a while. Out on the fjord, the first small sailing boat was cruising by.

"By the way," said Klüver without looking up, "I heard something at the Home Office yesterday."

"What then?"

"From the personnel department. You know that the post of deputy head of the State Police Department is coming up."

"Yes, that's common knowledge."

"The vacancy will be published in May. It might, however, contain specific wording that quite clearly steers the profile towards West Coast experience. The Home Office wants someone who knows the region and also the situation at the border."

Brandstetter put down his cutlery. He looked at Klüver, remaining calm, showing no visible reaction. "West Coast experience."

"That's what they're saying. I thought this might be of interest to you. If you take your time preparing an applica-

tion, you'll have a six-week head start on those who only wake up to it after the vacancy is published."

"The State Police Headquarters is a different story from Flensburg."

"Yes. It's a bigger deal."

Brandstetter picked up his knife and fork again. He cut himself a piece of plaice, chewed, swallowed. Klüver watched him and could literally see the thought process at work in the man, calm and slow, but palpable. "Who else knows about it?" he asked.

"Three people in HR. In politics, so far, just me."

"And you're telling me."

"We've known each other for fifteen years, Hartmut. Who else is going to tell you?"

Brandstetter nodded slowly. He finished his piece of plaice, took a sip of water, and looked out over the fjord. The sailing boat had grown smaller, had passed the harbour entrance and was now tacking off the eastern shore. "Thank you, Detlev."

"You're welcome. You'll be one of the best candidates anyway. I'm just helping you get a head start."

"Yes, you are."

The waitress came over and asked if they wanted dessert. Both declined. Brandstetter ordered another espresso, as did Klüver. Whilst they waited, Brandstetter said: "About the shift in focus. I'll sort that out with Kiel next week. Send me the proposal in advance by fax so I'm prepared."

"I'll send it to you this afternoon."

"Good, Detlev. That'll do then."

The espresso arrived. They drank in peace and talked about other things — an old colleague from Brandstetter's time in Husum, the possible closure of two police stations in the district of North Frisia, the SPD candidate for the state election in May. It was a conversation between men who knew and respected one another.

Klüver paid. He insisted, and Brandstetter let him,

because he knew that was the easier way. They stood outside the hotel and shook hands. Brandstetter asked him to say hello to his mother if she was having a good day, and Klüver promised he would. Then Brandstetter walked to his official car, a black Mercedes. He waved briefly from the window.

Klüver got into the BMW.

On the drive back to Kiel, at the slip road to the A7, he switched on the radio. NDR Info was on, the lunchtime news programme, with a report from Brussels about the enlargement of the European Union. Klüver listened with half an ear and thought of Brandstetter, of the way the man had put down his cutlery when the words 'State Police Headquarters' had been mentioned. A brief silence. Brandstetter would do it. He had already done it, the moment the word had been spoken. The rest was now just a formality. And in the second week of April, a delivery van from Skagen would drive unhindered along the A7 to Hamburg.

Klüver shifted into fifth gear and let the BMW pick up speed. Above the fields stood a row of wind turbines, white and slow, turning against the silver-grey sky. Klüver smiled briefly, involuntarily. Eighteen agencies, Duchamp had said. He knew people in at least eight of them.

Bremen, one week later

The building in Bremen city centre was a Hanseatic office block from the 1920s. But unlike the façade, everything behind it dated from the 1970s. There were high ceilings, heavy doors and carpet in a shade of green that had once been fashionable. Framed photographs of old ships — steamers and freighters from the twenties and thirties — hung on the walls of the stairwell. Each picture bore a small brass plaque with the name and year of construction, as if they were family portraits.

On the fifth floor, the Nordlicht Line had rented half a floor. The conference room into which Duchamp was led had wide windows overlooking the city's rooftops and a mahogany table. Seated around it were six men, all older than him. They looked as though they had spent their lives sitting in rooms like this.

Duchamp knew them all. Hannes Sievers, the shipowner who had founded the Nordlicht Line, sat at the head of the table. He smiled like a man who is content as long as the figures add up. Next to him sat a man in a dark blue blazer with gold buttons on his sleeves. His eyes seemed to say that it was best not to show any weakness in his presence. Duchamp knew the other four only vaguely, which was sufficient for his purposes. He sat down without being asked. He had learnt that in rooms like this, you either sit down immediately or remain standing forever.

"The last delivery," said Sievers without preamble, "was four days late."

"The ship suffered engine trouble off Dogger Bank," said Duchamp. "Repaired, carried on, arrived. The goods were intact."

"Four days," said the man with the gold buttons, "in our line of business, is no small matter."

Duchamp looked at him. "In any business with moving parts, there are delays. You have to accept that, otherwise you're in the wrong business."

There was a brief silence. Sievers cleared his throat.

"Before we move on to the next operation," said the stocky man with the receding hairline, "I'd like to go through the stock levels for the second quarter." He pulled a folder from his briefcase.

Duchamp said nothing. He watched as Brinkmann opened the folder and slid a densely typed page onto the table. It was typed in two columns, with subheadings and line numbers.

"Cocaine, Colombia, first grade, twenty-three kilograms in stock, eighteen of which reserved for current distribution,"

Brinkmann read aloud. He sounded as though he were reading out a financial report at an AGM. "Synthetic goods, nine kilograms in total, laboratories in the Czech Republic, last delivery mid-March." He turned the page. "Counterfeit luxury goods, handbags and leather goods, forty-seven items, mainly Louis Vuitton and Gucci, plus twenty-three watches, mostly Rolex and Patek Philippe." He placed the folder on the table and looked round the room. "I suggest we increase the stock of electrical goods in the next delivery. The market for counterfeit mobile phones is developing well."

Duchamp looked at the list in front of him: columns, subheadings, line numbers. In Antwerp, where he'd spent his early years, such a list would have been unthinkable. The men there were just as thorough, but no sensible person typed up evidence and filed it in a folder. He briefly considered saying something, but then let it go. The Germans had their order, and one got used to respecting it, even if it occasionally made the pulse quicken.

"We can discuss the electrical goods," said the man with the gold buttons. "What interests me more is the question of distribution. The Hamburg customers are dissatisfied with the delivery times."

"The Hamburg customers," said Duchamp, "are dissatisfied with anything that didn't happen yesterday. That's a characteristic of this city, not a criticism of our logistics."

The man with the gold buttons gave a short, dry laugh. Sievers tapped the table with a finger. "Nevertheless. What do we do?"

"The next operation will shorten the delivery time," said Duchamp. "Skagen instead of the North Sea off Heligoland. We'll do it in Danish waters. From there it's six hours to Hamburg, on perfectly normal roads, in a normal delivery van." He placed a folded piece of paper on the table, which Sievers unfolded and read. "The warehouse is an old fisherman's hut three kilometres south of Skagen, right by the water, disused for two years. No neighbours in sight."

"And customs?" asked one of the other men.

"Danish waters with Danish customs. The Danes are patrolling a different section of the coast that night." Duchamp paused briefly. He wanted to imply that he had this information first-hand. "That's sorted."

"Who's driving the boat?" asked Brinkmann.

"A Dane. He knows the waters, has worked for us three times, no problems. His name is Lars — that's all you need to know."

The man with the gold buttons leaned forward, the buttons glinting in the light of the ceiling lamp. "And the political side? You'd hinted that you have a new contact in Schleswig-Holstein."

"The political side is sorted," said Duchamp. "I'll keep the details to myself."

The man with the gold buttons opened his mouth. Duchamp looked at him calmly. Then he closed his mouth again. There was something in Duchamp's gaze that cut short any discussion.

Sievers nodded. "Good. Then that's how we'll do it."

The young woman in a simple suit appeared, carrying a tray with a bottle of champagne and seven glasses. She had evidently been waiting outside for this moment — which she probably had. Duchamp took his glass. They clinked glasses. The champagne was good, better than anything else in the room.

On the stairs, he took out his mobile. He wrote a short message to a number saved in his contacts under a woman's name: *Skagen, second week of April. All confirmed.*

The reply came as he stepped out onto the street through the heavy front door. It consisted of three words: *Understood. No contact.*

Duchamp put his mobile away. On the façade of the building hung a bronze plaque bearing the name of a cotton trading firm that had ceased to exist fifty years ago. He looked at it for a moment, then walked to his car.

CHAPTER 2

SKAGEN

Skagen, 9 April 2000, 10.14 pm

The fisherman's hut smelled of salt water that had seeped into old wooden floorboards, of nets that had been hanging on the walls for years, and of fish that couldn't have been fresh for long. Lars knew this smell from his childhood. His father had owned a similar hut, thirty kilometres further west. As a boy, Lars had sometimes slept there, on a bunk that was too short. Back then, he had resolved that this would not be his life. He didn't want to be a fisherman on a small boat off Skagen, growing old in a hut on the beach. He had kept that promise, though not quite in the way he had imagined.

Now Lars was sitting on an upturned wooden crate, drinking coffee from a flask he'd filled that afternoon in his hotel room. The coffee warmed his hands, which was the whole point.

Bent sat on the other side of the room, on an old chair. The backrest was broken, but it held up because Bent distributed his weight. He had his hands cupped around an enamel camping mug and was looking at the floor in front of him.

There was nothing to see there, but Bent liked to look at the floor when he was thinking.

A paraffin lamp on the table was the only light. Bright electric light would have seeped out through the cracks in the shutters, and an empty cabin with a light on raised questions that were best left unasked. The lamp cast a warm, flickering light that swayed with every gust of wind from outside. The shadows on the walls moved in time with it: the hanging nets, the old floats, and a calendar from 1994, which someone had stopped turning the pages of in the middle of July.

The sea was a hundred metres away and remained calm. But Lars knew the feeling when the sea was near. Then a faint vibration could be felt. "Another hour," said Lars.

Bent looked up from the floor and glanced briefly at his watch, an old Casio with a steel case that was scratched in several places. "Fifty-three minutes," he replied, looking back down at the floor.

Lars drank his coffee. They hadn't spoken much over the last three days. That had suited Lars fine, because he wasn't the sort of man to talk when he had nothing to say. Apparently, Bent felt the same way. They'd checked the equipment, discussed the route, saved the positions on the GPS, and that had been enough. Bent knew the waters off Skagen better than Lars, Duchamp had told him, and in the three evenings they'd spent together, Lars had found no reason to doubt it. Bent had once, without being asked, pointed to the map. The current at low tide ran north-northeast, he'd said, and you had to take that into account if you wanted to collect packages out there. Lars had made a note of it.

"Do you have any children?" asked Bent.

Lars looked at him. He hadn't expected Bent to ask personal questions. "A daughter," said Lars. "In Aalborg."

Bent nodded. "How old is she?"

"Fourteen," said Lars.

"I have one too," said Bent. "She's nineteen now and

studying architecture in Copenhagen." He took a sip from his mug. "Her mother raised her on her own, for the most part."

Lars said nothing, because any answer would have sounded wrong.

"It's not that I wasn't there," said Bent. "I was there when I could be. But that's not the same as being there."

He set the mug down on the floor beside the chair and folded his arms. Outside, a gust of wind buffeted the wall. The tarpaulin on the roof fluttered and settled again. "Does she know what you do?" asked Lars.

"No." Bent looked at him. "Does your daughter know?"

"No," said Lars.

"Good," said Bent. It sounded like the conclusion of a man who had long since settled the question in his own mind.

Lars looked at the paraffin lamp, whose flame was flickering again. The shadows on the ceiling shifted.

"How long have you been doing this?" asked Lars.

Bent thought for a moment. "The first time was in 1981. Smuggling cigarettes across the Öresund, in a fishing boat that belonged to my uncle. I was just twenty."

"And since then?"

"On and off." He shrugged. "Electronics from Poland in the nineties. Then nothing for a few years. Now this." He looked at Lars. "And you?"

"Five years." Lars took the last sip of his coffee, which was cold. "Before that, I was in the coastguard."

Bent looked at him, for a moment too long, then nodded slowly. "That explains a lot."

"What does it explain?"

"The way you move. You know how they think." He meant it as an observation. "That's not bad."

Lars put the thermos down and looked at his hands. There was the scar on his left thumb, from a rope that had snapped years ago. Next to it, the smaller scars on his knuckles. His hands knew hard work, just like Bent's did.

"Are you scared?" asked Bent.

The question took Lars by surprise again. He hadn't asked himself that yet. He thought for a moment. "Not of the night," he said at last. "Of what comes after."

Bent nodded. "The account in Malmö," he said.

Lars looked at him.

"Duchamp told me," said Bent. "Not the details. Just that you want to quit after tonight."

Lars said nothing.

"Me too," said Bent. He picked up his mug again and looked into it. "My daughter's getting married in September. I want to be there. To finally be there because I want to, and not just because I happen to be off work." He put the mug down again. "That sounds like a small thing. But it isn't."

"No," said Lars.

They were silent for a while. Outside, the wind blew steadily, force four, just as Bent had forecast that afternoon.

He glanced at his watch. Twenty-two minutes to go.

"It's time to get the boat ready," he said.

Bent stood up slowly. He picked up his mug and put it in his pocket. Then he tapped the outside pocket where his knife was kept and looked at Lars.

"I'm coming with you," he said.

They walked to the door together. Lars lifted the paraffin lamp and blew it out. For a moment there was complete darkness before their eyes adjusted. Lars opened the door.

The wind was biting and smelled of salt. Lars pulled his jacket tighter and walked towards the beach, Bent alongside him. Behind them, the cabin door clicked shut. The 1994 calendar swung back and forth once, then hung still again.

They pushed the boat fully into the water. As Lars waded in, the water up to his knees, he felt the cold seeping through his boots. Bent climbed aboard and started the outboard motor. The hum was deep and steady. Lars climbed into the boat and sat at the helm. He opened the throttle and headed out.

The rigid-hulled inflatable boat was immediately swal-

lowed up by the night. The swell lifted the RIB and let it sink again, steadily and without pause. Bent sat on the port side, one hand on the grab rope on the hull. Lars held a north-northwesterly course. There were still eleven nautical miles to the handover point. On the small GPS screen, he could see them approaching the point where the rendezvous was to take place.

"How much further?" Bent asked after a while.

"Eight miles to go. Twenty minutes."

Bent nodded.

Lars drove on through the night, thinking of his daughter in Aalborg, who was now fourteen and whom he saw twice a month. They had often gone out for lunch together, always at the same restaurant by the harbour. She would talk about school and her friends, and he would listen and sometimes ask the wrong questions. She would then give him a look so much like her mother's that it took his breath away for a moment. She didn't know what he did. Her mother didn't know either, or perhaps she did and said nothing, which amounted to the same thing.

After that night, the account in Malmö would have enough in it to last three years. He had decided to stop after that night. Three years' worth in the account was enough for a fresh start.

Skagerrak, 40 nautical miles west of Skagen, 0:14

At this hour, the bridge of the Santa María Express was lit only by the instruments. The green and orange displays shone onto Pinzau's face. His face looked unfamiliar in the dark glass of the window. He stood at the helm, maintaining a course of 87 degrees at a speed of 19 knots. The ship's autopilot was engaged. Nevertheless, his hands rested on the

edge of the console, because he was so used to it and because it gave him something to hold on to that night.

The ship was 275 metres long and carried eighteen hundred containers. On board were coffee from Venezuela, cocoa from Ecuador, and refrigerated containers of bananas. That was what was stated in the manifest, which the first officer had signed off in La Guaira before setting sail, carefully and in full, as was required.

What wasn't in the manifest was in hold four, section C, behind a wall of properly declared ship's spare parts. Pinzau hadn't seen it himself. He'd been given the coordinates for the handover and a timetable, and had copied both into his personal notebook. The notebook was now in the safe in his cabin. It was the only safe on board to which he alone had a key.

The first officer, Ramirez, had been on this ship for eight years and knew nothing. That was important, Pinzau thought. Ramirez was asleep now.

He twirled the wedding ring on his finger. That, too, gave him a sense of stability at times like these. His daughter Isabela lived in Caracas, and she sent him an email every Sunday. In them, she told him about her life, her flatmates and something she'd seen in the city. The last email had been about a street band playing bossa nova in the rain, and he had to smile at the thought.

He hadn't replied for three Sundays. He didn't want to write her a lie. That was important to him.

"Captain." The voice came from the door. Miguel, one of the two trusted sailors, was leaning against the frame, waiting. He was in his mid-thirties, from Maracaibo. His expression showed that he didn't ask unnecessary questions.

"Everything ready?" asked Pinzau.

"Javier's waiting below. The packages are in the lift."

Pinzau nodded. He glanced once more at the instruments and the radar screen. There was nothing to be seen there

except the usual traffic density up here off Skagen: a few freighters, a tanker twelve miles to the north-east, further back a container ship on a counter-course. Among them was no vessel approaching closer than it should.

Pinzau switched off the autopilot and reduced speed, slowly and steadily, from nineteen to twelve knots. In the logbook tomorrow morning, Ramirez would note a slight headwind, which had indeed been present, and a corresponding adjustment to the course. It was the sort of entry that interested no one. "I'll be right there," said Pinzau.

Miguel disappeared. Pinzau paused for a moment by the window, looking out at the black water all around them. Then he switched the autopilot back on.

On his way to the aft deck, he pulled his jacket tighter around him. The North Sea in April was different from the Caribbean in April. He knew that after twelve years on this route, but it still hit him anew every time. It was a cold that came from everything — the air, the water, the sky and the darkness. The darkness here was denser, less welcoming than anything he knew from home.

Miguel and Javier had already laid the packages out on the aft deck. There were four of them this time, sealed in waterproof black material. Each had a buoyancy chamber made of orange foam. They were larger than Pinzau had expected.

The three men worked in silence. No orders were needed, because everyone knew what they had to do. Pinzau held the line of the first package whilst Miguel and Javier lifted it onto the railing. He felt the weight briefly, then let go.

The package hit the water with a dull thud, which was immediately swallowed up by the sound of the engine and the wind, and drifted aft. The orange buoyancy aid was a small bright spot in the blackness of the Skagerrak. The other three packages followed. It took them four minutes, not five. Pinzau looked at his watch. It was 0:31.

He nodded to Miguel. Javier looked out at the water, where nothing could be seen anymore.

"Good work," said Pinzau. He went back to the bridge. There he increased the speed back to nineteen knots, slowly and steadily. Then the autopilot took over again. The radar screen showed nothing new.

Pinzau sat down in the captain's chair, which stood in the middle of the bridge, and looked at the instruments. In three hours, Ramirez would take over his watch, well-rested, coffee in hand, and ask if the night had been quiet. And Pinzau would say: yes, fairly quiet, considering they'd passed Skagen.

He twirled the wedding ring on his finger and thought of Isabela in Caracas, who was probably asleep at this hour.

He hadn't written her a reply yet.

12 nautical miles off Skagen, 00:45

The wake of the container ship was still visible. The long, bright streak was slowly darkening when Lars spotted the first package. It was drifting thirty metres away from the wake. The orange buoy was barely visible in the darkness. Lars only saw it because he knew where to look.

He opened the throttle and manoeuvred the boat into position. The swell was pushing from the side, and he steered against it. The package was drifting faster than expected because the wind had already caught it, and he had to make a wide turn to catch up with it. Bent stood on the port side with the boat hook. He leaned slightly and countered the boat's movements. This was how experienced seafarers moved, without even thinking about it.

The hook caught the package on the second attempt. Together they hauled it on board. The nylon was wet and

slippery, the weight awkwardly distributed. Lars tied it securely to the lashing lines on the hull. Bent was already swinging the hook over the rail again.

The second package was closer and approaching faster than the first, because the wind was pushing it in their direction. Bent brought it closer on the very first attempt. The third was drifting a hundred metres away. Lars opened the throttle and made a wide turn. The instruments glowed faintly before him.

It took them four attempts to retrieve the third package. On the second, the hook slipped, the package spun round and drifted two metres away. On the third, Bent had it briefly but lost it again after a wave lifted the boat. On the fourth attempt, they managed it together: Lars held the hook and Bent grabbed the wet nylon with his bare hands. They pulled until the package came over the inflatable hull and fell heavily onto the deck.

"Still one to go," said Bent.

Lars scanned the sea with binoculars. The fourth package must have drifted further away. But he found it after a moment; it was drifting a hundred and fifty metres to the north-west, moving with the wind. He opened the throttle.

The boat raced over the crests of the waves, water splashing over the hull, and Lars held his course. The fourth package was fast, but they were faster, and after two minutes he was close enough. Bent stood ready, the hook in both hands, his legs braced against the boat's movement.

He got it on the first try. The package came heavily over the rail, heavier than the others, and Lars and Bent pulled at the same time. Then it lay on deck. Bent swore quietly in Danish and shook out his hands, because the nylon was as sharp as wire in the cold.

They had picked up the four packages in sixteen minutes.

Lars checked the fastenings once more, then set course back towards the coast, which lay 12 nautical miles away.

They sailed in silence. The sea had become a little

rougher, as the wind was now blowing at force five, just as Bent had predicted. The boat had to fight against it. The water slapped against the hull. Lars stood at the helm and held the course. He thought briefly of the bank account in Malmö, then again of the last few nautical miles that lay ahead of them.

Bent looked at the radar screen. "There's a boat," he said.

Lars looked over. A boat was approaching from the north-east. It appeared to be smaller than a coastguard vessel, but larger than a fishing boat. It was heading south-west at 12 knots. Its course would cross theirs exactly if both speeds remained the same.

Lars reached for the phone and sent a message to the number he knew by heart: Boat from NNE, heading 220, speed approx. 12. Crossing our route.

The reply came after ninety seconds: Carry on. Do not deviate.

Bent had been reading along. He said nothing.

Lars carried on. He opened the throttle a little more. The beach was now four nautical miles away. The calculations still held, provided he was fast enough. The other boat held its course and continued at twelve knots.

But then it veered off course. Lars saw it on the screen; at first he thought he was mistaken, but then it was clear: the boat had turned twenty degrees south and accelerated to eighteen knots. It was now heading straight for them.

He typed: Boat has changed course. Heading straight for us. 18 knots.

Bent looked at the screen, then at Lars, then back at the screen. He still said nothing. But Lars saw his right hand slowly move towards the knife on his belt, just the fingertips. It looked like the reflex of a man who had learnt, in bad situations, to keep his hands near sharp objects.

The reply came after a long minute: Abort landing immediately. Continue towards Sweden, Gothenburg, South Harbour. We'll sort it out.

Lars handed the phone to Bent. Bent read it and handed it back.

"Do we have enough fuel for that?" he asked.

"Four hours. We won't make it to Gothenburg like this; we need six for that."

Bent nodded slowly. "Then that's not an option."

Lars typed back: Not enough fuel. What to do? There was no reply.

The other boat was now two nautical miles away and had switched on a signal light, flashing blue and white in turn. Bent spotted it first with the naked eye. "That's the coast-guard," he said.

Lars saw the identification and opened the throttle wide. The bow lifted, the boat shot over the crests of the waves, water splashed over the hull and hit him in the face, cold and salty. The beach was only three nautical miles away. The coastguard vessel was faster than they were. A Danish voice came over the radio: "Unidentified vessel at position fifty-seven degrees fifty-four north, ten degrees twelve east, please identify yourself and stop your engine."

"We're landing," said Lars.

Bent looked at him.

"We're landing, and we'll dump the packages before we reach the beach, and then we'll run." Lars held his course, his eyes fixed on the radar screen. The coast was now visible as a dark strip on the horizon. "Understood?"

Bent pulled the knife from his belt and held it in his hand, the blade pointing downwards. "Understood."

The coastguard repeated the order, for the second time. The voice remained calm and betrayed no impatience. The signal light flashed, blue and white, a nautical mile behind them.

Lars raced towards the beach. The swell grew shallower the closer they got to the coast, and the boat picked up speed. The engine roared at full throttle. Two hundred metres from the beach, they released the securing lines on the packages.

"Now."

Bent worked quickly but without haste. He took the first package, stabbed the float with the knife, once, twice. The air hissed out. Then he threw it overboard. The second package followed, then the third. On the fourth, the blade snapped off. The knife was too thin for the thick rubber of the buoyancy chamber. Lars pulled his own knife from his jacket pocket, stabbed it in and threw the package overboard.

All four packages sank immediately. Lars steered the large dinghy onto the beach with a swing. He gave it full throttle until the very last moment, then pulled the engine up. The hull scraped across the sand. He leapt over the side of the boat, landing with only his feet in the water, and ran towards the dunes. Bent followed him. He was heavier and slower, but he ran without hesitation.

The beach was a hundred metres wide, fine white sand that looked grey in the dark. The grass on the dunes at the edge swayed in the wind. The fisherman's hut lay thirty metres away, its wood dark, the tarpaulin over the roof flapping in the wind. Lars was twenty metres from the water when a shot rang out.

It came from the dunes, to the left of the hut, a single dry crack that the wind carried away immediately. Lars threw himself into the sand. He lay there and waited, then a second and a third shot rang out. Lars turned around.

Bent lay three metres behind him, on his back, arms outstretched, his right hand half-closed around the knife he was still holding. He didn't move.

Lars stayed where he was and looked at the dunes. The grass swayed steadily in the wind. From where he was, he couldn't see anyone, neither by the hut nor in the dunes. He waited ten seconds, twenty. When it remained quiet, he crawled towards Bent, lying completely flat in the sand.

Bent looked at him. His eyes were open and clear, his mouth slightly parted. Lars saw a wound on his left chest. Bent had pressed his left hand against it, and the hand was

dark and wet. He was breathing shallowly and rapidly. With every breath came a sound that Lars had never heard before and which he understood immediately.

"Go," said Bent.

His voice was calm. Lars looked out at the dunes. There was nothing to be seen. "Bent."

"Go now," said Bent, with a short, shallow cough. Lars saw his hand press more firmly against the wound.

Behind them, out on the water, a white light flared up. The coastguard vessel's searchlight swept across the beach, broad and steady. It illuminated the beach in a ten-metre-wide swath. The blue light was flashing too.

Lars stood up and ran.

He ran through the soft sand, which gave way with every step and slowed him down. His legs felt heavy, and after just thirty metres his breath was already stinging sharply in his chest. The dunes lay dark before him. The grass whipped his face as he ran up the first slope. His hands grasped at the grass but found no foothold. He slipped, knelt in the sand, then stood up again. He turned briefly and saw the coastguard's searchlight trained on Bent's body, which lay motionless on the beach.

On the other side, the land sloped down into a shallow hollow. A gravel track ran parallel to the coast. Lars saw it and ran across it, away from the beach.

He heard the engines before he saw the headlights. They were coming from somewhere to his left, and they were closer than he had expected. Then two pairs of headlights appeared, sweeping across the dip and coming along the gravel track.

Lars threw himself into the grass and lay still, face down, arms close to his body. The first vehicle drove thirty metres past him, the second twenty. Their headlights swept across the crest of the dunes and over the beach behind them.

He heard them brake, doors slam, then voices calling out in Danish and radios crackling.

Lars lay in the grass and waited. He felt the cold from

below, through his jacket, through his wet trousers. But he knew that any movement could give him away now. He thought of Bent, lying on the beach. He thought of the gunman in the dunes who had been waiting for them there. He thought that the gunman was either still there or had gone. Both were possible; he couldn't know.

The searchlight from the coastguard vessel continued to sweep across the dunes, the white light casting a broad, even beam. For a moment it fell on the hollow where Lars lay, then it swept past him. Lars watched the beam of light move across the grass and waited until it was far enough away.

Then he stood up and continued running, crouching low. He ran away from the blue lights and the voices and the searchlight.

He ran for an hour, perhaps more, through grass and sand and once through a shallow stream that was as cold as everything else that night.

Then he reached a tarmac road with white markings that glowed faintly in the dark. He followed it south until the first lights of Skagen came into view. At a bus stop on the outskirts of town, he sat down on the bench and waited. His hands were shaking, which he only now noticed. He put them in his jacket pockets and waited for it to stop.

In his right jacket pocket he found the phone. He'd forgotten he still had it. He looked at the display: 4.23 am, and three unread messages from the number he knew by heart. He didn't open them.

The first bus to Frederikshavn left at eight past five. Lars got on, paid in cash, sat by the window at the back of the bus and looked out at the road, which was grey and empty in the dawn light. From Frederikshavn, Gothenburg was three and a half hours away by ferry. From Gothenburg, one could reach Malmö by train in a few hours. He had to think about the bank account there.

Then the image of Bent came back to him, lying on the beach with his hand pressed against the wound. He remem-

bered what Bent had said. He had said, go. Lars looked out of the window at the heathland outside, at the trees and scattered farmsteads. Then he thought of nothing more.

Kiel, 10 April 2000, 00:31

Detlev Klüver switched on the lamp and sat down at his desk once more. Before him lay the documents for the Home Affairs Committee meeting the following week. There were thirty-three pages, densely written, with marginal notes in his own handwriting. He had read the first eighteen. Then he had opened the next page, slammed it shut again and looked out of the window.

Outside, the city was dark. He got up, went into the kitchen and filled a glass with water. He drank it standing at the sink. The water was just an excuse to move around. He put the glass down, went back to his desk and sat down. He turned to page nineteen. It was 00:38.

He did the maths. The ship must be in position, because Duchamp had confirmed to him two days ago that the freighter would reach Skagen on time. It was heading for Copenhagen, where it was due to arrive the day after tomorrow morning. The handover was scheduled for shortly after midnight. Lars and the old Dane were now out on the water, somewhere off Skagen, on a beach that Klüver had never seen and never would. In three hours, the goods would be in the fisherman's hut, the two men would have vanished, and by tomorrow morning none of it would ever have happened.

He read the nineteenth page. It was about the reallocation of border guard posts on the Danish border. That was a topic that normally interested him, because it offered scope for influence. He read the first paragraph, then the second. By the

third, he realised he hadn't retained the second, and started again from the beginning.

The telephone sat on the desk, to the right of the documents. It was a standard landline, black, with a long cord. He sometimes carried it around the flat when he was on the phone.

Duchamp had told him he'd get in touch if there was anything to report. That was the agreement, and the agreement was sound. Nevertheless, the telephone lay there, and he looked at it. He stood up again.

The restlessness that sometimes overcame him whilst he waited was a bad habit. He had never quite shaken it off, although he had learnt to hide it. In the state parliament, in committee meetings, when a vote was close and he couldn't be sure of the outcome, he sat still and upright, looking straight ahead. No one could tell from his expression what was going on inside him. He'd practised that for years. He didn't want to show any weakness to the outside world.

But here, alone in his flat, with the fjord outside and the telephone on the desk, there was no one to see him. He went to the window and could still see nothing new out there. He thought of Lars, whom he had never met and about whom he knew only what Duchamp had told him: reliable, knows the waters, has worked for us three times. Then he thought of Barschel again and of everything that had followed — the affair, the breakdown, the question that nobody asked out loud.

It hadn't been the corruption. Corruption was everywhere, and most people survived it. It had been the carelessness. The conviction that one was untouchable, that one's own position was strong enough to bear whatever was placed upon it.

Klüver wasn't careless. That was the difference, and he held fast to it. It was the principle that underpinned everything else. He appeared in no record, in no chain of evidence a prosecutor could follow. That was the structure that held, as long as no one made a mistake.

He glanced at his watch. It was almost one o'clock. He had calmed down, or at least as much as he was likely to calm down that night.

At one o'clock, Klüver got up, put the documents in his briefcase and went into the bedroom. He lay in the darkness for a while with his eyes open, listening to the wind pressing against the windows, force four, perhaps five. He wasn't thinking of anything in particular. He fell asleep shortly after three o'clock. The phone didn't ring.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRAIL

Kiel, 12 April 2000

It was just after nine when the phone rang. Klüver was sitting at his desk drinking his first coffee of the day. The morning paper lay in front of him, open at the business section. He didn't read the politics section until after his second coffee. Politics before ten o'clock was the wrong way to start the day. Outside, the fjord was grey and still, no wind, the surface as smooth as glass. That was unusual for Kiel in April. He let the phone ring twice before picking it up. "Klüver."

"It's me." Duchamp's voice was calm, as always, with that slight Belgian accent that still sounded foreign after two years. "Do you have a moment?"

"Yes, I do." He stood up and walked to the window, the phone in his hand, as the cord was long enough. Outside, a bus was heading towards the harbour.

"The operation is complete," said Duchamp. "But not as planned."

Klüver waited.

"The goods are lost. The boat has been identified, though

we don't yet know by whom. Lars has taken off." There was a brief pause, but it wasn't long enough to be a coincidence. "The other man is dead."

"What?" asked Klüver.

"My man on the ground. He saw they were about to be taken. He made a call."

The phrasing was precise and said everything and nothing. Klüver was familiar with such phrasing. He used it himself, in committee meetings, when a decision had been made that one didn't want to name. He made a call — that was a pragmatic response to changed circumstances. It was a necessary measure within the given circumstances. It meant the same thing: that someone had made a decision they didn't want to say out loud because it sounded wrong when spoken aloud.

"Who decided that?" asked Klüver.

"It was an on-the-spot assessment," said Duchamp. "Under the circumstances."

"I understood that." Klüver kept his voice steady. "My question was, who decided it?"

"My man on the ground. He saw that the two of them were about to be caught. That's why he acted."

"On your instructions?"

There was a brief pause. "He acted on his own initiative."

Klüver looked out of the window at the street. He thought of Bent, whom he had never met and about whom he knew only what Duchamp had told him: that he was reliable and knew the waters. He pushed the thought aside. Such thoughts were of no use. "That was wrong," said Klüver.

"Yes," said Duchamp.

"Not just morally." Klüver turned away from the window and walked back to his desk. "Operationally. Decisions like that leave a trail. A dead man on a Danish beach raises questions, and questions lead to investigations, and investigations are the only thing that can really put us in danger."

"The Danish police have classified the case as an unexplained accident," said Duchamp. "There's no link to us."

"Not yet."

"No," said Duchamp. "Not yet."

Klüver sat down. The coffee had gone cold, which he only now noticed. He took a sip anyway. "I don't want anything like this happening again without my knowledge," he said. "That was the condition from the start. It's not about protection from the consequences. It's about me having to assess the consequences before they occur. After that, it's too late."

"Understood," said Duchamp.

"Good," said Klüver. He hung up.

The phone lay on the desk in front of him, next to the newspaper he hadn't finished reading. He thought of Barschel. Briefly. He always thought of Barschel briefly whenever something happened that he hadn't fully controlled. Loyalty didn't hold. Silence didn't hold either. That was the lesson.

He needed control. Real, structural control over what happened and over the people who let it happen. That was the lesson. Klüver had learnt it, and he wouldn't forget it. He pulled the morning paper back towards him and found the place where he'd left off, in the middle of an article on the development of container traffic in North Sea ports. He carried on reading. Then he opened the politics section, even though it wasn't yet ten o'clock, and began to read it.

Gothenburg, 13 April 2000

Sören opened his flat door in the middle of the night. Standing before him was his old friend Lars. He looked hollowed out, tired, his clothes still damp and dishevelled. He looked at him for a moment, then stepped aside. It was half

past three in the morning, and Sören didn't ask any questions for the time being. That was what Lars valued in him, since their time in uniform together, and now again.

They walked through the flat into the kitchen and Lars sat down at the kitchen table. Sören took a frying pan out of the cupboard and began to make scrambled eggs. He didn't ask if Lars was hungry.

They sat together until just after six. Lars told him what had happened in Skagen: from the fisherman's hut to the beach, from the coastguard to the shot from the dunes, and about Bent, who had been lying on his back with his hand pressed against his chest. Sören listened without interrupting, his elbows resting on the table. When Lars had finished, he pushed the coffee pot across the table. "Lars, you have to go to the police," Sören said at last.

"On what grounds?" asked his friend. "I was on a boat without papers, involved in an illegal operation, and I fled from the coastguard. Bent is dead, and the goods are gone. What am I supposed to tell the police?"

"Everything you've just told me."

"I've got a first name and a mobile number that no longer exists," said Lars. "And Duchamp has connections, I know that, right up into the authorities, probably even in Denmark and Sweden. If I go to the police, I'll be the one who gets arrested."

Sören looked out of the window at the courtyard. It was slowly getting light. A bird began to sing in the tree beneath the window. "Then get out of here," said Sören after a while. "Go home and pretend nothing happened."

Lars looked at him, and Sören looked back. Neither of them said anything. "Bent is dead," said Lars.

"I know," replied Sören.

Eventually they went to sleep, as Gothenburg woke up outside. Sören slept in his room, Lars on the sofa in the living room. His blanket smelled of washing powder. He lay on his back and heard the first trams and cars and the footsteps of

someone in the flat above. He fell asleep at some point, without realising when.

When he woke up, it was just before noon. Sören was sitting at the kitchen table again, reading the newspaper. He looked up as Lars came in. Lars poured himself some coffee and sat down. The sunlight slanted through the kitchen window. "I've been thinking," Lars said at last.

Sören put down the newspaper, looked at him and waited.

"Duchamp has lost the goods," said Lars. "He thinks Bent is dead, and I'm gone, and the matter is settled." He drank his coffee. "But I don't want it to be settled."

Sören said nothing at first. "You have to go to the police, Lars."

"No, I think there might be another way."

Skagerrak, 17 April 2000

The seabed consisted of flat, even sand. Here and there, tufts of seaweed grew between the stones. Visibility was three to four metres. It was a greenish-grey twilight that made everything appear the same colour: the sand, the water and their own hands. They were at a depth of twenty-two metres, as their wrist-mounted dive computers showed.

The two divers moved in regular patterns across the seabed. They swam fifty metres in one direction, then fifty metres back, and each pattern was offset by ten metres. They seemed to be completing their dive in silence and without haste.

A cod swam past the first diver, close enough to see its scales, and vanished back into the grey. Once, an old anchor emerged from the twilight, half-buried in the sand and encrusted with shells. The two divers saw it and swam on.

After half an hour, the second diver touched the first's arm

and pointed to his pressure gauge. The first looked at his own, nodded and gestured upwards.

They surfaced into the flat, grey April light. A sailing yacht lay at anchor fifty metres away. A Swedish flag flew at the stern and the engine was off. They swam back and climbed aboard via the swim ladder.

Lars took off his fins and sat down in the cockpit. Sören sat down next to him and fetched a flask from the cabin. "Nothing," said Sören.

"Not yet," said Lars.

His friend poured tea and handed him a mug. They drank and looked out at the water. The coast of Skagen lay two nautical miles away as a flat strip on the horizon, barely visible in the hazy April light. Lars set the mug down and looked at the compass.

"We could dive thirty metres further to the north-east," he said.

Sören looked at him.

"The position isn't quite right," said Lars. "Thirty metres to the north-east might be more accurate."

Sören finished his tea and put the mug away. "Then let's swap the tanks," he said.

They swapped the empty tanks for full ones, checked the instruments and went back into the water.

Their second dive began, like the first, in a greenish-grey twilight. But this time they swam thirty metres to the north-east and continued their search there.

Lars found the first package after just eight minutes. It was half buried in the sand. The black plastic of the outer casing was intact; the orange buoyancy device was still attached, collapsed and limp. Lars swam close above the package and examined it. It was one of the three cocaine packets; he recognised it by its shape and size. He attached a small red flag to it and swam on. The second packet lay twelve metres away, the third a further ten metres to the

north-east, both cocaine packets, both intact. Lars marked them.

He found the fourth package next to a flat stone. It was a little smaller than the others and lay deeper in the sand. Its weight had caused it to sink faster. Lars touched the package and felt once again that the weight was unevenly distributed. He signalled to Sören to come over.

Sören hovered beside him and also placed his hands on the package. He lifted it briefly and let it sink again. Then he looked at Lars, who was pointing upwards.

They attached the package to the line that Lars had been carrying over his shoulder and surfaced, making their decompression stops at the required depths. They dragged the line behind them.

Finally they reached the surface and climbed aboard the sailing yacht. Sören had borrowed the boat from a friend in Gothenburg. They took off their scuba tanks, removed their wetsuits and stowed the diving gear in a duffel bag.

"So what do we do now?" asked Lars.

"Now we have to get that package up here somehow. Let me think." Sören picked up the rope, which ran over the side of the boat and disappeared into the sea, and examined it. "That might work. The rope should fit into the winch. And we'll use the boom as a jib."

"Right," said Lars. "We'll make ourselves a crane."

They swung the main sail boom outwards, guided the line out of the water over a pulley and onto the boat. Sören clamped the rope into the large winch, normally used to haul in the headsails, and cranked. The clacking of the ratchet filled the air. After five minutes, they took turns. "Whatever's hanging there must be really bloody heavy," said Sören, whilst Lars continued to crank.

At last, the package slowly emerged from the sea. Water poured in streams from the black outer shell. When it was far enough out of the water, Sören carefully swung the boom

over the cockpit. Lars released the line from the winch and the package fell to the deck with a thud.

They both stood over it, wet and heavy and misshapen on the cockpit planks.

Lars took out his knife and cut open the outer shell. The plastic was thick and he needed strength. Then the material gave way and he pulled it apart. Inside was a second layer of bubble wrap, wound around the contents in several layers. Lars unwrapped it, layer by layer. His hands were steady.

The first layer fell apart, revealing small sealed plastic bags, transparent, filled with objects that sparkled in the April light of the Skagerrak.

They were watches. A dozen wristwatches, with cases of gold and steel, dials bearing names Lars recognised, though he had never worn any of them. Beneath them were more bags, filled with jewellery — necklaces and bracelets and rings, some with stones that shone even through the plastic. And right at the bottom, in a separate foam-padded compartment, lay what appeared to be the main prize: four flat, thin bags containing gold in small bars.

Sören looked at the contents of the parcel, then at Lars, then lifted one of the plastic bags and held it up to the April light. The gold bars lay heavy and still in their foam casing. "I've never held a gold bar in my hand before," he said at last.

"Now you've got four," said Lars.

Sören carefully placed the bag back into the parcel, as if it were fragile. Then he looked at Lars. "And we'll leave the other three parcels down below?"

"We'll leave the other three down below," said Lars. He folded the bubble wrap back over the contents. "You don't want to bring that sort of quantity of drugs onto this ship. And we don't want to become drug dealers."

They weighed anchor and sailed back, first north-east, then south-west. The wind was now blowing at force four and drove the large Hallberg-Rassy quietly and steadily through the swell. The parcel lay in the berth in the cabin,

wrapped in a blanket. Lars sat at the helm in the cockpit, looking out at the water and thinking of Bent.

Sören came out of the cabin with two cups of coffee and sat down next to Lars.

"Lars, I'm still wondering what we should do with the drugs."

"We're heading back to Gothenburg," said Lars. "And then we'll give the Danish police an anonymous tip. The exact coordinates of what's down there."

Sören drank his coffee. "And this?" he asked, glancing briefly towards the cabin door.

"This," said Lars, "is for Bent, for his daughter and for us."

Sören nodded and said nothing more. They sailed on towards the south-west, with the parcel in the cabin, the coordinates on the GPS and the Danish coastline behind them, slowly disappearing over the horizon.

Hull, United Kingdom, 18 April 2000

The station in Queen's Gardens was half-empty that afternoon. Police Constable James Walker was quite happy with that. He preferred to sit alone at his desk, and a rainy afternoon in Hull in April had only one topic of conversation among colleagues anyway: the weather.

It had been raining since morning. Outside the windows, the city lay beneath a sky that had remained grey since daybreak. Walker sat at the back desk in the open-plan office on the first floor. Before him lay a pile of correspondence that had been moved from Sergeant Whittaker's inbox to his own that morning. Whittaker had said: "You've got plenty of time, haven't you, Constable?"

Walker had remained silent, as it was sometimes better not to say anything to Whittaker. After eight months on the job, he had learnt that every pile of paper was an opportunity to

make himself useful. Even if making himself useful today meant sorting routine reports from twelve police districts into the correct filing compartments.

He worked his way through the pile. A missing person's report, a theft report and two faxes were marked for forwarding. Then came a thin blue envelope with the Interpol stamp on the front.

Walker pulled out the letter. It was written in two languages, English and Danish side by side. The letterhead was from the Copenhagen Police; the date was the previous day.

Subject: Identification of shooting victim, Skagen beach, 10 April 2000. Request for assistance in investigating previous British contacts.

Walker read on. A man named Bent Pedersen, born in 1954, a Danish citizen, had been found dead on 10 April on a beach north of Skagen. He had a gunshot wound to the chest. No identification documents had been found on the body. Identification had been achieved via fingerprints. Pedersen had come to the attention of the authorities on several occasions in the 1980s for cigarette smuggling across the Öresund. On one occasion there was a British connection: in 1986 his boat had been intercepted off Grimsby by the local harbour police. The case had later been dropped due to legal irregularities. They were asking for information as to whether this file contained the names of any British accomplices that might be relevant to the current investigation.

Walker read the letter a second time. Then he stood up and went to the filing cabinet against the wall. In the drawer under the letter G, he looked for the Grimsby files from 1986. After five minutes, he found the case involving the Danish fishing boat. He took the folder back to his desk and leafed through it.

The boat had been called Solveig II. The coastguard had intercepted it on 14 September 1986. The cargo consisted of three thousand cartons of cigarettes without tax stamps,

declared as a fish catch. Three men had been on board. The case had been dropped because the searching officer had opened the cargo hatch without a court order. In the appendix, Walker found a handwritten list of the crew's names.

Pedersen, Bent. Hansen, Lars. Olesen, Erik.

Walker paused for a moment at the name Lars Hansen. He leafed through the file and found a pencil note at the end, dated November 1986. The sergeant in charge of the case, long since retired, had noted that Hansen had been identified at the time as a former member of the Danish Coast Guard. Next to it, in the same pencil handwriting: *This may well be the head of the operation.* Walker closed the folder. Then he opened it again and read the note once more.

He stood up and walked over to Whittaker's desk, which stood four rows ahead. Whittaker was fifty-three years old. His ninety-five kilos were squeezed into a uniform tailored for an eighty-five-kilo man; he was reading the Hull Daily Mail. He looked up as Walker stopped beside him.

"Sergeant. An Interpol enquiry from Copenhagen. A dead smuggler in Denmark with a British criminal record via Grimsby. His accomplice at the time, a certain Lars Hansen, was with the coastguard. The investigator noted back then that Hansen was probably the ringleader."

Whittaker folded the newspaper, slowly and carefully.

"And?"

"Pedersen has now been shot dead, Sergeant. On a beach near Skagen, with no ID. It looks like an execution. And Hansen has vanished. If Hansen was the ringleader back then and one of them is now dead, then we should look into this."

"Constable." Whittaker raised his right hand, calmly, with the patience of a man who had made this gesture many times before. "Where is Skagen?"

"In Denmark, Sergeant."

"Where is Hull?"

"In England."

"Very well. Then we agree that investigating a murder in Denmark is a Danish matter." Whittaker unfolded the newspaper again. "You reply to the request politely, send a copy of the file, and note that we have no further information from 1986. Full stop."

"But, Sergeant ..."

"Full stop, Constable." Whittaker looked up briefly. His gaze held the finality of a sergeant who had made this decision two hundred times before. "We're not a James Bond squad here. We're the Humberside Police. We've got five unsolved burglaries in West Hull and a missing person in Beverley, and the Chief Inspector wants to see a clean desk tonight. Denmark can look after Denmark."

Walker nodded. "Sergeant."

He walked back to his desk.

For a while he sat still, looking out of the window at the rain. No James Bond squad. Walker would have had a thing or two to say about that.

Last week he'd gone to the Odeon with Sarah. They'd watched *The World Is Not Enough*, starring Pierce Brosnan. Sarah had liked the film, with the enthusiasm of a trainee librarian looking to escape her daily routine once a week. Walker had been amazed at how far the series had gone downhill. Brosnan wore suits like a bank clerk and looked at the villains as if he were trying to sell them a loan. Roger Moore would have played the same scene with a raised eyebrow, and the cinema would have laughed. *A View to a Kill*, 1985, had been the last proper Bond film. Of that Walker was certain.

If Whittaker called that a James Bond squad, then Whittaker clearly hadn't seen a Bond film in fifteen years.

Walker took out his notepad and drafted the reply to Copenhagen, polite and courteous, just as Whittaker had requested. "We confirm receipt of your enquiry. We are sending you a copy of the file from September 1986. We

currently have no further information beyond the status at that time. Yours faithfully, Humberside Police."

Then he photocopied the enquiry and the handwritten note. He folded the copies three times and slipped them into the inside pocket of his uniform shirt. The original went into Whittaker's outbox along with the reply.

It was just after five when Walker left the station. The rain had eased off. Instead, a wind had picked up, sweeping through the streets from the Humber. Walker turned up his coat collar and walked along Queen's Gardens to the bus stop. A constable in his eighth month on the job was not driving a car; the service to West Hull ran every forty minutes.

At Carr Lane, he had to wait at a red light. The bus hummed quietly, the driver drumming his fingers on the steering wheel. Walker sat by the window and looked out. A car rolled up alongside the bus.

It was long and angular, with the austere lines of a car built to last rather than to be noticed. It took Walker a moment to place it. "Bristol Britannia," said a voice somewhere in his head that knew more than he did. Behind the wheel sat an elderly man with a well-groomed moustache. He had both hands on the steering wheel and was looking straight ahead. Walker watched him through the bus window, with quiet respect.

One day, thought Walker.

The traffic lights turned green. The Bristol Britannia set off and drove alongside the bus for a while before turning left at the next junction. Walker watched it until it disappeared behind a row of brick houses.

Ostend, 19 April 2000

Phillipe Duchamp stood on the balcony on the thirty-second floor, sipping his whisky slowly. The North Sea air was cold and salty, but he remained where he was. After a long journey, this gave him back what he needed. Below to the right lay the port of Ostend, its cranes silhouetted against the evening sky.

Behind him, through the balcony door, he could hear Véronique in the kitchen. He heard the soft click of the cognac bottle. Duchamp had told her about the trip — the name of the city, the number of days, a few details. She'd nodded and hadn't asked many questions. His phone buzzed in his jacket pocket. He took it out and looked at the display. It was a number with a Belgian area code. He answered. "Yes."

"I wanted to let you know," said the voice without preamble. "The Danish Coast Guard received an anonymous tip this morning. Coordinates off Skagen, twenty-two metres deep. Three packages of cocaine, totalling just under seventy kilos. They were recovered around midday."

Duchamp took a sip of whisky and looked out at the sea.

"The fourth package wasn't there," said the voice. "They're still searching, but I don't think they'll find it."

"Thanks," said Duchamp.

"As always."

The call ended. Duchamp put the phone in his pocket and stood still. Seventy kilos of cocaine on the seabed off Skagen, found by the Danish police on the basis of an anonymous tip. Someone had known where the packages were. That meant someone had been there. Lars and Bent had been on the dinghy.

Duchamp thought. The man on the dinghy, the Dane he knew only as Lars. He'd thought his man had caught him, along with old Bent. But Bent was dead and Lars was gone — he'd known that — and now he knew something more: Lars wasn't gone.

The fourth parcel.

He looked out at the sea and wondered what might have been in the fourth parcel. What was Lars planning to do with it now? Was it a problem that would sort itself out, or one that needed attention? Then the phone buzzed a second time.

He looked at the display. An unknown number, this time with a Danish area code. He answered.

At first he heard nothing. Then the caller said, in Danish: *For Bent*. The call ended.

Duchamp looked at the phone in his hand. For Bent. He didn't know any Bent, or perhaps he had known him by another name, a name that no longer mattered. He knew what the words meant, not in detail but in principle, and he stood still on the balcony for a moment, letting them sink in.

Behind him, the balcony door opened.

"Philippe." Véronique stood in the doorway, a glass of cognac in her hand, her eyes tired. "Are you coming in? It's cold."

Duchamp looked out at the sea for another moment, at the cranes and the black water. Then he put the phone in his pocket and turned around.

"Yes," he said. "I'm coming."

He stepped through the balcony door back into the warmth of the flat. Behind him, the North Sea lay waiting in the darkness.

Hull, 20 April 2000

Walker ate his dinner alone, as he usually did. He had baked beans because he hadn't fancied going shopping. It was still raining outside, the same rain that had been falling for two days, grey and steady. He had placed the Hull Daily Mail on the kitchen table, next to his plate. He wasn't interested in the sports news, and he usually knew the police reports before

the paper came out. He leafed through the pages until he reached the business section.

Half a page was devoted to a British-Belgian trade delegation that had visited Moscow three days earlier. They had apparently held talks on energy infrastructure and port logistics, as part of Russia's economic opening. Below that was a photo, black and white, slightly out of focus as all press photos in the Daily Mail tended to be. Eight men in suits stood in front of a building Walker didn't recognise. Beneath the photo were six names, not eight.

Walker ate and looked at the photo, for no particular reason. It was a habit he enjoyed indulging. In meetings, on the bus, whilst waiting, he would look at faces and try to place them. Whittaker called it a waste of time. Walker didn't call it anything; he simply did it.

Six names for eight faces. Two men stood in the background, slightly apart, as if they hadn't wanted to be part of the group or as if the photographer had overlooked them. One was tall and bald. The other was slimmer, wearing rimless glasses, his face turned away slightly. Walker drank his tea and turned the page.

But he turned back again. He didn't know why. It was just a feeling he recognised and had learnt to trust. The face of the man with the glasses was not unfamiliar to him. He wasn't sure, and he couldn't place it. He folded the newspaper so that the photo was on top and placed it on the pile by the door.

The next morning, Walker arrived at the office twenty minutes before Whittaker. He placed the newspaper on his desk and opened the filing cabinet. He had refiled the 1986 Grimsby file the previous day, under the letter G, third row from the top. He took it out and placed it next to the newspaper.

There was an attachment in the file that he had only glanced at before. It was a fax from the Hamburg Customs Office, dated

October 1986, three weeks after the Solveig II had been seized. Someone had enquired at the time as to which company the cigarettes on the ship had originally been addressed to. The reply was brief: Maritime Logistics Group, Ostend, Belgium.

Walker looked at the fax. Then he looked at the newspaper. He stood up, went to the filing cabinet and looked for the folder containing press releases and conference reports from the current year, which the sergeant had created some years back. No one had ever thrown it away, because no one ever threw anything away in this office. The folder contained reports on port conferences, shipping industry days and business meetings, cut out and filed with the care of a man who thought they might be needed one day.

In February, a European offshore logistics conference had taken place in Hamburg. Walker found the report on page three of the folder. A small photo showed the participants at dinner. Beneath it was a caption listing names.

There he read: *Phillipe Duchamp, Maritime Logistics Group, Oostende.*

Walker held the photo up to the light. Then he placed it next to the Daily Mail with the Moscow picture. It took him a moment. Then it fell into place.

The man with the rimless glasses in the background of the Moscow photo — the one whose name wasn't in the caption — was the same man who had been sitting at the dinner in Hamburg. The same man whose company name appeared in a fax from the Hamburg customs office. The same man who had organised cigarette smuggling across the North Sea in 1986, or at least lent his name to it.

And somewhere in a Danish file lay a dead man named Bent Pedersen, shot on a beach near Skagen, with no ID.

Walker heard Whittaker's footsteps on the stairs. He put the Grimsby file back in the cabinet and the conference report back in the folder. He folded up the newspaper and put it in his briefcase. He quickly photocopied the Hamburg fax before

Whittaker opened the door, and slipped the copy in with the rest.

"Good morning, Constable," said Whittaker. He hung up his coat and sat down. "A tidy pile today?"

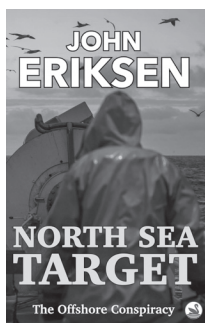
"A clean pile, Sergeant," said Walker. He sat down at his desk and opened the first inbox of the day.

Phillipe Duchamp, Maritime Logistics Group, Ostend. Moscow, April 2000. Walker wrote the name on a scrap of paper, folded it once and slipped it into his wallet, behind his driving licence. Then he set to work.

BOOKS BY JOHN ERIKSEN

THE NORDIC PROTOCOLS

Book 1: »North Sea Target«

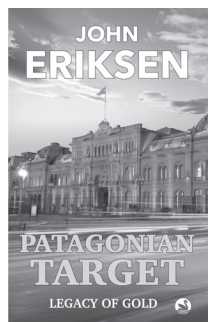


The first book in the series: Off the coast of the Faroe Islands, a fisherman finds animals in his traps that don't belong there. Hamburg-based journalist Erik Wiedner receives explosive documents from the Dutch Ministry of the Environment. And in Hull, a British investigator picks up a lead that points to a Belgian offshore entrepreneur – and to a politician in Schleswig-Holstein whose career

is built on corruption. Three leads, one network, one island.
Available in print and ebook.

"Patagonian Target: Legacy of Gold"

The Nordic Protocols - Book 2

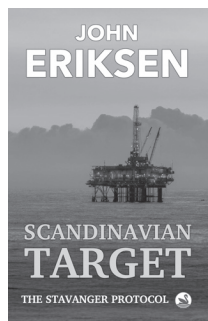


A Norwegian energy CEO finances a military coup in Argentina with fifty million dollars. In Buenos Aires, reformist President Harrison Calder threatens billion-dollar interests—and the generals are ready to strike. When journalist Erik answers his uncle's desperate call for help, he uncovers a network stretching from Bergen's fjords to the Andes glaciers. Erik and his

fiancée Amelia race to prevent the coup. Behind the gold lies a system. Behind the coup stands a network that never disappeared. *Available in print and ebook.*

"Scandinavian Target: The Stavanger Protocol"

The Nordic Protocols - Book 3

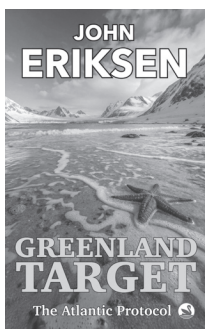


Something is evolving beneath the North Sea. When an oil platform sinks off the Norwegian coast, marine biologist Amelia Wiedner discovers an organism that shouldn't exist—spreading through offshore installations and dissolving steel. Her husband Erik, an investigative journalist, uncovers a cover-up reaching the highest levels of Norwegian industry. Now they're

racing against time before the next platform falls. *Available in paperback and ebook formats*

"Greenland Target: The Atlantic Protocol"

The Nordic Protocols - Book 4

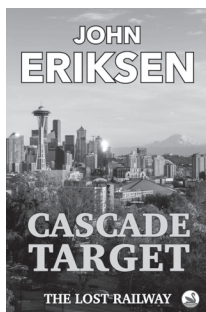


Steel is corroding across the North Atlantic—and no one knows how to stop it. Marine biologist Amelia Wiedner briefs European leaders on a crisis that's dissolving metal on contact and collapsing trade routes. Her husband Erik, an investigative journalist, follows the money to UN strategist Detlev Klüver promoting a radical solution: abandon the Atlantic, follow the Arctic instead. But when the trail leads to Greenland and a remote lithium mine, Amelia recognizes patterns she hoped never to see again. The organism is everywhere. *Available in paperback and ebook formats*

THE PURSUIT SERIES

"Cascades Target: The Lost Railway"

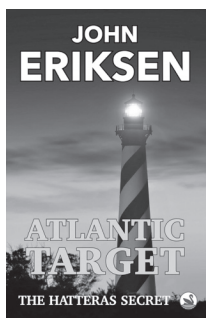
The Pursuit Series - Book 1



This series takes place between »North Sea Target« and »Patagonian Target«. When German journalist Erik and Canadian biologist Amelia relocate to Edmonton, they plan a trip to British Columbia's coast. Instead, they stumble into a criminal enterprise with tentacles deep in Canadian politics. Now they're being hunted through the wilderness of the Pacific Northwest. *Available in paperback and ebook formats*

"Atlantic Target: The Hatteras Secret"

The Pursuit Series - Book 2



After Amelia is kidnapped from a conference in Detroit, Erik launches a desperate search for his fiancée. The kidnapper—crime boss Orson Corbyn—is hunting a shipwreck off North Carolina's coast. With help from New York reporter Billy and Amelia's brother Robin, Erik races to uncover the truth behind Corbyn's obsession. *Available as paperback and ebook*

Discover the world of John Eriksen's international thrillers at john-eriksen.net

