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Andrea hadn't realised that cockroaches could fly until a black beast alighted on the plastic chair beside her, casually folding its wings away out of sight. She did her best to ignore it, knowing her brothers would tease her mercilessly if she were to show the slightest fear. It was a relief when the cockroach made its way down the chair's metal leg and headed for Jóhannes, just as he bit deep into his burger. His powerful jaws worked hard as he tried to cope with a mouthful that was far too big, his thick lips parted to show the half-chewed food between his straight white teeth. Andrea grimaced, he teased her with a wink and an exaggerated sigh of enjoyment, and took an even bigger bite.

His younger brother, seventeen-year-old Daði, was focused completely on his food, while their sweat-drenched parents made do with iced tea. It was June, and although it was winter here in Australia, it was hotter than midsummer could ever be back home in Iceland.

Andrea glanced down at the chair. It was back, the cockroach, long antennae outstretched. Its torso jerked and it set off. A few centimetres more and the thing would be on her leg. She stifled a yelp as she felt long, thin feet pass over her neck and onto her cheek. She slapped smartly and felt its body beneath her palm. She rolled something between her fingers and drowsily opened her eyes. It was a fly, an ordinary house fly, its thin wings caught in her fingers. Revolted, she wiped the remains under the seat and looked around in confusion, first at the towel hung over the rail of the balcony

where she had been lying to hide from the neighbours' eyes, then at the tired date palm in its terracotta pot and the little table with the summer flower she had just bought.

She sighed and ran a hand over her forehead, damp with sweat. The cockroach had plagued her for years, but recently its appearances in her nightmares had become rarer. The memory of the black thing reminded her of her late brother Jóhannes sitting in that white plastic chair as he munched a burger. The guilt pursued her like a bad dream. She hadn't missed him enough, and even, occasionally, had felt relief. He had been an ebullient personality, demanding and pushy, but sometimes capable of being such delightful company that any unpleasantness vanished like dew in the sunshine.

Andrea took long, slow breaths until her pulse settled. She felt for her phone under the sun lounger, keen to see if any likes had been added to her latest post. There turned out to be another twenty, which was better than nothing and served to sweep away the final vestiges of the nightmare. She got to her feet and went into the living room, looking around. Everything was sparkling clean and tidy, colours immaculately co-ordinated. She allowed herself a shadow of a smile, and avoided thinking about the bedroom, the grubby bedclothes and the junk on the floor. The cleaner had come on Friday, but was never allowed in there. Somehow her intention to deal with it herself seldom came to anything.

She went over to the fridge and opened it, took out the bottle of white wine and unscrewed the cap. She reached for a glass, filled it and took a mouthful, and then another. The feeling of wellbeing flowed through her veins and helped dispel the nightmare from her thoughts. Topping up her glass, she glanced at the clock. It was past midday on a sunny summer's afternoon. When the sun shone in Iceland you might as well welcome it, and she wasn't expecting any visitors today, no more than any other day. On the few occasions she met friends, it would be at a coffee house.

Andrea wondered whether to take a taxi down to

Nauthólsvík or downtown, but she didn't really have the energy for either. Her new bikini was great, but she needed to work on her tan or get a decent fake tan to really hit the summer vibe. The beach would be packed on a bright Sunday like this one and it wouldn't be easy to find a spot. If she were to go downtown, that would mean choosing an outfit and putting on make-up. That would take time, as she took care to never leave home without her hair and face perfect.

She checked her phone again. The responses to what she had posted yesterday weren't bad, better than they had been the previous day, but she still wasn't satisfied. She'd have to think fast and do something about this. Last night the nail of her index finger had been pulled off when she had been drunk and crazy, getting herself ready for bed, but her toenails were all right, they were absolutely fine.

Gazing out over the balcony, she saw the new table was great and the flowers looked lovely in the sunshine. A glass of champagne would add the perfect finishing touch to the scene. She emptied her glass in one long swallow, snatched up a cloth and bustled out. Once the table had been wiped clean, she rubbed the latest tanning cream into her right instep and toes, then lightly powdered them.

There was an unopened case of champagne flutes in the bedroom. She'd reckoned they weren't anything special, but now they would come in useful, so she fetched one. She polished the tall glass and stood it next to the flowers before she opened a bottle and filled it. The tube of tanning cream was allowed to lie on the table as if dropped there without a thought.

It was a perfect tableau! She clapped her hands in childlike delight before she perched on the chair and swung the tanned foot up on to the table, where it fitted seamlessly into the picture. She snapped one picture after another. She selected the best one, adroitly altered it, added a few words and posted it online. Satisfied with her day's work, she sipped the champagne then fetched more white wine. It wasn't until

Re she had drunk a toast to herself that she remembered that she had used exactly this arrangement before.

'Ah! I'm an idiot!' she told herself, her glass landing so hard on the table that some of the contents spilled.

Her phone pinged to announce new messages, and she hurried to open them, and saw an image of a slim figure sitting on a bed, hunched forward. She had cropped brown hair, and delicate silver earrings. The woman took something from her cupped left hand and put it in her mouth. A heavy silver ring with a clearly defined motif could be seen on a finger of her right hand, and now Andrea could see that she was feeding herself tablets. They disappeared past her lips, one after another, and she reached for a glass. Water spilled down her chin as she drank and Andrea could see that she seemed to be struggling to swallow.

The horror of what she saw before her was such that she could hardly breathe. She knew this woman who stared into her eyes as if through a fog.

'You'll have to wake up, he's stop... ra...' Kristín Kjarr said in a drowsy voice.

Andrea howled and threw the phone aside, just as the doorbell rang.

Guðgeir hesitated before pressing the doorbell. He shuffled his feet on the heavy doormat while he waited for someone to come to the door. He tried to recall the names he had seen on the mail boxes downstairs. It would probably have been better to go home to fetch a hammer, rather than disturb their new neighbours, he thought. But he rang the bell again.

'Hello, and sorry to disturb you. I was wondering if you might have a hammer I could borrow?' he said as the door opened, cautiously and only half-way. Patterned straps stretched across the woman's slim shoulders and tanned fingers held a grey towel across her chest. Good-looking, but a bit past her best, he thought. 'I took my hammer home with me yesterday, you see. It always happens when you're moving house, backwards and forwards all the time with tools.'

He laughed apologetically, but she showed no reaction.

'Look, it's no problem. I was about to pack it in for the day anyway. There's just one nail that needs to be knocked in properly. I can do it tonight or tomorrow instead.'

She inspected him suspiciously.

'I was sunbathing,' she said, her voice hoarse, and he could smell the booze on her breath.

'Sure. Perfect weather for it. People shouldn't be allowed to hide away indoors on days like this,' he said cheerfully and made to be on his way. 'Sorry to disturb you. I'll sort it out

somehow,'

'You're the one who's moving in?'

She nodded towards the door of the flat that would soon be home to him, Inga and Pétur Andri. Their daughter Ólöf had recently left home to move in with her boyfriend.

'That's right. I'm Guðgeir Fransson. We met in the garage the other day, didn't we? We're planning on moving in at the end of the month, so I'm busy fixing things up for the moment.'

'My name's Andrea and to tell you the truth, I don't have much of a memory for faces,' she said, patting down tousled dark hair. 'Hold on. I'll put some clothes on.'

The door banged shut in his face before he could say anything.

Should have just gone home and not bothered with this, he muttered to himself as he glanced around impatiently. A pot containing a large evergreen plant stood by the door. Its leaves were dusty and he stroked one of them. It was so odd to the touch that it was obvious this was a plant that would never require water. Was it acceptable to have this kind of junk in the corridor of a block of flats? He wasn't sure. The door was opened, all the way this time, and Andrea appeared in a gown that looked to be some kind of Japanese kimono. The black shadows under her eyes had gone, and she had put on lipstick. She smiled wanly.

'No offence, but like I said, I struggle with faces,' she said. Her voice was low and not entirely clear. 'Come inside. I'll have to hunt around.'

Guðgeir followed her into an open area, what the estate agent had called a primary space when they had looked at their flat for the first time. He would have to get used to this. Even though they hadn't yet moved in, he was already starting to miss the cramped but cosy kitchen of their place in Fossvogur. He glanced around curiously. It was similar to their flat, but probably larger. He counted five doors leading off from the central area. The doors to the balcony stood

open and he saw a sun lounger, a green chair and flowers on a table, along with a couple of glasses – one for champagne and one for white wine, and he realised why she had taken so long to answer the door, and so scantily dressed. This looked embarrassing. He had clearly called at the wrong moment. There was probably someone keeping very quiet in the bedroom, waiting for him to be on his way.

'You've made yourselves comfortable here,' he said and coughed awkwardly.

'I live here alone.'

'Really? I thought...' He hesitated and glanced at the glasses on the table.

'Oh, I see,' she said, following his eyes. 'That's from yesterday. I had guests. A guest, I mean.'

'Been here long?'

'A year. From new. Endless trouble with the place for the first couple of months. You're lucky to have missed all that.'

She straightened her back and ran her fingers through her long hair.

'It must have been exhausting,' he agreed, looking around. There was no mistaking that the furnishings had been chosen with care. No expense had been spared. There were paintings on the walls, with other varieties of artworks ingeniously hung between them, everything perfectly co-ordinated. The room had a high ceiling and ample floorspace, in complete contrast to the cramped apartment he had rented during his time in Höfn. That year of indefinite leave from the police had been spent working as a security guard. He and Inga had spent the best part of a year apart. It had been a difficult and lonely time for him, but now they were back together and he had returned to his post with the police force. He was working on what were referred to as special assignments for the moment, but with any luck that would change before long. It had been more than a year since his return home and it had been fine so far, except for the sinister memories linked to their terraced house in Fossvogur. After talking things over,

they had decided to up sticks and start again somewhere new. Their promised land was a newish apartment block fairly near the centre of Reykjavík, and downsizing had put a healthy balance into their bank account, which made him even more confident that the future was bright.

'What are you up to? Is there much that needs fixing in a new flat?'

Andrea opened a drawer and rooted through it. She then pulled over a stool and teetered for a second as she stood on it, opening one cupboard after another as she went through the contents.

'Hang on while I have a quick look in the store room,' she said stepping off the stool after a fruitless search. 'I'm sure there's a hammer there.'

She set off along the corridor, a little unsteadily.

'We decided to take out a wall, and change the kitchen a bit... and put down a new parquet floor. Hey, let's not worry about the hammer. It'll be all right. I need to be on my way home, anyway.'

'A shame they split up, the couple you bought the place from. They were only here a couple of months,' she said and her voice faded as a door closed behind her. He wondered if she was really going to go barefoot to the store room in the basement.

Guðgeir sighed. Outside work, he wasn't used to being left alone in someone else's apartment and it was an uncomfortable sensation. By the door he noticed some eye-catching hooks, more artwork than practical, with no clothes hung on them. A row of pictures in heavy frames stood on a shelf on one side wall. He felt in his pocket for his glasses and went closer to take a look. The largest picture was of a young and strikingly handsome young man. Dark-haired, with long lashes and full lips, his eyes were focused on the camera's lens. A smile flickered across his lips and he radiated self-confidence. Guðgeir felt that the dreamy expression on his face made him look like a model. The next picture showed

five young women, cheerful, with raised glasses. Andrea was one of them, impeccably dressed and glamorous. She was also in the next frame along, which was clearly a family photo, with parents, two brothers and a young Andrea, all in their best clothes. One of the two brothers was the handsome young man in the big picture.

'I found a hammer,' he heard her call out. 'You can hold on to it until you've moved in, or for as long as you need it as far as I'm concerned. It turned out I have two hammers, which is really strange because I don't remember buying a second one. One of those thickheads who was working here must have left it behind, because there's still some of their stuff down there in the bike store.'

She handed him the hammer.

'Builders?' Guðgeir asked as he took it. 'Did they leave tools behind?'

'Yes, or some stuff, anyway,' Andrea replied, the irritation clear in her voice. 'I can't stand them. They never keep a promise, and they're just endlessly pushy the whole time.' She was about to continue, then stopped herself with an apologetic look on her face. 'You're not a builder, are you?'

'Me? No. I'm a police officer.'

He smiled and ran a hand over his chin. Her relief was obvious and he found her embarrassment amusing.

'Really?' she asked with interest. Her eyes were clearer now. 'What do you do? I mean, what sort of cases do you work on?'

'Criminal investigation.'

'What do you do there?'

'I'm in charge of a department at the moment that handles some special investigations. It's temporary,' he added after a pause.

'Do you look for missing people?' she asked, wrapping her arms around her waist to keep the kimono tightly closed.

'If there's a suspicion that there's a criminal element to the disappearance, then yes,' he said, weighing the hammer

in his hand. 'I'd better go and make use of this, thanks.'

He opened the door and she followed him.

'Don't you close cases too quickly? I mean, if there's no body, who decides to end a search?' she asked in a tone of voice that he found alarming.

'I remember a few cases of that kind over the years. It's always a difficult decision to take, but there's a point at which you have to say stop. That's just the way it is.'

'Maybe you remember my brother Jóhannes? He disappeared on 17th June 2000,' she said earnestly. 'He went camping with our brother Daði and their friend, Brynjar. The family hadn't long come home from Australia, and the boys had brought the tent home with them...'

Andrea fell silent and stared at him accusingly, and he realised that she felt he wasn't showing enough interest, but he had simply meant to borrow a hammer and finish what he was doing. She sniffed sharply and looked at him with eyes that were beginning to fill with tears. There was a sense of desperation about this young woman.

'If you walk along by the Sogið river, below the Thrastarlundur café, there's a camping site there in the woods,' she continued. 'I don't think it's in use any more. Anyway, Jóhannes was on his own there and was going to get some sleep while the others went to buy food and take a look at the 17th June celebrations in Selfoss and Hveragerði. Then there was the big earthquake, and there were all kinds of chaos. It was a real quake, pulled roads apart and all sorts.'

'Yes, I remember it well,' Guðgeir said.

'The boys were in Hveragerði when the earthquake hit and they tried to call Jóhannes, but couldn't get through to him. They reckoned the phone system must have been overloaded, so that didn't strike them as anything out of the ordinary,' Andrea said, and drew a deep breath, almost as if she wanted to tell the story, but first meant to offer Guðgeir an opportunity to escape. 'The mobile network wasn't as good as it is now,' she explained. 'The boys didn't get back to

Thrastarlundur until that evening, and there was nobody in the tent. They decided Jóhannes must have gone for a walk, or something. Maybe to see if there was any earthquake damage, understand?'

She looked at him intently, absorbed in the story that Guðgeir was sure she must have told many times before. He glanced at his watch, hinting that he was in a hurry, but without wanting to appear discourteous.

'It's a long time ago now, but of course I remember that day,' he said. 'I was down at the harbour watching the displays with my daughter who was in a push chair then, just as the earthquake happened and the sea turned rough. The ships in the harbour were almost lifted out of the water. At first people didn't realise what was happening, and everyone was terrified. It was worrying having a small child just as all that was happening. Wasn't there another big quake right afterwards? I forget...'

'But do you remember my brother's disappearance?' Andrea insisted.

'I can't say I do, but it rings a bell,' Guðgeir replied, again weighing the hammer in one hand as an indicator that he needed to get back to work. This was a situation he occasionally found himself in, with people telling tales of circumstances their relatives had been caught up in. Normally it would be something trivial, and nothing to do with any of the work he did. He always tried to listen with interest, and sympathised with an old friend who was a doctor, who complained that he had to listen to endless tales of illnesses every time he was out and about. But Andrea's tale seemed to be anything but trivial and he did sympathise. He let the hammer hang from one finger. It wouldn't make much of a difference if he were to tap that nail in now or later.

'They thought that he had fallen into a crevasse or that he might have been by the river when the earthquake hit, and that he could have missed his footing and drowned. Come with me,' she said, stepping back into the living room.