

There's something out there ...

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answer to
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Daily Telegraph

The Day is Dark

Yrsa Sigurdardottir

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Translated from the Icelandic by Philip Roughton



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This book is dedicated to my sister, Laufey Ýr Sigurdardóttir.

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It should be mentioned that although some of the characters in the book have the same names as some of my friends and family members, their names are the only thing they have in common.

—*Yrsa*

31 October 2007

Oddný Hildur looked away from the computer screen, took the headphones from her ears and listened. The wind moaned outside; the wooden walls creaked in the strongest gusts, but otherwise she couldn't hear anything. Strange. She'd had the feeling that there was someone else in the building. She relaxed her shoulders slightly and looked at the clock. A few minutes to midnight. Was it really so late? It was highly unlikely that anyone had come over; most of the others were either asleep or well on their way to dreamland. It must have been her imagination. Who could be up and about so late? Oddný Hildur sighed. She had been working non-stop since coming over to her office after supper. The weather had done a complete about-face, the beautiful, ice-cold calm turning into a noisy gale that whipped up the snow from the morning. The changeable weather here no longer surprised her, although she would never get used to it. Now she regretted not having followed the safety regulations and given notice of her plans; she had avoided doing so out of fear that someone would want to join her. Arnar had talked about doing some more work, but luckily he hadn't shown up. She had very much wanted to be alone with the work she'd been putting off, work that now really needed to be done. There was never any peace and quiet when the others were there too, especially in the evenings after a long day at work.

Suddenly she regretted having slunk over here on her own. Instead of feeling good about her solitude, she was overwhelmed by an odd sensation of discomfort. It was unlike her; she was known to have anything but a fertile imagination, and usually stared blankly at whoever had told the joke which others roared with laughter. It's not like there was even a chance that she would get the joke later. Generally speaking, anything other than pure fact went over her head. This had worked to her advantage in geology, but it was a hindrance when it came to human interaction.

She yawned and shook off her uneasiness. Before shutting her laptop she checked whether her husband Stebbi was on MSN chat, but of course he'd long since gone to bed. The time difference made it midnight for him, and he was supposed to start work at Ártúnshofði at 8 a.m. The morning traffic meant he had to give himself plenty of time to make it all the way from Hafnarfjörður, where they bought their first apartment. It was this investment in real estate that had forced her to accept the difficult job, which paid much better than comparable positions in town – partly thanks to the extra allowance included to offset the long absences from her family. They had waited too long to buy, deciding to do so only after the prices had been driven sky-high, and now they had their hands full trying to pay it off. Fortunately they hadn't taken a loan in foreign currency for the purchase, as so many who now bore the consequences of the falling rate of the Icelandic króna had done, but the payments had increased nevertheless and they were eating into their income. When Oddný Hildur saw the advertisement for the Berg Technology job on the east coast of Greenland, common sense had told her to apply. Her husband was not as keen, since it meant she would be away for four weeks at a time. 'Why live together if we sleep in different countries?' he'd argued. She tried to look on the bright side however: high wages and two weeks off work in between tours. Afterwards they would be able to think about having children, which they'd put off doing due to their financial struggles. But until that day came, Oddný Hildur had to make the best of hanging around in a work camp in a godforsaken place far from civilization.

She gazed disconsolately at the MSN chat window on her laptop. Occasionally when Stebbi was unable to sleep he signed in on the off-chance, but that was not the case tonight. The unpleasant sensation crept over her again. Now she had a strong feeling that someone was staring at the back

her neck. Of course she knew that was impossible, but she still needed to gather the courage to turn around to make sure. She only had two more days left on this tour and knew she was suffering from fatigue. To make matters worse, the weather forecast was bad and she had been worrying about having to travel home in bad weather, or getting stuck here. Some harsh words she'd used during an argument earlier were also niggling at her, and she regretted having reacted so brusquely.

She stiffened.

Either she was going mad or someone was watching her. Could somebody be outside the window? Whoever it was would have a clear view of her in the brightly lit office. She turned in her chair very slowly and peered out into the black night, but saw only her own reflection in the window. Her face seemed to belong to someone much younger than herself; her wide, fearful eyes gave her a childlike look she hadn't seen for many years. What was wrong with her, anyway? She was alone in the office because Arnar would certainly have looked in on her if he'd come as planned. And of course there was nobody outside. Her co-workers would hardly be spying on her in this perilous weather, nor was she irresistible enough for any man to go to such trouble. But what about the residents of the village? Was one of the locals out there? She cursed herself again for having failed to lock the door. What was wrong with her? Of course no one had struggled against the gale all the way from the village; the only ones who would even have considered such a thing were the alcoholics, and she knew they'd all have fallen into bed long ago, dead drunk. The fact that it was Tuesday changed nothing; to those poor wretches, every day was the same. It was out of the question that any of them was up and about so late in the evening, and no one else was likely to hang around outside the window. Although the locals took a dim view of Berg Technology, she thought it unlikely that their antipathy ran so deep that they would seek revenge.

Contrary to all logic, her apprehension would not leave her. She rolled her chair towards the window and turned off the light, but was in no rush to go back to the window and look out. Finally she plucked up the courage.

A strong gust of wind shook the building, then died down. Oddný Hildur gasped when she saw what was outside. A large, bedraggled husky sat in the parking area, staring at her. Its ears moved in the wind, but otherwise it was like a statue. Their eyes met and the dog stared at her without blinking. She gazed back as if hypnotized, her heart hammering in her chest. One of the first things she'd been told was not to approach the huskies, neither to pet them nor to feed them. They were working dogs, and did not associate with people in the same way that pets did back home. She had learned this second-hand when travelling on an emergency medical flight to Reykjavík, shortly after starting work in Greenland. It was the first and last time she would take such a flight. A little girl had wandered into a group of huskies, and her face had been mauled. The sound of her crying, which hadn't stopped all the way to Iceland, still echoed in Oddný Hildur's ears, as did the desperate attempts of the girl's mother to soothe the child. Oddný Hildur's stomach tightened as she recalled how the girl had looked when she saw her several months later, on one of her few trips into the village, playing with an old doll by the side of the road. It was entirely possible that the dog outside was one of those that had attacked the girl. None of them had been put to sleep. She wondered whether she should swallow her pride and call Gísli, who was in charge of security for the area. He would accompany her to her apartment without a grumble, even though he was probably already asleep. He took his job very seriously, performed devotedly and was incredibly obliging. On the other hand, she didn't want to have to endure the ribbing of her co-workers for dragging people out of bed in the middle of the night to walk her the short distance home. She was unpopular enough at the moment. No, she would be fine by herself.

She had heard that dogs did not attack people unprovoked; there was no risk if they were left in peace. She would walk the short distance home briskly, and the dog would stay where it was and then disappear into the night. Before she knew it she would be in bed. Oddný Hildur turned off her

computer and prepared to leave. Before she went into the corridor she looked once more through the window and saw the dog still staring at her. Suddenly it tilted its head, as if it were wondering why she had stood up. She regretted having given in to curiosity; now the dog knew that she was on her way out and would lie in wait for her at the door. However, it did not appear to be that cunning – it just sat there, still as stone. Oddný Hildur tugged at the curtain intending to block the dog's view, but when she emitted a howl she was so shaken that she dropped it. Then she heard a muffled bark, but what startled her most was the creature's sudden movement. She left the curtain as it was and hurried out. This was getting ridiculous. She turned off the light in Arnar's office on the way out, but most of the other rooms were already dark. Their electricity came from a diesel-powered generator and she'd had to get accustomed to using it sparingly, which to her was a completely alien idea.

In the vestibule she put on a thick eiderdown jacket that had proven invaluable in this stormy place and with the damaged face of the little girl in mind she took a scarf from one of the hooks and wound it tightly around her head, leaving only her eyes uncovered. Finally she put on mittens and pulled on the warmest boots she could find. Her shoes were wet, since she had once again forgotten to turn them upside down. The snow on them had melted as she worked, and made them soggy and cold. The same went for her hat, which had fallen off its hook onto the wet floor, so she also grabbed a fur hat to keep the wind and cold out of her ears. No one would miss it, or the scarf and boots, if she came to work early enough the next day. She pushed her trouser bottoms into the boots and stood up stiffly. She was so warmly dressed that she could barely move, and it would be no easier when she got outside, with the wind in her face. She drew a deep breath and opened the front door. Suddenly it struck her that perhaps the dog had been warning her, not menacing her – was there something else she should be afraid of?

The cold invigorated her and she pushed this thought aside. Her unease was probably all due to the video recording she'd just been puzzling over. Just before supper a clip had been e-mailed to her and her co-workers, showing Bjarki and Dóri, the two drillers, mucking around in the smokers' room. Oddný Hildur didn't know who had shot the video; maybe they'd set up the camera themselves, since there were few others besides the two of them who could bear the little smoke-saturated room for any length of time. However, what had caught her attention was not their stupid antics, but something that had shot past the window behind them without their realizing it. Since she had little interest in this kind of foolishness she hadn't opened the e-mail before supper, when she could have asked her colleagues about it. Maybe the apparition behind them was part of the joke? She had tried unsuccessfully to pause the clip and get a better view of it, but the movement was so swift that she never managed to stop it in the right place.

It looked to her like a person wearing some kind of mask or strange headdress, and after it disappeared a red streak was left behind on the windowpane. The person – or whatever it was – had been holding something red, which must have bumped into the window or been dragged across it for some purpose. But what was it? The rapid movement and dark red, irregular streak formed something of a gruesome backdrop to the drillers' pranks, and her failure to figure it out unsettled her. Maybe she would laugh it off in the morning, but right now she wished she had an explanation. For some reason she couldn't imagine stopping by the smokers' room to see if any marks were still there. Deep inside she knew that it was out of fear that the dark red streak was blood.

Oddný Hildur exhaled in the doorway and put her hands in her pockets. The dog was nowhere to be seen. She walked out into the drifting snow and darkness for the last time.

Chapter 1

18 March 2008

Thóra Gudmundsdóttir put down the overview of her last month's work schedule at the legal firm. It was hardly what she would call encouraging reading: the cases taken by her and Bragi, her business partner, along with two paralegals, were numerous, but mostly small-scale and quickly processed. That was certainly good for the firm's clients, but it didn't put much in the till. Nor was it all about the money. The most exciting cases demanded a great deal of work and were more complex than the smaller ones, which were usually run-of-the-mill and monotonous. Thóra groaned inwardly. She didn't dare groan audibly for fear that one of the young lawyers would hear her. If he sensed that she were worried about the firm's workload, he might start thinking of moving on, and they could not afford that. She and Bragi could never run the firm and everything belonging to it – not least the dreadful secretary, Bella – alone. Although it would be difficult to imagine how it could be possible to do her job any worse than Bella herself did it, Thóra had no interest in stepping in for the girl, and Bragi would do whatever was necessary to avoid having to sit and take phone calls. So they would just have to accept this arrangement: these two young lawyers who appeared more interested in YouTube than Supreme Court judgements, and Bella, who also spent more time than was healthy on the Internet.

Thóra turned back to the list of clients and cases. Divorces, bankruptcies and other financial entanglements were the most prominent types of case by far. There were some involving inheritance, paternity suits and sporadic minor cases. It was probably not appropriate to think so, but Thóra longed for more criminal cases. They were much more demanding than divorces, which Bragi had been specializing in recently. He had built up a good reputation in this area, which meant that more and more people turned to the firm for help when their marriages were on the rocks.

Such cases, however, could often be quite colourful. One of her current clients was a man named Trausti, who wanted to change his name following his divorce since his wife had left him for another man with the same name. Of course it was no trouble to obtain permission to name oneself something other than what was recorded on the church register. But things became complicated when this was not enough for Trausti; he also insisted that their children's patronymics be changed accordingly. He wanted to make it clear to everyone that he and not his wife's new partner was the father of his children. Although the laws on namegiving allowed for changes in children's surnames under special circumstances, the legislation had not foreseen this possibility, thus there was no easy resolution to the case. Thóra thought it highly unlikely that a Trausti who did not want to be named Trausti would be permitted to change his children's surname, especially in light of the children's mother being totally opposed to the change. Her protestations only made her husband more determined to have his way, and in the end Thóra gave in and sent a letter describing the matter to the Minister of Justice. Even then Thóra would actually have been completely willing to change her *own* name rather than sign such an unprecedented letter. Over a month had passed since she had sent it, and still no word had been received. She took that to mean that the authorities were wondering if this were some sort of joke.

At the time, her own divorce had certainly brought out less than the best in her and Hannes, her ex-husband. However, they hadn't had the imagination for anything much beyond quarrelling over worldly possessions – which of them would get the flat-screen TV, and so on. Name changes would have been inconceivable. It was probably this experience that distinguished her from Bragi, who enjoyed working on such cases. He had been happily married to the same woman for three decades

and thus had no personal experience of marital failure. Thóra, on the other hand, could easily identify with her clients and what they were going through. As a result, what she always wanted most was to tell her clients to face the fact that lying ahead of them were difficult times in which the spouse who was previously so dear to them would radically transform into the Devil himself and that no one, not even their mothers, would feel like listening to the dramatic stories of the other's cruelty. Enough time had passed since Thóra's own divorce for her to realize how unbearable she must have been; she had taken every opportunity she could in her conversations with others to complain about how impossible Hannes was. She had clearly been extremely unreasonable towards him – and vice versa. In any case, divorce had been the only sensible option in their situation, since they both agreed that they'd had enough.

Now things looked different. Thóra was in a stable relationship with Matthew Reich, who had just accepted a job as head of security for Kaupthing Bank. But they hadn't yet gone so far as to move in together. Not for lack of willingness on his part – it was Thóra who wasn't quite ready. She was still a little over her head at the moment: her two children, Sóley and Gylfi, made sure her hands were always full, not to mention her grandson Orri, who was almost two. Thóra was much more involved in Orri's life than most grandmothers; her son had only been a child himself when he and his girlfriend, Sigga, had rushed rather heedlessly into their biological experiment. As a result, they would never be named Parents of the Year; with their son they behaved almost more like his siblings, and didn't fully shoulder the responsibilities that come with a small child. Thóra realized this was partly her own fault, along with Sigga's parents. It was too easy to take over and do things herself; easier than following from a distance the teenagers' unorthodox attempts at childcare. When Orri was with her, it was as if the child was Thóra's own. She felt happiest when the boy was at home, but when she took him and his young parents into town she must have looked like a dubious mother, to put it mildly. Orri was barely talking and he already called Thóra 'mama', meaning that those who didn't know their situation must have thought she was a bit strange, letting her older children look after the youngest and not seeming to care when Orri cried or called for his mother. But that was the life of a young grandmother.

So it wasn't because she didn't want to live with Matthew that she had responded to his suggestion unenthusiastically. She just found it so comforting to be able to switch to a different life now and then; a life in which everything was clean and tidy; no dirty nappies, no sandwiches to make or piles of clothes to wash. In that other life Thóra could go out to eat at a café, or do whatever else she wanted. That life revolved only around her and Matthew, adults with no obligation to wake up at the crack of dawn on weekends and watch cartoons. Thóra enjoyed that parallel life only on alternate weekends, when the whole gang abandoned her home and went to Hannes and his new wife. Few things cheered Thóra more than the pretend look of happiness on Weekend Daddy's face when she drove up to his house with the youngsters. His smile had grown even stiffer after Sigga fell out with her mother and moved in with Thóra. She reluctantly went along with the others to Hannes' and as soon as he tried to object, Gylfi said simply that if Sigga were made to feel unwelcome in any way he wouldn't come either. His father quickly held his tongue and never complained again about the lack of space. Gylfi was now eighteen years old, which meant that he wasn't obliged to spend time with his father every other weekend; in fact he could have refused to do so from the age of sixteen. Thóra doubted Gylfi realized this, but she had decided not to mention it so that he and his father would remain in touch. And also so that she herself would continue to have some space.

Thóra tried to direct her attention back to her work – a draft of a prenuptial agreement. Part of it concerned a two-storey single-family home which was to be divided into two separate apartments to save the owner (the prospective bridegroom) from the black hole of the currency basket loan that he had taken at the wrong time, during a fit of great optimism.

Before she could get stuck in again, Matthew called. It was rather unusual for him to call her during

working hours – unlike Thóra, he was quite formal and took everything very seriously. For example, he had enrolled in a course in Icelandic for foreigners – he was German – and worked on it very diligently. At first she had helped him out with the homework and had been unable to resist the temptation to slip in a few words at an inappropriately high level. Matthew wasn't at all amused when this came to light, and he stopped asking for her help. Thóra's daughter Sóley had then taken over as teacher's aide. She was only eight years old and thus still bore an almost unlimited respect for every sort of schooling. As a result the two of them had become good friends and Matthew started making quick progress in the language, even though he and Thóra still spoke German together.

'How would you like to take on a little project for the bank?' asked Matthew, after apologizing for calling her at work.

'The bank?' repeated Thóra. She was surprised, since the banks had armies of specialists and lawyers at their fingertips. 'What kind of project?' She stared at the prenup awaiting her on the computer screen. Did they need a contract of this sort? Had their own army of lawyers refused to come anywhere near such trivialities?

'It has to do with a performance bond,' replied Matthew. 'The bank has guaranteed a contract called Berg Technology, which apparently is not going to fulfil a contract it signed with a British mining company. It looks as if the British want to claim insurance, meaning the bank will take the hit. It really is a lot of money, even more in the current financial situation, since the guarantee is in Euros.'

'And what's my job?' asked Thóra. 'Get the mining company to drop their claim to the money?' Matthew laughed curtly. 'No, neither you nor anyone else would be able to do that. I understand they're really hard to deal with, since they're not in the business of giving money away. Even if they get the insurance money out of the bank, they still lose out on the work contract. They're simply cutting their losses.'

'What am I supposed to do?' asked Thóra. 'See to it that the Euros change hands, or maybe try to file a complaint?' This was sounding potentially even duller than prenups, so it might be better not to take the job.

'Neither,' replied Matthew. 'As things have gone, Berg Technology is way behind schedule and is unlikely to be able to make up for the delays that have already occurred. On top of that, their work has come to a complete stop, and it looks as if that situation won't be remedied any time soon. The employees refuse to return to the site, and the work is so specialized that replacements can't be picked up off the street. The plan is to send a team there to assess things and decide whether the bank should hire another contractor if the situation is irretrievable.'

'Can they do that?' she asked. Although her work had focused on contract law for some time now, an actual construction contract had never found its way onto her desk. She was not that familiar with them, but knew enough to understand what they involved, and to realise that they were considerably different from other, more traditional contracts.

'Yes,' said Matthew. 'I'd like to send you the construction contract and the details of the performance bond if you're interested, but I hope you understand that I can't do so unless you've accepted the project.'

Thóra thought it over for a moment. 'Am I to understand that the work is being done overseas?' She was quite prepared to get out of Iceland for a few days. The winter had been the hardest she could remember for a while, and although it was March it was still one storm after another.

'Yes, you would have to go abroad,' he said, without elaborating.

The tone of his voice suggested someplace rather unexciting. She was fairly sure there were no Icelandic contractors working in Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan or any other war zone, so it couldn't be too bad. 'What type of work is this precisely, and where?' she asked, crossing her fingers in the hope that

it involved building a hotel in the Caribbean. She had a great bikini that she hadn't had the chance to saunter around in since God knows when, and it was conceivable that the mining company wanted to branch out and try its luck in the tourist industry.

'They're doing preliminary studies and constructing infrastructure facilities on behalf of Arctic Mining for a mining operation in Greenland. Berg Technology made the lowest bid for the project and has had workers there for nearly a year. Until now everything has gone without a hitch, though the results haven't been exemplary. But now something has happened to unsettle the workers.'

Thóra's mind had begun to wander when she heard the name. Greenland. One of the few countries that was colder and more unbearable at this time of year than Iceland. Her bikini would be of no use, she took this job – what she'd need would be sealskin trousers. She swallowed her disappointment. 'Are the workers in Greenland?'

'No, they're in Iceland. All but two people who are probably still on site. The others came home during their allotted leave, but now refuse to return.'

'What do you mean when you say that the two who remained behind are *probably* still on site?'

'Nothing's been heard from them for around ten days, and they can't get hold of anyone there to go and find out what's happening. It's possible that the camp's communication system has simply failed, but apparently the only way to find out is to go there. If a logical explanation is found for their silence it's conceivable that the other employees can be persuaded to return. That of course would be the best solution for the bank.'

'Could something have happened to them? Could they have been trapped outside, or something along those lines?'

'That's one possible explanation,' said Matthew. 'It's happened before. About six months ago a geologist there disappeared from the camp, a young woman, now presumed dead. She was never found, but it's most likely that she got lost in a storm and froze to death.'

'She was out taking a walk in a *snowstorm*?'

'Nobody knows,' he replied. 'She disappeared, so she could have committed suicide. People tend to get depressed in that kind of isolation.' Thóra was silent, not knowing how to respond. Matthew was quick to add: 'That incident has nothing to do with your task, nor with the disappearance of the two others. In the best-case scenario, they're still alive; the camp's transmitter has failed and they simply haven't been able to get it working again. Other explanations for their fate are rather more gloomy: the weather there has been like it's been here recently, only worse. They wouldn't have been able to survive it if they were anywhere but indoors. In any case, things have become serious, both with regard to these men and to the interests of Berg Technology – and, by association, the bank.'

'Isn't it simpler to call on a Greenlandic emergency rescue team, or the police there?' she asked. 'This all sounds rather frightening, and if something *has* happened, it'll be up to law enforcement to go there to investigate it.'

'The site is in the wilderness on the east coast. Of course there's a small village nearby, but it doesn't have a regular police force, and the locals can't be persuaded to go and investigate either for us or for Arctic Mining. If the men have suffered food poisoning or become ill in some other way, every day makes a difference and we can't waste any time trying to get the Greenlanders to help.'

'I'm not going to be of much help if this is about a disease,' said Thóra. 'And I'm not sure I want to go if I'm going to find people who are seriously ill – or even dying.'

'You wouldn't be going alone,' said Matthew. 'A doctor has already joined the team, as well as a highly experienced rescuer and a former employee of Berg Technology who knows her way around the place. The team will also include an information systems technician, to get the connection working again.' He paused. 'And me.'

'Ahh,' said Thóra. That was certainly a plus. The location was a minus, at least in winter. 'When

the team leaving, and for how long?’ Judging by the number of people involved, this would be an overnight camping trip.

‘We’re scheduled to leave tomorrow morning,’ he told her. ‘The forecast is favourable – for once. We aim to be there for as short a time as possible, but that’ll become clearer when we get there. The weather will have a lot to do with it, of course.’

‘Where would we be staying?’ she asked, suspecting she knew what the answer would be. It was unlikely that a five-star hotel of the kind you might see in the Caribbean was to be found in those parts.

Matthew cleared his throat. ‘At the work camp. If it’s considered safe. If not, then we have to negotiate with the villagers for accommodation.’

Thóra looked at her computer screen and the boring document glowing back at her. She’d just been offered a little adventure, barely five minutes after she’d mentally complained about her unexciting work. She could easily leave the office for several days if the young lawyers took up the slack. They’d just have to spend less time on the Internet during her absence. ‘I’ll go with you,’ she said, but she hurriedly added: ‘Actually, I need to see about getting Hannes or my mother to look after the kids before I can give you a definite answer, but I don’t expect it to be a problem.’

‘Fantastic,’ said Matthew, and the satisfaction in his voice was plain to hear. ‘We can get it all arranged if you drop in here and speak to the person responsible. You’ll be well paid for it, that I can guarantee.’

‘Why aren’t any of your lawyers going?’ asked Thóra.

‘Their hands are full at the moment, and anyway they’re not that interested. It doesn’t suit them. You, on the other hand, are perfect for the job.’

Thóra couldn’t understand why. She was no good at skiing or hiking, and didn’t care much for outdoor activities beyond short walks in good weather. However, the reason was irrelevant. Matthew saw the world differently to her, and as close as they were, he might very well be under the impression that Thóra dreamed of being the first grandma under forty to reach the North Pole with a grandchild in her arms, for all she knew. ‘Those men,’ she said, adding what was pressing most heavily on her mind. ‘Do you think they’re dead?’

Matthew inhaled sharply. ‘One of them has probably died, but hopefully not both.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Thóra, startled. It was unlike Matthew to be so vague.

‘One of the employees of Berg Technology here in Iceland made repeated attempts to gain remote access to the system and seems to have got in, although attempts by others since then haven’t produced any result. So there was a computer connection for a time, even though it was patchy, but now it appears to have been lost for good. In any case, the man managed to look up the latest files and among them he found a particularly interesting one that was created after the rest of the group left the site. The man saved it and then sent it to others in the group, and it seems the e-mail is the main reason why the staff refuse to return.’

‘What did this file contain, then?’ asked Thóra.

‘Everything in it suggests that one of the men is alive, or at least that someone is still at the work site. It’s what caused the matter to be put on highest priority.’

‘What was in the file?’ insisted Thóra.

‘I’ll just send it to you. Some of it is actually impossible to put into words,’ he said. ‘Are you sure you want to see it? I’m warning you, the contents are not for the faint-hearted.’

Naturally Thóra had to see the file, and as quickly as possible. They said goodbye and hung up, and she waited impatiently for the e-mail and clicked on it immediately when it appeared. The attachment was a wmp. file, its name made up of an indecipherable sequence of numbers. The numbers could not refer to the date, and must have been made up by the video camera itself. Thóra right-clicked on the

file and saw that it had been created four days ago, just before midnight on 13 March. She could not determine whether this information had been added by the camera, or the computer onto which the file had been transferred. A wrongly set clock or different time zone could of course have confused the information. She shut the window and opened the attachment itself.

Chapter 2

18 March 2008

The video was short but powerful. It took Thóra a few moments to figure out what was being filmed, as the quality was poor and the image appeared in an impractically small window on the screen. When Thóra tried to enlarge it the image became grainy and even less distinguishable as a result. The sound was also of rather poor quality, characterized by a continual low buzz. It would have been little problem for the characters in an episode of *CSI* to clean it up, but since the legal firm had no research lab at its disposal Thóra had to make do with the unclear sound. That was unfortunate, because it was what could be heard through the buzzing that affected her most. The clip was shot indoors, but it was difficult to determine in what sort of building the camera's operator was located, since his or her hands were extremely unsteady. Thóra caught a glimpse of a bookshelf and chair at the start of the clip, but then the camera was pointed almost immediately down towards the speckled linoleum. That was pretty much the perspective until the end of the clip. Apart from the linoleum, nothing else could be seen but two feet and legs up to the knees. The owner of the legs was lying or sitting on the floor, which in itself was peculiar. Whoever it was also appeared to be completely immobile, which made the scene even stranger. Thóra hadn't seen anyone lying so still since her days of going out on the town when she was younger. Sometimes a guest or two at a late-night post-club party would be lying in the same position, but judging by the footwear this hadn't been any sort of party. The feet were thick, probably woollen, socks and open slippers that had never been and would never be in style, hardly appropriate for a social get-together. The person in the video sat or lay flat on the floor in jeans, his or her legs splayed in either direction. Thóra had the feeling that it was a man, without being able to explain why, since it was impossible to determine the size of the feet or shoes.

In the three minutes and twenty-two seconds that the video played, the legs jerked weirdly for several times. Just before each time a whistling sound momentarily rose above the buzzing, ending with a muffled thud. Then the legs would jerk, and a dark liquid sprayed across the middle of the frame. Over the years Thóra had found herself forced to watch numerous horror films with her son Gylfi, which was probably why she imagined the worst possible scenario. To her it seemed as if a body were being dismembered, or someone was being killed with an axe or a heavy club. But it couldn't be the latter, since there was no screaming or any other sound of anguish. There was only the whistling, a thump and what sounded like the strange crooning of a child. Thóra could distinguish a melody, but could make nothing of the words. Either the child was babbling nonsense or its language was totally alien to her. She reached for her phone and rang Bragi's extension. 'Come here for a second,' she said, squinting as she watched the video for the third time. 'I need to get your opinion on something.' She stopped the video and leaned back in her chair, thinking it over. It had clearly been a mistake to say that she would go along, even though she could always change her mind. She looked askance at the paperwork on her desk and glanced at the documents for the name-change case at the top of a thick stack of other papers. She looked back at the computer screen. Judging from the video, the Greenlandic case would certainly be different.

'What's going on?' asked Bragi curiously as he appeared in the doorway. He was a large man with a teddy bear-ish manner who wore his age well. He was wearing a dark suit with a tie, since he was of the generation of lawyers who thought it brought shame to the profession to dress in comfortable clothes. His orthodoxy, however, was not strong enough to prevent him from loosening the knot of his tie and leaving the top button of his shirt undone, which slightly diminished his respectability.

‘Take a look at this,’ said Thóra, pointing to the screen. ‘And tell me what you think is going on there.’ She started the video and pushed the desk chair aside to allow him to come closer for a better view. Bragi enjoyed anything strange, so this should be right up his alley. She waited until it was over and the peculiar chanting had stopped. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘let’s hear it.’

Bragi’s eyes flashed. ‘If this is related to a divorce, then I have dibs on the case, as the kids say.’ He fumbled for the mouse to replay the video. ‘This is great.’

Thóra interrupted him and told him the basics about Matthew’s offer and the origin of the video. She watched his smile fade as he realized this probably had nothing to do with a marriage at death door. ‘But what do you think this is?’ she asked.

‘Best case scenario, assault. Worst, murder,’ replied Bragi, making no attempt to hide his disappointment that this wasn’t a divorce case.

‘That’s what I thought,’ said Thóra, exhaling. ‘I don’t know, maybe I should pull out of this one. It’s more than a little bit strange, and much more serious than a loss of insurance money.’

‘Well, that depends on how high the insurance is,’ said Bragi. ‘There are tables showing individuals’ monetary worth, so if the poor fellow has been called from this life, we could certainly set the nominal value placed on loss of life against the amount of insurance lost, and measure which is considered more severe.’ He thought for a moment and then added: ‘We would certainly need additional information, like gender, age and education, to make more precise calculations.’

Thóra grimaced. ‘I know that,’ she said, irritated at Bragi’s bad taste. ‘I’m mainly wondering now whether it would be safe for me to make this trip. What if the video was shot at the camp?’

‘I wouldn’t read too much into it,’ said Bragi, patting her shoulder. ‘This could have been anything and shot anywhere. Even at a fitness centre.’

‘I doubt many people wear woolly socks at the gym,’ said Thóra. ‘And what kind of exercise do you call that?’

‘God only knows,’ said Bragi. ‘From what I know, all sorts of things go on at those places. I have a divorce case that all started at a fitness centre. The husband became obsessed with his body and completely forgot about his wife and children. It wouldn’t surprise me if this loser put up with the treatment in the hope of increasing his muscle quantity.’

‘Muscle mass,’ corrected Thóra, without thinking.

‘That’s what I mean,’ said Bragi. He looked Thóra in the eye. ‘I’m getting mixed up with all these digressions. The main point of all this is that for us it opens a door to the banks. Up until now they’ve had their own lawyers, or looked to the big firms. This could be the start of some excellent business opportunities for us. Not to mention the changes that you’re longing for so much.’

Thóra nodded thoughtfully. Naturally, this could be of advantage to the firm and the bank could possibly become a great source of income for them in the future, but she thought it more probable that the bank had simply opted out of the Greenland trip and that this would be a one-off. When it came to other cases that could be handled at a normal pace, there would be no reason for the bank to seek the assistance. On the other hand, clouds had been gathering over the nation’s economy, and even though Thóra didn’t follow the financial sector that closely she hadn’t missed hearing about the attacks by foreign hedge funds on the Icelandic króna and the dubious position of various large Icelandic enterprises. Concepts no one had understood, much less used, a month ago were now on everyone’s lips, most noticeably terms like ‘short selling’ and ‘cross-ownership’. Thóra suspected that her eight-year-old daughter could explain these concepts now. This trend also suggested strongly that more hardship lay ahead, which often meant increased work for lawyers, particularly in debt collection. No matter how dismal she found collecting, it was more than likely that they would happily accept such cases if the economy froze. Chances were that this video was just some nonsense from the Internet completely irrelevant to the employees of Berg Technology. ‘I’ll think about it,’ said Thóra. ‘It’s be-

if I look into this a little further, and if this video turns out to be showing what we both think it might be, then this is definitely out of my sphere. We'd need to call the police.'

'The Greenlandic police?' said Bragi. 'You might as well ask your neighbourhood sports association to undertake research on fundraising.'

'What do you mean?' Thóra exclaimed. 'Is something wrong with them?' She interrupted herself. 'And anyway, what would you know about the police, or anything else in Greenland? You've never even been there.'

'No, maybe not, but everyone knows the situation there is absolutely dreadful. The police aren't immune to it, no more than anyone.'

'Dreadful' was a word Thóra's mother used frequently when she was fretting over something, and Thóra couldn't help but smile. 'In any case the police here in Iceland need to be informed about this. Then they can put themselves in touch with their colleagues over in that dreadful Greenland.'

Suddenly Bragi's eyes widened. 'Listen,' he said heartily, 'you should take Bella with you! She'll look after you, and besides, she's completely expendable for that short amount of time. There are a lot of different traditions and customs in Greenland and I'm sure it will be good to have her along under those circumstances.'

Bella was more likely to trip Thóra up straight into the jaws of a polar bear than come to her rescue. 'Matthew will be there, so I'm sure I'll be safe. I don't need her,' said Thóra, grinning. Then she hurriedly added: 'If in fact I go.'

'Yes, my dear, you should go, and it won't do you any harm to take Bella along,' said Bragi, clearly enthralled with his own idea. 'It would even help me out if she weren't here for the next few days since I have to take care of so many cases. It would be a great relief to be free of her.'

'There's no room for Bella on the plane,' Thóra lied. 'Just do what you were thinking the other day and put up a partition so you don't have to see or hear her.' She stood up. 'I'm going to go and talk to the head of the bank about this,' she said, to put an end to the conversation about Bella. 'I'll make my final decision afterwards.'

'And?' asked Matthew curiously as he followed her out of the bank. 'What are you going to do?'

'I'm inclined to take the job. But still . . . oh, I don't know,' replied Thóra. The head of the bank had turned out to have several years, if not decades, to go before he could live up to his job title. He was in fact a slender young man who smelled so strongly of aftershave that it had taken all Thóra's willpower not to pinch her nose shut as they spoke. She suspected the overapplication was deliberate; his palms were sweaty and he appeared nervous. It was easy to read between the lines and guess that his future at the bank hung on the same thread as the insurance. If the bank had to pay the insurance, he would be handing his marching orders. It seemed there was much more to this case than just the insurance money; there were great expectations for the mine in Greenland, even though there hadn't been much public discussion about it. It was hoped that it would be serviced from Iceland, since the closest town with an airport was Ísafjörður. This could lead to more jobs that would both directly and indirectly serve the mine, but these teething troubles had not inspired the locals to put their trust in this bank company. It could also be the case that political interests were threatening the young man's position. However, he wasn't all bad; Thóra was quite pleased with much of what she heard, especially the fact that he had informed the police about the situation and requested that they do what they could to persuade the Greenlandic authorities to intervene. The bank's interests were not high on the police department's list of priorities. The idea behind the group's expedition was to survey the situation and try as hard as possible to minimize the damage if everything had gone completely awry, so that Bella Technology would be released from its contract. The equipment and tools belonging to the contractor needed to be inspected and the status of the research evaluated so that the bank could either g

another contractor to take over, or persuade the employees to return to the site. According to the young man this was not out of the question; the group had been gripped by mass hysteria but, more often than not, these things passed when common sense returned. If, on the other hand, there really was something unusual about the situation at the site, information pertaining to it would have to be gathered. This would help the bank to demonstrate that conditions were extraordinary and therefore outside the company's control: in short, they could invoke force majeure.

This term kindled Thóra's interest in the case. Force majeure meant that the parties to the contract could be freed from their obligations if they were unable to fulfil them due to circumstances beyond their control. This included war, workers' strikes and earthquakes, or anything else that the parties to the contract could not influence. Thóra was well aware that no war was being fought in Greenland, and nor had she heard of any natural disasters or strikes there, either recently or in the past. This was what pricked her curiosity: there was a definite challenge involved in evaluating a situation in search of what could be considered uncontrollable. Crimes could be categorized under force majeure, and considering the video it was possible that might be the case here; however, that was not at all a given, making this an even more exciting legal issue. And there were other factors involved: whoever did not fulfil his obligations had to demonstrate that he had tried everything within his power to minimize the impact of external factors. In this case, determining such a thing could prove to be more challenging than pinpointing the actual phenomenon that had prevented the party from fulfilling its contract. Was this not precisely what she had craved so much – that very morning, in fact? A challenging case that wouldn't make her yearn to throw her pen at her client's head in fury?

'I'll come,' she told him, without considering the matter any further. As soon as she said it she felt a definite sense of relief and anticipation. She actually also felt troubled, but pushed that feeling aside.

Matthew stopped for a moment in the elegant lobby of the bank's headquarters. He hurriedly stepped away when he realized that he was standing in the middle of the entrance and that the large automatic glass plate doors were about to close on him. 'Really?' Now it was his turn to have doubts. 'You realize it's going to be a difficult trip – it's a real wilderness of ice and snow there.'

Thóra was certainly aware of the snow. It was what was *not* there that attracted her most. Boring routine cases. This would be different; that was for sure.

'What colour are Greenlanders?' asked Sóley, yawning. She was lying in bed and should have been asleep long ago, but in the light of her impending trip, Thóra had decided to ignore her daughter's normal bedtime. She kissed the girl's blonde head.

'They're just like us, darling. Not green, if that's what you think.'

'Mummy,' said her daughter indignantly, 'I know that. I meant whether they were yellow like Chinese people or something like that.'

'Chinese people aren't yellow any more than the Independents are blue,' said Thóra, smoothing down the pink duvet cover.

'What?' asked Sóley, who knew as much about politics as any other eight-year-old child.

Thóra merely smiled at her. 'You'll behave yourself at Daddy's while I'm gone, won't you?'

'Yes, if you bring back a nice present for me,' replied Sóley, smiling. 'Sweeties, too.'

There must be sweets in Greenland. 'I'll buy something,' answered Thóra. 'Maybe a polar bear cub.'

'Oh, yes,' said Sóley, excitedly. 'A real one.'

'Well, I meant a teddy bear,' said Thóra, patting one of the many soft toys lying on the bed. She prepared to stand up. 'It's much too late. Try to sleep now.'

'A dog?' implored Sóley, taking her mother's hand, and Thóra shook her head out of old habit. Sóley piped up at least once a day about getting a pet. More often on weekends. 'Why not? Gylfi g'

to have a baby – why can't I have a puppy or kitten?'

'Good night,' said Thóra, standing up from the bedside. 'We'll wake up at the same time in the morning, you'll go to school and Mummy will go to the airport. I'll try to call you when you've got Daddy's, but I can't promise that it will work.' She responded in advance to the question that would inevitably follow: 'There are phones in Greenland, but I don't know if they work where I'll be. The line might be broken.'

After switching off the light in the pink room and staring for a few moments at the numerous glittering teddy bear eyes, Thóra went out to the garage. She had no rucksack, as Matthew had recommended she bring – a suitcase would have to do. Things became more complicated, however, when it came to what she should pack. No one knew how long she would be there or what the conditions would be like; it was best just to take a bloody big pile of clothes. The doorbell rang, forcing Thóra to put aside any further thoughts on packing. Her friend Gugga was standing in front of the house, smiling from ear to ear and waving two bottles of white wine. 'You've got to let me in,' she said as Thóra opened the door, as though Thóra were in the habit of slamming the door in visitors' faces. 'I just bought a new car and really want to celebrate it with someone.' Thóra could think of a number of ways to celebrate the purchase of a new car without alcohol being involved, but she smiled nonetheless. She was well aware that the car had probably been bought with the highest loan Gugga could get, and that after six months her friend would show up at her door, again with bottles in hand, to drown her sorrows over the sea of debt she was in and her repossessed car. Sometimes one had to live in the here and now and indulge oneself in the spirit of Louis XIV. He would probably have taken advantage of a car loan if such things had existed in his day.

So there was to be no packing until later, when Gugga finally left in a taxi. Around that time Thóra was starting to see double, and when she dozed off, exhausted from the effort of trying to shut the overstuffed suitcase, it was impossible for her to recall what she'd thrown into it.

Chapter 3

19 March 2008

The coffee at Reykjavík City Airport was quite good, even though it was simply called ‘coffee’ and came not from a gleaming chrome machine that spouted steam like a locomotive as it brewed one cup at a time, but an old coffeepot standing on a hot plate, reflecting the style of the tired old terminal. You’d have to go a long way to find such an old-fashioned brewing method in town, where the fancier machines had taken over everywhere. Thóra had even received one of the newfangled contraptions as a Christmas present from her parents. On Christmas Eve she had gulped down immoderate amounts of coffee without realizing that the new coffee was much stronger than the weak liquid she was used to. All that night she lay stiffly with her eyes wide open, barely able to blink, much less sleep. Since then the coffeemaker had been collecting dust. However, now Thóra would not have objected to a double espresso from her machine to perk her up; her head was throbbing and her mental abilities were in a wreck. An overly large dose of coffee would probably help.

‘You should have brought a rucksack,’ muttered Matthew as he sat down next to her in the waiting area. He was still agitated about the suitcase Thóra had turned up with. ‘I told you specifically.’

‘Oh, come on, sweetheart,’ she replied, putting down her coffee cup. ‘It’s on wheels. There are even four of them.’ She had been careful to select the suitcase that would be easiest to pull behind her, and it most resembled a well-trained dog, following almost automatically at her heels. Luckily she had chosen the bag before gulping down all that wine.

‘Thank goodness they all work,’ said Matthew, just as unimpressed as he’d been when he picked her up half an hour ago. Thóra hadn’t been able to disguise how sleep-deprived and hungover she was, which was not at all to his liking. She felt too poorly for that to make any difference to her, which seemed to irritate him even more. ‘Winters are rough out there.’ Matthew had clearly gone and bought himself a new rucksack. Thóra came to this conclusion partly because she did not believe that he would have already owned one, but also because his huge backpack was so brilliantly clean that it could have come straight from the shop that very morning. Apparently that hadn’t been his only new purchase, because, for once, he was wearing a proper coat. Beneath this, though, he was wearing pressed, neatly creased trousers and a shirt that was actually quite casual for him. At least he’d had the sense to skip the tie. But Thóra was pretty sure he had one or two in his backpack, just in case.

‘I know,’ said Thóra, trying not to let his grumbling about the suitcase get on her nerves. One of their fellow travellers, whom they had met at the check-in counter, had confined himself to a quick, dubious glance at the bright green lump of plastic. He had introduced himself as Dr Finnbo Kolbeinsson; he looked to be approaching fifty, with a slender build, and his battered hiking boots suggested that he was quite the outdoorsman. On the large rucksack that he swung as if it were empty were the remains of all types of stickers and patches from distant lands. Thóra had the feeling that Matthew’s new and shiny rucksack inspired the same indignation in the doctor as her suitcase did, possibly even more. At least she wasn’t putting on pretences.

Thóra couldn’t wait to show off to Matthew everything she’d thought to put into her big bag. She had no idea precisely what was in it, but hoped some sensible garments were hidden therein. She was actually pretty certain that Matthew had packed without knowing anything about cold weather conditions and camping, and although she of course could personally be considered no expert either, she was quite familiar with sudden weather changes and winter conditions, a familiarity that she had hopefully survived her intoxication. When Matthew tore everything out of his rucksack at the

destination in search of woollen socks, and his ties and shirts were flung around the room, she could get back at him for all his grumbling. Still, she decided to change the subject, since his nagging and her headache were not a good combination. 'I'm trying to memorize who's who,' said Thóra, looking over the group, which had spread out around the little airport, each member armed with a mobile phone. There was the only flight scheduled at this hour – the bank had made arrangements with Air Iceland to fly them to Kulusuk, where the company made regularly scheduled flights in the summer. From there they were to be transported north by helicopter, to a small village near the work camp. It wasn't yet clear how they would travel the final stretch of their journey, but it was considered likely that they would find one or two cars from Berg Technology in the hangar by the helicopter pad, where they would usually have been stored. The employees who had gone home had left them behind, unless they had been stolen the vehicles should be there. Thóra prayed to God that that was not the case; if they had to walk, she would be in trouble. Her luggage was hardly designed for long hikes.

'I can't say that I know all the names, but I know who does what,' said Matthew, apparently willing to abandon the suitcase discussion. 'There aren't that many on the team, and you'll get to know them quite quickly in our isolation.'

'Of course, of course,' said Thóra. 'Everyone looks okay to me.' She watched as the youngest member of the group by far, Eyjólfur Þorsteinsson, stuck a coin into the gumball machine standing near one wall. The machine swallowed the coin but refused to deliver the gum, and after trying peacefully to get his money back, the young man pounded energetically on the machine's large plastic bowl, tossing the gumballs around inside it. This produced no result and he walked away angrily. Thóra hoped that this wasn't representative of Eyjólfur's technical skills, because Matthew had said he was responsible for everything connected with the site's computer system. In fact it was he who had first set it up, and thus knew all of its ins and outs. He looked to be about twenty-five years old, slim with a dark complexion, and probably popular among the women, handsome as he was. In that regard he was the absolute opposite of Alvar Pálsson. Alvar was fortyish, and had been enlisted for the expedition because of his experience on rescue teams that had connections with Greenland – he had been among the Icelanders recruited to assist the Greenlanders in the organization of a rescue-team system there. Thóra didn't know what his main occupation was, but guessed that he was probably a lighthouse keeper or had a similar job that involved little human interaction. His face was fiery red and he had barely responded when Matthew tried introducing Thóra to him; he had simply snorted something and carried on trying to attach his walking stick to his rucksack. If Thóra had been forced to describe him, the word 'bad' would have featured frequently; the poor man had bad teeth, smelled bad, looked in bad shape, and to make matters worse, was badly shaven.

'Where did the geologist go?' asked Thóra. 'The woman?' Of the team's six members there was only one other woman besides Thóra, Friðrikka Jónsdóttir. She had worked on this project during its early days but had resigned and gone to work for Reykjavík Energy. Matthew told Thóra that a decent sum of money had persuaded her to take some days off to come with them, since she knew the project so well and was likely to be able to assess the status of the drilling without needing to first familiarize herself with everything.

'She must be here somewhere. At least, she'd already checked in by the time we did. Maybe she's just out having a cigarette, or on the phone?'

'Did she see the video?' asked Thóra.

'No,' he replied, setting his briefcase down on the table between them. 'There was no time for that and perhaps it wouldn't have been appropriate either. If she'd backed out, there was no need to have bothered her with unnecessary details.' He opened the briefcase and took out a hefty stack of spiral-bound notebooks. 'I wanted to give you these. It's probably good for you to have them on the plane if you want to use the time to read through them. They're all about the construction contract.'

Thóra took the entire pile, which was far thicker than the contracts she was used to. ‘But the Friðrikka might still have been able to say whether the video was taken at the site, and maybe even have recognized the feet by the slippers,’ she said.

‘Yes, of course,’ said Matthew. ‘Still, we decided not to show this to anyone but you and the doctor. We’ll see how it goes once we get there. Maybe then it’ll be time to let the others watch it. The IT guy could also possibly identify the feet, since he knows the group even though he didn’t actually belong to it.’ He shut the briefcase. ‘But I’m hoping that we won’t need to do that.’ Looking around, he added: ‘We’re actually missing one passenger.’

‘Oh?’ asked Thóra. ‘Who’s that?’

‘Bella,’ he replied, not meeting her eye.

‘Ha ha,’ said Thóra sarcastically. Her hangover felt even worse at the thought of her secretary. She stared piercingly at Matthew, who was still avoiding her gaze. ‘Don’t even joke about it – is that meant to be funny?’

‘No,’ said Matthew hesitantly. ‘Your partner Bragi called me last night and fobbed her off on me, saying we didn’t even need to pay her. It’ll help to have someone who can take care of typing everything up on the computer. I called the bank this morning and they gave it the green light – they were ecstatic, even, since it’s not often they’re offered something for free.’ He was gabbling now, and added even more rapidly: ‘She’ll be helping the group out before you know it, and you won’t even know she’s there. There’s a lot of information that needs to be entered on the computer, so her skills will undoubtedly be of great use to us.’

‘You’re kidding!’ said Thóra. ‘I have a hunch that the seal hunters in Greenland would be better at typing up information than Bella, and they’d certainly move faster.’

Matthew made no attempt to argue this point. ‘I couldn’t say no,’ he hissed. ‘You’ve always said how pushy Bragi can be, and he gave me no other choice than to accept the help.’ He smiled sheepishly. ‘Believe me, I tried many times to decline it.’

Thóra was speechless. She was both frustrated with Matthew and furious at Bragi, and couldn’t decide which of them she would rather lock inside a cupboard with Bella for a week. But her hangover prevented her from arguing about this any further. The entrance to the airport was not visible from where they sat, but she could see the check-in counter, where all was quiet. ‘Maybe she’ll miss the plane,’ said Thóra, looking at the clock on the wall. ‘I bet she misses the plane.’ Then she started thumbing through the documents in the hope that her anger would dissipate.

‘Yes, maybe,’ said Matthew, awkwardly. ‘But we won’t make a fuss about it if she turns up too late. It was only this morning that I received final confirmation that she could come, but I don’t know when Bragi delivered the message to her.’

Thóra ground her teeth and continued to read. There was a total of five volumes of various thicknesses and she could see immediately that only two of them mattered: the contract terms and the letters sent between Berg Technology and Arctic Mining during the negotiation process. The other three volumes contained information about geological studies of the area, the climate and drawings that had been scaled down so small that Thóra was unable to make out the tiny print. One of the notebooks was labelled ‘Job Description’, and its contents covered the details of each of Berg Technology’s tasks and how they would be paid for. Thóra knew that she would have to read over the last volume, especially if everything on site had gone to pot. ‘Why is no one from the contractor joining us?’ she asked without looking up. ‘This is a rather large contract and I doubt that everyone from the company was working on site. At least not the management.’

‘It’s not a big company,’ replied Matthew, clearly relieved that Thóra was talking about something other than his having given in to Bragi. ‘It’s very specialized and has managed to make a name for itself in geological research and related feasibility studies, though mainly in the field of geothermal

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