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ANNA
KAROLINA
**SAVAGE
CONGRESS**

Translated from the Swedish by Hanna Löfgren





echo

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1

FUCK, fuck, fuck! Adnan glanced in the rear-view mirror and saw that the shitty Saab was still following him. No doubt about it. They were after him. Floor it or die. Shit!

He'd noticed the Saab at the Statoil petrol station, badly parked. Didn't think anything of it then. He filled up and took some deep breaths. Loved the smell of petrol. He shook the nozzle, making sure not to drop any on the paintwork – diamond black. He'd been exploding with pride when he picked up the keys. He grew with the car. Respect for him grew. He saw how other guys got that manic look in their eyes. He was somebody. He and the car – together they were a total pussy magnet.

He checked out the chick on the till as he paid, tossing a packet of condoms on the counter. He grabbed another packet. It was a new day. Glorious! Time to start fucking again after nearly a year and a half of jerking off in prison. There hadn't been much to turn him on in a small cell with cold, concrete walls and a tiny, hard, lumpy bed. He'd really had to use his imagination.

The fucking Saab had started following him immediately. Out onto Drottningholmsvägen. They'd let another car in between. Thought they were smart. Switched into the lane next to him on Ulvsundavägen. Then in behind him again. Fuck, fuck, fuck! Milorad's boys were going to butcher him this time. Skin him alive.

Last time he'd only just been spared. His honour was smashed to pieces. He'd kissed their shitty, disgusting boots. Licked them. They'd laughed hysterically. Laughed as only Yugoslav bastards do. They were after their money! Preferably yesterday.

'With interest, it's three hundred and fifty grand,' Milorad had said in his hoarse, dark voice that would scare even a deaf person. He'd shot his henchman a look that had said, *One more kick*. The brute, built like a gorilla, had taken aim and landed a kick with all his strength, right in the solar plexus. Fortunately, the Gorilla didn't have great technique, but the kick was forceful. He would have

preferred to see stars. Instead, everything was black. Panic. Lungs refused to take in air. Lying in the foetal position like a fucking baby. They stood around him. A wall of filthy boots. Laughing. Kicking. Spitting. The pressure eased off. Even more laughter. Rubbed mud in his face. In his mouth. Mud mixed with anabolic piss. 'You and your Arab mates have a week. After that, you'll be eating more than just mud.' More laughter. More kicks. That was then. Never fucking again!

The Saab was still in the rear-view mirror. He had to come up with something smart. Fast. Impossible to have ingenious thoughts when his pulse was racing. He spotted a Shell a bit further ahead on the left. To his right – a residential estate. He could lose them in there for sure. At least he had a hot ride – 520 horses under the bonnet. He floored it and managed to put some distance between them. Houses flashed by in his periphery. He gripped the steering wheel tightly and swung into the estate. Had a brilliant idea. Slammed on the brakes: right, right. Usually worked. A classic. At the first intersection he took a right and then floored it. Tyres screeching. Spinning the steering wheel back around. Careening. Straightening up. Next intersection, right again. He'd nearly shaken off the Saab.

Fuck! Concrete barriers blocking the road!

Foot on the brake.

Put it in reverse.

Fast as fuck.

Back into first.

Shit!

Headlights in the rear-view mirror, getting closer and closer. Crash! His head hit the steering wheel. Dazed. Must get out of here. His honour would never survive another round. Mamma wouldn't either. And last time she only saw a bump on his forehead and a fading black eye. Accusingly, his Pappa had let him know that she hadn't slept for several weeks after that. Adnan had avoided his parents for as long as possible but when his younger brother Samir had his school graduation he had no choice but to show his demolished face.

The crash had spun the car halfway around and he accelerated again. The Saab was right up his arse. Bang, pulled back, bang,

pulled back. He wasn't going to fucking take it. Floored it again. The Saab seemed even more determined and came after him. Hit him harder this time. Bang. Adnan skidded. Saw a tree that was too close. Swerved. Spun around like a fucking ice princess. One spin, two spins. Lost count.

And then it stopped. Two thoughts – out, and run. Run faster than Usain Bolt. Powers of reaction at 100 per cent. Even so, headlights shone a millimetre from the door. Two lights suddenly became a thousand on his retina. Someone tore open the passenger door. A strong palm hit his face. Then he was lying face down in the mud again. Legs still in the car. Arms pinned. He tried to free himself. Protested. Thrashed his body. Protested even more. The grip tightened.

Suddenly it felt like his eyes had been stabbed with knives. It burned, his eyes watering. Those fuckers had teargas! They howled as if possessed. Adnan howled as well. Amid all the turmoil: a yell that seemed too soft for what was going on. Something was wrong. Really wrong. Then the penny dropped. He breathed a sigh of relief. Managed to separate the screams and understand. Coppers. It was the cops. He was saved. He wasn't going to die. Not today. Not now.

'Police! Lie still for fuck's sake! Or it's just going to get worse!' The cop-bitch screamed. Others screamed as well. Bodies, weighing down each arm.

Relief turned to rage. Who the hell did they think they were?

'Fucking pigs! You nearly fucking ran me over!' The tear gas was making him bawl like a hysterical bitch. The way they cry when he disses them. Utter humiliation. The snot ran. 'Why the fuck did you use teargas? You fucking cowards!'

'It's pepper spray. If you'd just calm down we can start washing it out. It's not dangerous.'

Snot was streaming out of his nose. Hanging off his chin like freshly cracked egg white. 'I don't fucking care what it is! Fuck!' His eyes were burning.

'It's just chilli, nothing dangerous.'

If the bitch didn't shut up he was going to hit her. Crush her. Not give a shit about being at a disadvantage. Not give a shit about the consequences. 'Fuck!'

A deeper voice: 'I know it really hurts but if you'd just calm down...'

'I am fucking calm!'

'Relax your arms so we can sit you up.'

Adnan released the tension in his biceps, which he had pumped to the point of explosion earlier in the day. Best to go along with this.

'That's it, good. Now let's get you sitting. Easy now.'

He tried to open his eyes to see the jerk who was babbling like a preschool teacher. The blink reflex made it impossible. He made out three people, maybe four, in the short moments he managed to keep his eyes open.

The preschool teacher stretched out his hand. 'Here's a wet wipe,' he said.

'Why did you try to get away from us?'

'How the fuck was I supposed to know you were cops?'

'Hey, Adnan, we're trying to be nice here. We're going to treat you the way you treat us. That's fair isn't it?' The preschool teacher seemed to be in charge.

'Nice! Is that how you treat somebody when you're being nice? You were fucking going to kill me and then you go and spray teargas in my face.'

'It's pepper spray, made from chilli. It's not dangerous.' The bitch just wouldn't drop it about the chilli.

He didn't bother answering this time. Ignoring it would have better effect. He wasn't going to lower himself to chatting with a cop-bitch.

'We signalled and used a stop sign,' said the preschool teacher. 'Didn't you see that?'

He hadn't. The only thing on his mind had been the Yugos, mud and urine. Shattered pride. 'By the way, how'd you know who I am?'

'We're working on the Nova project. Do you know it?'

Adnan grew in pride. From teary chick to notorious dreaded criminal. He was on the Nova list! So dreaded that he was a part of the cops' biggest project on the most criminal of criminals in all of Stockholm. One of the biggest in the whole fucking city, maybe the country. Most dangerous. Most fierce. Massive.

'I know what you do,' he said.

‘Do you have anything on you?’

The bitch was staring at Adnan. ‘We’re going to search you so you may as well show us what you’ve got.’

‘Search all you like. You’re not going to find anything anyway.’ He was as clean as snow. He hadn’t used, hadn’t dealt, not since he went in.

‘You can stand up. When did you last take anything?’

‘Are you a bit slow or what? I’m not mixed up in that shit anymore.’

‘What did you use to take then?’ The bitch was just too much.

Adnan protested through silence.

‘What did you throw out the window?’

What were they talking about?

‘Stop playing stupid, we’re going to check what it was anyway.’

Suddenly he remembered that he had chucked a chewing-gum wrapper when he turned out from the Statoil petrol station. Was that the reason for all this? A chewy wrapper? Extra-mint flavour. They were welcome to look for it. He hoped it would take them a while.

The preschool teacher took over. ‘Haven’t you just done eighteen months for possession of drugs?’

‘If you say so.’

‘Surely you don’t want to do more time? You know you don’t have a driver’s licence. You’ll be charged for driving without one.’

Adnan blinked to get a better glimpse of the preschool teacher.

‘I’m not going in again for just that am I? My other offences were written off.’ He wiped his face with the back of his hand.

‘That was probably because you went in for drugs possession and got a reduction on everything else. But I can let you know that prison is on the table for these offences, so you should probably think a bit. Whose car is it, by the way?’

‘A mate’s.’

‘What’s your mate called then?’

‘Why? He doesn’t have anything to do with this.’

‘I was just going to be nice and let your mate, Diar, know that he’s lost his brand-new car.’

‘You can’t fucking take the car!’

‘Listen, Adnan, we never do anything we’re not allowed to. You’ve been stopped in it three times in the past month and you’ve been seen in it several more times. Therefore, you are considered to be the one using it and it will be seized. So you’re going to have to come up with a good story for your mate now. I can’t imagine he’s going to be very happy?’

‘Oh, come on, charge me, do what you like. But don’t take the car! I’ve only borrowed it!’

‘You know we’re only doing our job. We have two compelling reasons to take the car. The first is that you are regularly driving without a licence and the second is that you have debts to the Enforcement Authority. It would probably seem strange to them that you have debts of almost half-a-million kronor that you can’t pay and yet at the same time you’re driving around in a car worth more or less the same amount.’

‘But it’s not my fucking car!’ This was bad. He was sweating. His eyes still running. His nose too.

Diar’s car seized. Diar’s treasure that Adnan had borrowed while Diar was inside. At first he’d only thought to use it once. Then Diar’s sister had called him asking for a lift. That suddenly made it seem legit, even without Diar’s consent. Then it became a bad habit and Adnan was driving every day.

Diar: the guy who hated physical activity. He’d lost at least ten kilos since he got caught. Adnan had seen him in court. It looked like he’d been locked up in Auschwitz. Clothes hanging. Cheeks caved in. Really, Diar could be beefy if he wanted to. He had the genes. If he could only gather the energy to drag his bony arse to the gym occasionally. But he couldn’t be bothered. Thought body builders were wasting their time.

Adnan had tried to get him to understand the value of pumping iron: chicks, respect, envy. More chicks. The list could go on. But Diar didn’t care. For him, a cool car was enough.

A car that one of the cops was now climbing into and driving away. Fuck! The cops had fucked up his life! Worse than the Yugo bastards.

2

THIRTEEN police officers were waiting for the team meeting to begin. Some were completing the compulsory ‘pre-driving check’ and the garage was full of activity. Oil levels, windscreen-washer fluid, antifreeze, tyre pressure, sirens, blue lights, indicators, headlights. Did they have barricade tape? Did they have all the forms? The infringements booklet? Seats were lifted – now and again some pothead would manage to smuggle a bit of dope from their underpants and stuff it into any suitable place they could find. The list of what was required could be longer if you belonged to the more thorough group of constables. On the other hand, those who had shortened the list were drinking coffee out of the Authority’s Nespresso machine or eating up the last of what was in their lunchboxes.

Amanda was running late and quickly ate her homemade lasagne. Once you headed out there was no guarantee of having time to eat during the shift. Seconds before 10 p.m. she ran into the meeting room as she swallowed the last bite.

She took off her portable radio so she could sit down. The chairs weren’t meant for uniformed police officers who had bulky belts heavy with a range of gadgets: handgun, pepper spray, baton, handcuffs, extra rounds, radio. They had complained for a long time that the armrests weren’t ideal, but that was just one of many suggestions that were ignored by the person responsible for purchasing inventory. The chairs were an ongoing topic of conversation at the station. Despite seeming like a petty detail, it was irritating for those who had to put up with it every day.

Amanda wondered what might happen during the night shift. You never knew. It was one of the attractions of the job.

Västerort offered a mixed bag of what was on offer. Kista: with a shopping centre full of cultural collisions and kleptomaniacs. Hässelby: a kingdom of social-welfare cases. Vällingby: a meeting place for alcoholics. Bromma: home to the Hells Angels and the

odd call-out from the airport. Sundbyberg: the young bachelors' suburb for weekend drunkenness and the accompanying black eyes. Here even the rapping, identity-searching boys got a foothold – wannabe hip-hoppers, wannabe armoured-van robbers. Alvik: gangly, pimply rich kids who seemed to have only ever learnt one sentence: 'Actually, my father is a lawyer.' Nockeby: one psych case after another. On the other side of the Nockeby Bridge, beautiful Drottningholm: the Royal Family's well-frequented castle with its crazy stalkers. Ekerö: cows on the loose. Solna: football hooligans. Rinkeby/Tensta/Hjulsta/Akalla: here you came across all the good stuff, but without the 'actually, my father is a lawyer' rubbish. Drugs of all sorts: brown, green, white. You name it. Small-time robbers, big-time robbers, robbers who robbed each other.

Amanda and her partner were sent to identify a dead baby at the Astrid Lindgren Hospital. A boy who had only lived for four months. His mother and father had been arrested for infanticide. A much-debated phenomenon: shaken baby syndrome.

Tobbe had a one-year-old himself, so Amanda understood why he'd left the room. The teddy bear by the baby's side had been too much.

'I know,' she said. 'Next time it'll be me who won't cope.' She smiled at Tobbe and he looked thankful.

She thought that'd never happen. That she wouldn't cope. She'd said it for his sake. Didn't want him to feel stupid for having cried. A big strong police officer with a gun and baton who cried. But that was okay. She wished she *could* cry. She hadn't in years. Not since... She pushed the memory away.

They were silent for a while. The only sound came from the windscreen wipers, on the lowest setting.

They drove on through the Stockholm night. Patrolled the industrial areas. Solvalla campground. Dark houses in Äppelviken. Bought freshly baked rolls at a bakery. Stopped a few cars and conducted a few blood-alcohol tests. Suddenly the mobile phone in her pocket vibrated. Amanda went through a few names in her head, wondering who the text message could be from. The seconds of uncertainty before she saw the name on the display were equally suspenseful. She was happy when she saw the name: Adnan.

Adnan from a couple of days ago. A strange feeling spread in her stomach. Delight? She'd felt he would be in touch again. The question had only been when. Two days was faster than expected. The unwritten rule was three, wasn't it?

She read. *What's up I want too see you.*

The spelling mistake bothered her. No hugs or kisses or: 'It was nice to meet you.' Not even a smiley. Was he shy? Didn't dare show how he felt? Was he even interested?

'What are you sitting there smiling about?' Tobbe was looking at her and the mobile phone, which had maybe taken up a bit too much of her attention given that she was the one driving.

'Just a text message.'

'Oh, come on!'

'I might have met somebody.'

'Okay, who? Someone at the station?'

She tried to put the phone back in her pocket again and concentrate on the road at the same time.

'Definitely not. You can't get together with a cop.'

'Thought not.' He nudged her arm. 'Tell me then!'

'I don't know much really. We've just talked a bit. He seems nice.'

'Okay, where did you meet?'

She thought for a second about whether to be truthful or not. 'At Konsum supermarket.'

'What, really?'

'Romantic, isn't it? In the frozen-food section. He looked really good so I just approached him and started talking about the chicken.'

Tobbe threw his head back against the neck rest and laughed. 'You're completely nuts!'

'What should I have done then? He was fucking hot.'

'But hey, if I'm going to approve of this guy then I have to know what car he drives.' Tobbe, the car fetishist. He was fanatical and knew every manufacturer, every model, car part, screw.

'A Mercedes.'

'That's good.' He nodded. 'Model and colour?'

'Black. I've got no idea what model.'

'A black Mercedes. Sounds dodgy.'

Not a bad guess. Adnan Nasimi was a serious criminal and Nova

marked. Not something she was planning on letting Tobbe or anyone else know about. She knew she was taking a big risk, but she was forced to. 'Who knows in this city?'

'Did you get the licence number?'

'Ha, you know me. I've already checked. It's not registered under his name. I'll probably have to look into it a bit more.'

'Yeah, that sounds a bit fishy.'

'I suppose he's borrowed it.'

She chose not to tell him about the information she'd got on the owner of the car. He was on all of the police registers. 'I'm going to dig a bit more next time I see him.'

'So you're going to see each other again then?'

'Yes, at least if I'm interpreting his message correctly. Why are guys so bad at being clear?'

'What did it say?'

'*What's up, I want to see you.* Is it okay to write like that?'

'Yes, he wants to see you.'

'But it wouldn't kill him to go into a bit more detail. It's not nice to be so blunt.'

'Don't start over-analysing. He wants to see you. That's it.'

'Do you think he just wants sex?'

'Of course he does.'

They were interrupted by the police radio that had been unusually quiet the last half hour. A male radio operator came on air: '*Area three from three-zero. 33-3120. Over.*'

Tobbe picked up the microphone. '*Listening Solna. Over.*'

'*Please attend Maltesholmsvägen 73 in Hässelby where we have a woman who's been raped. It's apartment 5, and Didriksson is the name on the door. Over.*'

'*Understood. Over.*'

'*The door code is 3588 and, for your information, the rape allegedly took place at another location and it's the victim's friend that has called us.*'

'Yes, understood, we're on our way. Over and out.'

'*Over and out.*'

Amanda swallowed and tried to seem unaffected by what she'd heard. But she couldn't block out the truth. Memories of her sister

and what she had gone through welled up and overwhelmed her for a few seconds. Then she forced herself back to the present and concentrated on making her voice sound normal. She must have managed because Tobbe didn't seem to have noticed anything.

'You know how to get there?' he asked.

'Sure thing.'

She turned on the blue lights and wound through the sparse night-time traffic. She decided against sirens; there was no reason to drive like a lunatic to get to a rape when the perpetrator was no longer at the scene. A few flashing lights was enough. Of course, it was always fun to drive fast.

It was warm and stuffy inside the apartment and the sweat was running under her bulletproof vest. The place stank of urine and when Amanda passed the bathroom she saw a litter tray next to the toilet that was probably the culprit. In the living room there was a worn fabric couch against one wall and a coffee table littered with cigarette butts from the deep, overflowing plate that was being used as an ashtray. Stella Didriksson was curled up in an armchair staring at Amanda and Tobbe with red, puffy eyes. Mascara had run down her pale cheeks and her dark hair hung in wisps.

'She called me and told me she'd been raped.' Stella's friend started to tell Amanda and Tobbe before they had even had a chance to introduce themselves. 'Then she wouldn't say anything else. I think she's terrified; she's never like this.'

Amanda squatted down next to Stella. 'Hi, my name's Amanda. I understand what you've been through is difficult to talk about but you don't need to feel afraid in front of us. Unfortunately we've met many girls who have experienced similar things.'

Stella nodded.

'Do you want to tell us what happened?'

Stella shook her head.

'Then I'd like to ask you a question that I'd like you to answer yes or no to. Have you been raped this evening?'

Stella seemed to hesitate, and then mumbled: 'Yes.'

'I have to ask you why you don't want to tell us about it.'

‘I just don’t want to.’

‘Is it difficult for you when my colleague is listening?’ Amanda nodded towards Tobbe.

‘No, it doesn’t matter. But I didn’t want you to come in the first place. It was Emma who called, I fucking regret telling her.’

Stella let out a sob and hid her face in the crook of her arm. Amanda waited a moment and let Stella calm down.

‘Where did it happen?’

Stella shook her head but didn’t say anything.

‘Was it outside or inside?’

‘Inside.’

‘Do you know the man who did it?’

Stella’s lips quivered when she answered: ‘I know who he is.’

‘Can you tell us a bit about what happened?’

Stella suddenly changed pitch. ‘You don’t understand, I can’t tell you a fucking thing!’ she yelled. ‘I’m going to be given hell, I can’t!’

‘In what way will you be given hell?’

‘I’m not going to say anything else now, I can’t.’

Amanda glanced at Tobbe, who had lingered in the doorway. He shook his head as a sign that it wasn’t worth trying anymore. Amanda’s frustration grew but she knew there was no point in pressuring her.

‘Stella, we don’t need to talk anymore today, but I hope that you choose to let us know who the person is later on. Since it seems that he’s threatened you it feels especially important that we find out who it is; you probably aren’t the only person he’s done this to.’

Stella sat in silence.

Amanda stood up to stretch her legs. She’d been squatting for too long. ‘However, I’d like you to come with us to the hospital for a medical examination. It’s really important that we do that now to have the greatest chance of finding some evidence.’

‘I’ve already had a shower.’ Stella curled up even more in the armchair.

‘That’s a shame, but there could still be some evidence left, and possible injuries. They are really good at what they do there and there’s nothing to worry about.’

‘No, I don’t want to.’

‘Stella, remember that you might change your mind later and then we’ll have no physical evidence at all.’

‘I’m not going to change my mind.’

‘Why? What is it that’s made you so scared?’

‘I just don’t want to. I know how it works; it wouldn’t lead to anything anyway. It would just leave me in a really fucking bad situation. Nobody would believe me – why would they?’

Amanda understood where Stella was coming from. It was word against word between a man and a woman and, besides, she was as high as a kite. Amanda chose not to report the drug use. It wouldn’t exactly increase the chances of Stella talking.

Amanda tried one more time: ‘I’m fully aware that it’s a long process to go through for anyone who reports a rape and that it isn’t always possible to prove. Of course rapes nearly always take place with no witnesses. That’s why it’s especially important to find out as soon as possible who it is, since there could even be traces of you on him. The more time passes, the harder it gets to achieve a guilty verdict in the end. It’s also a chance for you to stop him from doing the same thing again, to somebody else.’

Stella sat in silence for a while and seemed to be thinking. When she answered, Amanda knew that they weren’t going to get any further today, probably not any other day either. ‘He’s going to do it again.’ She looked at Amanda with enlarged pupils. ‘And he’s done it before. If you’re stupid and believe anything then sometimes you end up in trouble. But I’ll survive. I always do.’

It was five o’clock in the morning when Amanda and Tobbe left Stella Didriksson and Hässelby. Neither was particularly satisfied after failing to get Stella to cooperate.

As much as Amanda understood Stella and other women who couldn’t cope with the process of countless interrogations and examinations that were waiting if they reported a rape, she also despised them. It was due to their weakness that others were put at risk of being exposed to the same thing. Like her sister, Sanna.

Amanda remembered it like it was yesterday. Their last conversation. Sanna had slurred her words on the phone. Amanda thought she was high.

‘You have to help me, Amanda, you have to...’

‘What’s happened?’ Amanda had closed the door to her room and sat on the edge of the bed. She didn’t want her parents to hear.

‘That poor monkey.’ Sanna sobbed.

‘What are you on about? Pull yourself together! Tell me what’s happened.’

‘I couldn’t help her.’

‘Who?’

‘The monkey.’

‘Sanna, what are you doing? What have you taken?’

‘You don’t understand. You’re never going to. He’s always going to have this on me.’

‘Who?’ Silence. It sounded like Sanna was blowing her nose.

‘Hello? Sanna, are you there?’

A mumbled: ‘Yes.’

‘Who are you talking about? Tell me what’s happened.’

‘He raped me.’ Only just audible.

‘What?’

Sanna snorted. ‘See. You don’t believe me. Just like that cop.’

‘Of course I believe you. I’m just shocked. When did it happen? You’ve reported it to the police then?’

‘Yes, but there’s no point. He didn’t believe me, I could tell. So he’s going to keep doing it. He’s going to keep going as long as he likes and there’s nothing anyone can do about it.’

‘Who? Did you tell the police who it was?’

‘Yes, but he was so offhand, as if it was my fault.’

‘But that means they have a name at least. How do you know him? Was it that guy you’ve been talking about? Sanna? Hello! Was it...’

‘I’m hanging up now, beautiful. Love you.’

‘Wait...’ There was silence. ‘Sanna?’

Amanda called her sister again but it went straight to voicemail. A chill spread across her chest and she didn’t know what to believe. She could hear that Sanna was high but she knew she would never lie about something like that, even if Amanda hadn’t understood the

part about a monkey. Raped? For god's sake! But if she'd reported it the police should do something. They would find whoever had done it. Amanda tried to call one more time but got her voicemail again. Sanna's voice sounded happy and alert.

'I love you, too,' she said quietly to herself when she'd finished listening.

At the time she'd been blissfully unaware that it would be their last ever conversation.