



The
LIBRARY
of
SHADOWS

MIKKEL BIRKEGAARD

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

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Mikkel Birkegaard lives in Copenhagen. *The Library of Shadows* is his first novel. It was first published in his native Denmark where it was a national bestseller, and has now gone on to be published in seventeen languages.

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The Library of Shadows

MIKKEL BIRKEGAARD

Translated from the Danish by
Tiina Nunnally



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1

Luca Campelli's wish to die surrounded by his beloved books came true late one night in October.

Of course this was one of those wishes that was never formulated either in speech or thought, but people who had seen Luca in his antiquarian bookshop knew it had to be true. The little Italian moved among the stacks of books in Libri di Luca as if he were strolling in his own living room, and without hesitation he could direct his customers to precisely the stack or shelf where the book they were seeking was located. Luca's love for literature became obvious after only a brief conversation with him, and it made no difference whether it was a question of a worn paperback or one of the rare first editions. This sort of knowledge bore witness to a long life with books, and Luca's authority among the shelves made it difficult to imagine him outside the comforting atmosphere of muted devotion that suffused the antiquarian bookshop.

For that reason, this particular night was unique because, aside from the fact that it was to be Luca's last, a whole week had passed since he had set foot in the shop. Eager to see his place of business again, he took a taxi straight from the airport to the bookshop in the Vesterbro district of Copenhagen. During the ride he had a hard time sitting still, and when the cab finally came to a halt, he was in such a hurry to pay and get out that he gave the driver a more than generous tip, simply to avoid the trouble of waiting for change. Appreciatively, the driver lifted Luca's two suitcases out of the boot and then left the elderly man standing there on the pavement.

The shop was cloaked in darkness and looked anything but hospitable, yet Luca smiled at the sight of the familiar facade with the yellow letters 'Libri di Luca' painted on the windowpanes. He lugged his suitcases the few metres from the pavement over to the front door and set them down heavily on the doorstep. The autumn wind took hold of his coat as he unbuttoned it, his coat-tails fluttering uneasily as he reached his hand inside to pull his key ring from his inner pocket.

The sound of the bells over the door welcomed him home, and he hurried to drag his suitcases inside and onto the dark red carpet so he could shut the door behind him. He straightened up and stood still with his eyes closed as he inhaled deeply through his nose, savouring the familiar smell of yellowed paper and old leather. He stood like that for several seconds as the sound of the bells faded away. Only then did he open his eyes and turn on the lamp hanging from the

ceiling, even though it really wasn't necessary. After roaming these same premises for more than fifty years, he could orient himself in the dark with no problem. Even so, he flipped all the light switches on the panel behind the door so that the lights above each section of shelves and the lamps in the glass cases on the mezzanine also went on.

He went behind the counter and took off his coat. From the cabinet underneath he took out a bottle and a glass, which he filled with cognac. Glass in hand, Luca went to stand in the middle of the illuminated shop and looked around with a satisfied smile. A gulp of the golden liquid completed the moment. He nodded to himself and took a deep breath.

Carrying his glass of cognac, he slowly walked up and down the aisles, studying the rows of books. Other eyes probably wouldn't have been able to see the changes that had occurred during the past week, but Luca registered even the smallest changes at once. Books that had been sold or moved, new volumes that had been inserted among old ones, and piles of books that had been shifted or combined. On his tour of inspection Luca pushed on the spines so that all the books were properly aligned, and he moved volumes that had been incorrectly placed. Every so often he would carefully set down his glass so that he could pull out a book that he hadn't seen before. With curiosity he would leaf through it, studying the typeface and letting his fingers feel the texture of the paper. Finally he would close his eyes and hold the book up to his nose to breathe in the particular scent of the pages, as if from a vintage wine. After studying the title page and binding one more time he would gently put the book back in place, giving it either a shrug of his shoulders or a smile of acknowledgement. There were more nods than shrugs as he made his way through the shop, so the assistant's transactions, undertaken while the owner was away, seemed to be acceptable.

The assistant's name was Iversen, and he had worked in the shop for so long that it was more a question of a partnership than an employer/employee relationship. Yet even though Iversen loved the shop as much as Luca did, there had never been any overtures to form a real partnership. The antiquarian bookshop had been passed down to Luca from his father Arman, and the intention had always been for it to remain in the hands of the Campelli family.

Very little had changed since Arman left the shop to Luca, but the balcony at the height of a mezzanine was the most noticeable. The balcony was a good metre and a half wide, and it ran along all four walls. It was an addition that the regular customers had quickly dubbed 'the Heavens' since it was there that the rarest and most valuable works were kept, protected and displayed in glass cases.

Before Luca headed up to the balcony, he went back to the counter to pour himself another cognac. After that he walked to the very back of the shop where a winding staircase rose up to the projecting balcony above. The worn steps creaked ominously as he made his way upwards; undaunted he continued his

ascent and soon reached the top. There he turned to survey the shop. With a little imagination the bookshelves below him might seem like a labyrinth of well-trimmed shrubs, but he was too much at home there to get lost, and his gaze fell on the two suitcases standing just inside the door.

A frown and a concerned expression suddenly darkened his furrowed face, and his brown eyes seemed to be looking at more distant realms than the floor below. Pensively Luca lifted his glass and sniffed at the cognac before he took a sip and moved his gaze from his suitcases, focusing instead on the shelves on the balcony.

The lights emitted a soft glow inside the glass cases, giving the volumes they protected a romantic, golden sheen. Behind the glass the books were displayed like small objets d'art. Some were open to colourful illustrations and fantastical depictions of the stories contained inside; others were closed to showcase the artistry that had been devoted to the binding or the tanned leather.

Luca walked slowly along the balcony with one hand on the railing and the other wrapped round his cognac glass, which he cautiously twirled in little circles as he let his glance slide over the contents of the display cases. Normally there was little change among the works on the second floor since few people could afford to buy them; those who could usually bought very few volumes, carefully selected for their existing collections.

New books were added almost exclusively through purchases from estates or, less often, from book auctions.

That was why Luca froze when his eyes fell on a particular volume. He frowned and set his glass on the railing before he leaned towards the glass pane to study the book more closely. It was bound in black leather with gold type, and the edges of the pages were also gilded. Luca opened his eyes wide when he got close enough to read the title and the name of the author. The book turned out to be a custom-bound edition of Giacomo Leopardi's *Operette morali*, in superb condition and presumably in Italian, the original language – Luca's native tongue.

Clearly moved, Luca knelt down and opened the glass case. With shaking hands he reached for his shirt pocket and fished out his reading glasses, which he set on his nose. Carefully, as if not wanting to frighten the prize away, he leaned forward and grabbed the book in both hands. Having secured the trophy, he lifted it out of the case and with astonishment turned it this way and that. Deep furrows appeared on his brow, and with a sudden lurch he got to his feet and cast a wary glance all around, as if he sensed that someone was watching him – a hidden observer to this extraordinary find. Finding no one, he turned his attention back to the book in his hands and gingerly opened it.

On the title page he saw that it was a first edition, a circumstance that along with the date of publication, 1827, would justify its placement in the Heavens.

The paper was of a sturdy texture, and with obvious delight he let his fingers slide over the surface. After that he raised the book up to his nose and sniffed. It had a slightly spicy scent from something he deduced must be bay laurel.

With a lingering, scrutinizing thoroughness he began turning the pages of the book, stopping at a copperplate etching that showed Death wearing a cowl and carrying a scythe. The illustration was exceedingly well executed, and even though Luca examined it carefully, he could find no flaws in the printing. Copperplate engraving, that rather difficult method of printing, was in widespread use during the nineteenth century, notable for its greater degree of detail and subtlety than even the best woodcuts. On the other hand, the paper had to be printed twice, since the ink settled in the grooves of the copperplate, unlike the text itself, which was typically cast in lead and raised.

Luca turned more pages, admiring with enthusiasm the rest of the copperplate engravings the book contained. At the last page he once again frowned. It was here they normally inserted a price slip the size of a business card with the name of the bookshop, but there was no card. That Iversen would have invested in such a valuable work without consulting Luca seemed odd enough, but that he would have displayed the book for sale without a price seemed counter to the man's otherwise meticulous nature.

Again Luca swept his eyes over the room, as if he expected a welcome committee to leap out suddenly and offer an explanation for the mystery, but very few people knew of his trip or his return home; those who did were fully aware that this would not be an appropriate occasion for a celebration.

He gave a shrug, opened the book to the middle and began to read aloud. All doubt swiftly disappeared from his face, replaced by the joy of reading his native language. Soon he raised his voice and let the words slip freely out over the shop's corridors of books. It had been a long time since he had read Italian, so it took a few pages before the accent came easily and he found the rhythm of the poem. But there was no doubt that he was enjoying himself; his eyes gleamed with happiness and his joyous expression offered a sharp contrast to the melancholy of the text.

It lasted only a moment. Suddenly the look on Luca's face shifted from enthusiasm to surprise, and he staggered back two paces, his body slamming into the glass case behind him. With his eyes still on the book, he continued reading as shards of glass rained over him. The surprise in his wide-open pupils changed to terror, and his knuckles turned white from the convulsive grip he had on the volume he held in his hands. With tottering, almost mechanical movements, his body toppled forward, and when it struck the railing, the jolt caused his cognac glass to tip over the edge and plummet to the floor below. The carpet muffled the sound of glass shattering.

The strength of Luca's voice continued undiminished, but the rhythm had

become uneven and spasmodic. Sweat appeared on the old man's brow and his face was pink from exertion. A couple of drops of sweat trickled down his forehead, along his nose and hung from the very tip, before dripping onto the book. The thick paper absorbed the beads of sweat as if they were raindrops on a dry riverbed.

Luca's eyes were open as wide as could be, locked onto the text without blinking even once, not even when sweat ran into them. His pupils relentlessly scanned the lines on the pages, and no matter how hard he tried to turn his head away Luca could not tear his eyes from the words in the book he held in his hands. His whole body started shaking violently and his normally kind face was contorted into a horrible grimace.

In spite of all this, Luca's voice kept projecting into the room, stammering and occasionally interrupted by a pause, then followed by a burst of words. There was no longer any rhythm to what he read; the sentences were chopped up and combined with no regard for grammatical rules, and the stress on individual syllables became more and more random as the speed picked up. Even though the words could still be distinguished as words, the enunciation and syntax were no longer comprehensible. The sentences emitted by Luca's vocal cords were devoid of recognizable content. The tempo increased significantly and the flow of words was interrupted only by panicked inhalations, as his lungs were emptied of oxygen. After each breath, which sounded more and more like a wheeze, the words and sentences would again gush out of Luca's mouth.

His body was now shaking so violently that the railing Luca was pressed up against began vibrating, making the wood audibly groan. Sweat poured out of his body, soaking through his clothing in several places. Drops of sweat had formed dark patches on the carpet all around him.

All of a sudden the stream of words ceased and the shaking stopped. Luca's eyes were still staring down at the book in his hands but the expression of panic was gone. A gentleness came into the Italian's eyes and calm settled over his face. Slowly he leaned his old body over the railing. The book slipped from his sweaty hands and, with pages fluttering, fell to the floor below. The railing groaned ominously under the weight of his body and with a snap a section of the balustrade tore away, spraying splinters of wood all over the shop. For a moment Luca's body stood motionless on the edge of the balcony until it plunged forward, lifeless, hurtling to the floor three metres below. The slack limbs flailed uncontrollably out to the sides, bringing down shelves and books in a cloud of dust.

Luca's body struck the floor with a hard thud in a narrow corridor between bookshelves and was instantly buried under a pile of books, wood and dust.

2

Every time Jon Campelli had to make an appearance in court, he would sleep uneasily the night before, if he managed to drift off at all. The same thing happened on this night and finally he gave up and got out of bed, pulling on his dark-blue robe. He sauntered out to his small kitchen where he made himself a pot of coffee in a cafetière. He sipped the coffee and again read through the script for his closing arguments. Even though he'd already gone over the pages several times the previous evening, he carefully went over them once more, testing several versions of the same sentences out loud. And so it was that at four in the morning a clear voice could be heard coming from the penthouse flat on Kompagnistræde, repeating the same passages over and over, as if an actor were rehearsing a role.

After a couple of hours Jon went to get the newspaper from outside the front door. He leafed through it as he ate breakfast, supplied with a fresh pot of coffee. His script remained within his field of vision, and several times he stopped his perusal of the newspaper and instead pulled the script close so he could read through a specific passage again before going back to the daily news and his toast.

None of his colleagues had any idea how much work he put into his closing remarks, but in spite of his relatively young age, he was already known for mastering the discipline to perfection. As a barrister only thirty-three years old, he had acquired a reputation that made him a bit of a celebrity among his colleagues, as well as a challenge to his adversaries and the object of unfounded mistrust among older members of the judiciary.

For that reason his court cases were often well attended. It was highly likely that a large number of spectators would also show up today, even though the outcome seemed predetermined. Jon's client, a second-generation immigrant by the name of Mehmet Azlan, was charged with fencing stolen goods; like the three previous charges against him, this one was also without basis. It was beginning to look like harassment on the part of the police, but Mehmet took it with astonishing calm, satisfied to strike back through legal means, which meant suing for damages for pain and suffering.

Jon drained his coffee cup and went to the bathroom, where he turned on the water in the shower. He dropped his robe on the floor, and while he waited for the water to get hot, he studied his body in the mirror. With his thumb and index finger he gripped the love handles just above his hips, examining them as if they

had swollen up during the night. Five years ago he'd had a stomach like a washboard, but almost imperceptibly, and no matter what he did to prevent it, the sculpted figure had gradually been erased as if by a rising tide.

As he stood there in the shower his mobile phone rang, but Jon calmly rinsed the shampoo out of his hair and finished the rest of his morning ritual before he checked to see who had called. It was Mehmet. In the message his client had left, he explained in his customary laid-back tone that he'd sold his wheels and was in need of a lift to the courtroom. The line was busy when Jon called back, so he made do with leaving a message that he was on his way.

Outside it was raining. Jon jogged over to his car, a silver-grey Mercedes SL, and tossed his briefcase onto the passenger seat before he jumped in out of the damp. Through the wet windows the world outside seemed to dissolve; figures wearing colourful rain gear melted into one another until they looked like imaginary creatures in a child's drawing. The windscreen wipers switched on when he started the car and the imaginary creatures vanished along with the water, to be replaced by morose Danes fighting their way through the rain or huddled together under awnings.

Even taking into consideration the weather, the traffic heading for the Nørrebro district was moving very slowly, and Jon kept glancing at his watch. Arriving late for a court appearance was never a good way to start, no matter how sound a case he might have, and Jon took pride in always being on time. Finally he was able to turn off Åboulevard and head down Griffenfeldsgade towards Stengade, which was where Mehmet lived. His building was part of a concrete structure covered with red brick, and each flat had its own garden or balcony. There was a large courtyard in between the buildings, complete with frowzy grassy areas, weather-beaten climbing frames and benches faded from the sun.

Mehmet's ground-floor flat made him the owner of a garden that measured six square metres, surrounded by a woven wooden fence a metre and a half high that was algae-green, though it had probably once been white. Visitors to Mehmet's flat always had to use the door facing the Park, as he liked to call his garden, so Jon cut diagonally across the courtyard and through the creaking garden gate. The Park's grass was littered with empty cardboard boxes, milk containers and wooden pallets, which had all served their purpose and were now just waiting for the caretaker to order Mehmet to remove them. A canopy that ran the width of the flat provided shelter from the rain and also covered a storage area for more boxes, barrels and a pallet of dog biscuits in twenty-kilo sacks.

Jon knocked on the living-room window and didn't have to wait long for Mehmet to appear behind the pane, wearing boxers, a T-shirt and, most important of all, his mobile phone headset. Like a typical Mehmet happening, it said 'Corner Shop' in big type on his T-shirt. He loved to use the most stereotypical prejudices in his small provocations, a sort of hobby of his to carry out pinprick operations against Tabloid Denmark, as he called it. This didn't stem from the bitterness or

anger to which some immigrants succumbed, but rather from pure and simple amusement and self-mockery.

The door to the living room opened, and with a smile Mehmet motioned for Jon to come in as he continued talking into his headset. As far as Jon could tell, the language was Turkish. The room he entered served three purposes for Mehmet: living room, office and storage room. Occasionally it also seemed as if the space were used as a sauna. At any rate, it was always very hot, possibly so that Mehmet could walk around in boxers and T-shirts year-round.

Mehmet was a 'contest jockey'. That was the label that he used for himself, and it undeniably gave his work a more romantic tone than it actually deserved. With the universal breakthrough of the Internet, many companies had discovered that a good way to entice visitors to their website was to offer a contest or a lottery that enabled participants to win products, money, trips and much more. Electronic versions of scratch cards and casino games also became effective draws. Since most of these contests were not limited by where the player might be in the world, there was access to countless opportunities, with new ones appearing every second.

Mehmet lived off, in many cases quite literally, taking part in as many contests and games as he could find, regardless of what he might win. He then re-sold the prizes he couldn't use himself, which was why his home looked like a merchant's warehouse with cardboard boxes everywhere, containing cleaning products, breakfast cereals, bags of crisps, toys, sweets, wine, fizzy drinks, coffee, toiletries and a few larger items such as an Atlas freezer, a Zanussi electric cooker, an exercise bicycle, a rowing machine and two 'Smokey Joe' grills. To an outsider it might look like the well-stocked inventory of a receiver of stolen goods, and that was also the reason why he was regularly accused of using his flat for exactly that purpose.

'What's up, boss?' exclaimed Mehmet, reaching out to shake hands with Jon. He was apparently done with his phone conversation, though it was never possible to know for sure since he rarely took off his headset.

Jon shook his hand.

'Well, *I'm* ready,' he said, nodding at Mehmet's half-dressed state. 'What about you?'

'Hey, all I have to do is sit there and look innocent,' said Mehmet, holding up his hands.

'Then you should probably change your T-shirt,' suggested Jon dryly.

Mehmet nodded. 'I'm on it. In the meantime, take a load off, it'll only take me a nanosecond.'

Jon's client left the room, and the barrister looked around for a place to sit down. He moved a box filled with tinned goods from a brown leather sofa and sat down with his briefcase on his lap. At one end of the room stood a large dining table that functioned as Mehmet's desk. On the table three flat-screen computer monitors were lined up as if they were headstones. Behind the table stood a desk chair the size of a dentist's chair, and judging by the multiple levers it offered as many possible settings.

'What about the lawsuit for damages?' called Mehmet from the bedroom.

'We can't very well sue them before we've won,' Jon shouted in reply.

Mehmet appeared in the doorway, transformed by a black suit, white shirt and highly polished shoes. He was in the process of tying a grey tie, struggling with the unaccustomed manoeuvres.

'But it could be a fair amount this time,' Jon went on, pointing at the cut on Mehmet's face.

Mehmet gave up on the tie and tossed it aside. 'Yeah, they're going to have to cough up plenty of euros,' he said as he touched his eyebrow. 'What's the hourly rate of a punch bag?'

Jon shrugged in reply.

At the latest visit the police had shown up with six officers and forced their way into the flat through the front door, not knowing that the hall was filled with cases of tinned tomatoes, Pampers nappies, electric kitchen utensils and wine. Of course they weren't aware that visitors, for that very reason, always entered through the garden door, so they interpreted the mess as an attempt to barricade the entrance and the subsequent arrest was significantly more violent than was necessary. Mehmet ended up with two bruised ribs and a cut over his eyebrow when they flung him to the floor. The situation was not helped when eight of Mehmet's friends from the neighbourhood came storming in and, according to the police, behaved in a threatening manner so that back-up officers had to be called in.

The next day one of the morning newspapers pronounced the raid a 'successful break-up of a Turkish fence syndicate'. Even though the court ruling later in the day would demonstrate something else entirely, none of them expected an apology or even a retraction in the same paper.

Mehmet straightened his shirt collar and threw out his arms. 'Okay?'

'Lovely.' Jon stood up. 'Shall we get going?'

'Stop,' said Mehmet. 'I can't let you leave without making you a special offer, just between friends.' He went over to a stack of boxes and opened the one on top.

'How about a couple of fantastic books?' he asked. 'I'll give you a good price.'

Judging by the covers, they were romance novels of the worst kind, so Jon gave him a wan smile and shook his head.

'Er, no thanks. I don't read much any more.' He tapped his finger against his temple. 'I had an overdose as a child.'

'Hmm,' grumbled Mehmet. 'I've also got a few detective novels, even a couple of legal mysteries, as far as I recall. Those interest you?' He glanced at Jon, but the barrister wasn't about to change his mind.

'What about some Tampax?' asked Mehmet. 'For your woman, I mean.' He burst into loud laughter. 'I won a year's supply of Tampax from some women's magazine. First prize was a trip to Tenerife.' He shrugged. 'You can't win them all, but the best part is that when they come over to deliver the prize this afternoon, they're going to take a picture of the lucky winner for the next issue of the magazine.' He clasped his hands behind his neck and rotated his hips. 'So I'm going to be a model.' He laughed again.

'Well, at least your annual Tampax budget should be quite low. But thanks anyway. I haven't got a girlfriend at the moment.'

'I don't understand it,' exclaimed Mehmet. 'With your Latin-lover looks you shouldn't have any problem in that area.'

Jon shrugged his shoulders. His complexion wasn't as dark as Mehmet's, but it still had a hue unlike that of most Danes, and his hair was jet-black. But since he was only half Italian, he was slightly taller, five foot eleven, and with lighter skin than might be expected; perhaps that was why he had never experienced any sort of racism, especially not from the opposite sex.

Mehmet snapped his fingers and dashed over to the computer monitors, where he grabbed the mouse in one hand and pressed a couple of keys on the keyboard with the other.

'But I could get you a woman, boss. There's this contest put on by a Copenhagen nightclub, and you can win a night with ... let's see, what was her name?'

'I'm really not that desperate.'

'Just say the word. I've fixed the bot on their website.'

Mehmet was trained as a computer programmer, but like many other second-generation immigrants in Denmark, he hadn't been able to find a job in his field, which was otherwise clamouring for manpower. Even though he was a highly skilled programmer, he had realized that his name played a bigger role than his

qualifications, and the best way for him to get ahead was to go into business for himself. Opening a pizzeria was too much of a stereotype even for Mehmet, so he had decided to become a contest jockey, which offered him the necessary freedom as well as the opportunity to make use of his expertise in developing bots. Mehmet's bots were tiny computer programs that could be instructed in filling in the contest forms and applications he found on the Internet. Once he had instructed a bot how to go about things, it would obediently repeat the procedure and pump in the names and addresses from his address file, so increasing his chances of winning. His address file contained his family, friends, acquaintances, neighbours and whoever else he could persuade, including Jon. Consequently, one day Jon received a phone call from an enthusiastic secretary at a big chain toyshop, telling him that he had won a pram with cross-country tyres and a detachable hood.

As payment for agreeing to be included in Mehmet's address file, everyone was offered some of the goods he couldn't sell, or a significant discount on whatever he happened to have on hand.

Mehmet nodded towards the door.

'All right, let's get this over with.'

The two men left Mehmet's flat and jogged through the rain to Jon's car.

'What happened to your Peugeot?' asked Jon as they sat in the Mercedes, on their way to court.

'I finally got rid of it. Unfortunately I had to drop the price to a hundred K, even though it was really worth two hundred.' Mehmet shrugged. 'Not many Danes dare buy a car from a Turk.'

'But that's still an okay hourly wage, isn't it?'

'Sure, it's cool. On the other hand, I had to throw out two pallets of cornflakes that had gone bad. But in the big picture, it all works out.'

'So what do you have to eat?' asked Jon.

'Hey, I've got plenty. Two weeks ago I won fifty frozen dinners, so now I don't have to eat breakfast food at night.'

As expected, the courtroom was packed. Some of Mehmet's friends were present, but there were also many of Jon's colleagues and acquaintances from his law-school days. At this stage of the case, everyone was waiting for the final arguments, which affected the last examinations of witnesses. They were routinely carried out, without a great show of enthusiasm from any of the parties involved. Even the judges seemed to be mentally twiddling their thumbs. The decision was going to be made by a panel of five judges – a method Jon didn't

much care for. He was better in front of a whole jury, which wasn't biased by previous cases or Jon's own personality.

The prosecutor, a thin, bald man with a drawling voice, gave quite a sober speech, but by now no one had any doubts about the outcome of the case. There was simply no definitive proof, and any remaining speculations or suspicions about Mehmet's operating as a fence were dubious at best.

It was utterly silent in the courtroom when Jon was asked to begin his summation. Slowly he got up from his chair and stepped in front of the judges. Many of his colleagues improvised their final arguments, but that didn't suit Jon. His presentation was written down word for word on the pages he held in his hand, and it was very seldom that he diverged from his script.

Jon started reading but, for the spectators, it didn't sound as if he were reading aloud from a prepared text, and many didn't even notice that he kept on consulting his notes. The illusion was a combination of various techniques he had developed over time. For instance, the text was divided in such a way that he could make use of natural pauses to turn the pages, and the sections were structured so that he could quickly find his place in the text again after having looked away. He also had methods for looking at the papers discreetly, either with a glance or under the cover of other gestures, like a magician.

The purpose of all this meticulous preparation and constant consulting of the text was that during the speech Jon was able to concentrate on the presentation itself. Even though the content was fixed, he could still change the emphasis, taking his audience into account; he could accentuate certain sections and downplay others, colouring the statements as needed.

The only time he had ever tried to explain his technique to a colleague, he had compared it to the work of an orchestral conductor. Except that in this case he himself was the instrument, and he could turn the effects up or down as needed to fit the situation, precisely the way a conductor can alter the experience of a piece of music. Jon's colleague had looked at him as if he were crazy, and since then Jon hadn't tried to explain or teach anyone his approach, even though it had never yet failed him.

The effect wasn't lost this time either. Before long everyone's attention was directed towards him, and the mood could be read in the satisfied expressions on the faces of Mehmet's friends and in the small nods of acknowledgement from Jon's colleagues. Even with his back turned, Jon could sense their support, as if it were a home game. The judges leaned forward in their chairs, their bored expressions were gone, and their eyes attentively followed Jon's performance. The prosecutor, on the other hand, sank lower and lower in his chair, uncertainly plucking at the papers on the table in front of him. He emanated defeat, and Jon was audacious enough to lend the police officers' report of the case a sarcastic tone that provoked a good deal of amusement in the courtroom.

It was over. Jon read the last sentence of his speech and stood in silence for a moment before he folded up the pages of his text and returned to his place, accompanied by spontaneous applause from the spectators as the judges called for order.

His client slapped him on the shoulder. 'Pure Perry Mason,' whispered Mehmet with a smile. Jon replied with a wink but maintained a neutral expression.

The judges withdrew to deliberate while everyone else in the courtroom dispersed, slowly and reluctantly like a group of school kids after an outing. The prosecutor approached his opponent and shook hands, giving Jon a smile of acknowledgement. As Mehmet joined his friends, who loudly greeted him, Jon gathered his papers into two neat stacks.

'Congratulations, Campelli,' said a hoarse voice behind him. He turned round and stood face to face with Frank Halbech, one of his law firm's three partners.

Like Jon he wore a dark suit, a Valentino as far as Jon could tell, but it was his manicured hands that revealed that this man was not encumbered with work; he had people for that. He'd become a partner in the law firm five years ago at the age of forty-five, and judging by his appearance, he now spent his time at hair salons, tanning spas and fitness centres.

'Open-and-shut case, but good argument,' said Halbech, offering his hand. Jon took it. Halbech leaned forward without releasing Jon's hand. 'He's losing his grip, Steiner,' he whispered, motioning with his head towards the prosecutor.

Jon nodded. 'The case should never have gone to court,' he whispered in reply.

Halbech straightened up, released Jon's hand and took a small step back to give him the once-over. His grey-blue eyes scrutinized Jon, while a little smile formed on his lips.

'What would you say to a real challenge, Campelli? A case that will put hair on your chest?'

'Of course,' said Jon.

Halbech nodded with satisfaction. 'That's what I figured. You seem like a man who dares take up the gauntlet, someone who will come through when it counts.' He formed his fingers into a pistol and aimed them at Jon. 'The Remer case. It's yours.' He broke out in a big smile. 'Drop by my office tomorrow and we'll talk about it.'

Before Jon had time to react, Halbech turned on his heel and strode towards the exit. Astonished, Jon watched his boss go until a short, stout man wearing a light-grey suit stepped in front of him and blocked his view.