

Monday

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When the line stopped at the exit of E4, Ernesto threw Hiace's backdoor open and aimed the guards in a white armored Iveco with an AK-47. Ahab and Goran jumped past Ernesto onto the asphalt holding similar assault rifles and aimed at the same direction.

- Dra åt helvete! Ernesto said.

The guards read from the lips. They knew that at that range, the assault rifle's 7,62 mm bullet would penetrate the armored glass, especially if shot perpendicularly. They glanced at each other and opened their doors, darted each on their side to the bushes by the road and disappeared from sight rustling loud.

Ahab run to the left of the armored vehicle, Goran and Ernesto to the right. All three had black clothes on and balaclavas over their eyes, and so had Rune at the wheel of the dark blue Hiace. The Hiace was the first at the ramp. In the front of it, traffic dashed by on four lanes, on the left to Södertälje, on the right to Stockholm.

Ernesto and Ahab made sure that the guards wouldn't get it into their heads to return and that

the people waiting behind stayed in their cars. Goran put his assault rifle down on the strap and took a chunk of orange plastic explosive out of his belt pack, slapped it high onto the Iveco's side and adjusted timer of the electric percussion cap. Ernesto raced with him towards the switch cabinet by the roadside, Ahab had taken cover on the other side of the armored vehicle.

Squatting behind the switch cabinet Ernesto soon began suspecting that Goran had messed it up. No matter what kind of an ex-Serb-Partisan bomb expert he was. Or then the Semtex had gone bad or old, or the blasting cap was faulty. There would be no explosion and they'd get caught merely on an attempt of a robbery. It would be embarrassing. And it would be no use to try and explain it to the boss.

Seconds dragged by. Ernesto felt the air pressure on his temples like in hangover sometimes. Busy lunch traffic grew quiet and turned into busy commuter traffic. Sun set and rose, days got shorter and then longer again. Ernesto turned thirty-five, forty, fifty. No way in hell, he wouldn't live that long. At that age, one would hardly dare to look at oneself in the mirror.

His head was sweating, mouth was drying out. Ernesto pulled lower edge of the balaclava aside a

tad and spat the snus quid from his upper lip down on the grass. Then dna came to mind and he collected the black quid and the smeared grass into his glove, stuck them into the pocket of his jeans and wiped his glove on the side of his pants.

- Pssst!

Goran pointed his finger at the large Volvo station wagon standing behind the Iveco. A blond but reddish average Svensson was tired of waiting. He opened the door, wiped back his thin hair off his forehead, got off onto the asphalt and straightened his pants. He had both suspenders and a belt. Volvo was wailing anxiously as the seatbelt was unfastened while the motor was still running.

Boom. Ernesto and Goran hit the ground and covered their ears, a little too late. The blast wave hit over them, and wavered the coppice behind them. The switch cabinet trembled but prevailed.

When Ernesto carefully raised his head, Goran was already sneaking a quick look at the ramp over the AK's barrel from behind the cabinet.

- Little big ladning, Goran said. He had lived in and out of Stockholm well over ten years but he still couldn't speak Swedish properly. His English wasn't that great either.

Neither were his skills in charging. Iron scrap was still coming down, large and small. The average

Svensson had fallen down on his back next to his Volvo. A large sooty piece of metal stuck out of his chest like a knife and Iveco's back blinker had sunk into the left eye socket. No more blinking.

The armored vehicle had tumbled over to its right side. A front tire was gently spinning on its own in the air, the back tire was held still by the handbrake.

Ahab had been hit by the van. There wasn't even a scrap left. Goran looked at Ernesto and waved his hand. What can you do.

Ernesto nodded and rushed past Goran towards the smoking remains of the Iveco. He peeked in through the jagged crack torn into the side and saw that the money bags were partly sooty but untouched. He threw the rifle on his back and took hold of the edges of the opening, burned his fingers but nevertheless climbed onto the wall of the deceased vehicle and dropped himself into the cargo area.

Rune backed the Hiace up closer to the Iveco, got off the wheel and spread caltrops and a couple of large sports bags the sides of which said BOMB around the Iveco. Must've been the same in English as in Swedish. In the meanwhile, Ernesto threw the money bags over to Goran, who slung them forward through the Hiace's rear doors. Forty-two heavy sacks all filled with used notes. The money was on

its way to be destroyed, so it hadn't been registered anywhere or protected with dye packs. The loot must have been dozens of millions of crowns.

The sun hid behind the clouds. Weak nerves, Ernesto thought. Didn't dare to watch. A gust of wind stirred the birches and quivered the aspens. The sky in the north was so gray that it surely was already raining behind the Hallunda center out on the open lake Rödsten.

When Ernesto dropped himself from the Iveco's cadaver back onto the asphalt, Rune was back at the wheel of Hiace. It wasn't drizzling yet.

- Hurry upp!

Goran had closed Hiace's rear doors and rushed Ernesto over to the glide door. Ernesto had a quick look around, didn't notice anything alarming and jumped on. Rune hit the pedal at the very same moment, and Ernesto tumbled on his side over the money bags. AK got caught in the middle, but never mind.

Ernesto glanced at his watch. Less than two minutes had passed from the moment they had scared the guards off. Pretty good hourly wages, even if a couple of bags would go to the helpers. To the guard duo for an inside tip, to the car thieves who'd set the blown cars on fire any minute now

here and there in Botkyrka, on the motorway and elsewhere, and to those who would drop a couple of "bomb bags" and caltrops nearby in order to further confuse and slow the coppers down.

On the negative side of things there were Ahab and the average Svensson but everything has its price. Ahab had known the risks and not even the average Svensson was so dumb that he wouldn't have understood his. Should've stayed in his car.

Didn't feel like telling to Anna, Ahab's missus, though. Rune could take care of that, as Rune had been taking care of Anna also when Ahab was last doing time. That's what Rune said anyway.

Goran pulled the sliding door shut in full speed, grabbed the balaclava off his head and put his thumb up for Ernesto. It appeared that the dark guy with cropped hair was almost smiling.

A gust shuffled the car but Rune straightened it up right away. His short blond hair was still covered by a ski cap when he hit the cabin window with his fist and shouted:

- Satan! Vi gjorde det!

Ernesto grabbed the sweaty cap off his head and tucked it into his pocket, coming into an upright position on top of the bags.

- Scrooge McDuck, he said in Finnish. In his mother's language. - I feel like Scrooge McDuck.

Goran didn't get it but nodded anyway, still in high spirits.

- Tonight... party!

- Party, party, Ernesto confirmed.

One wanted to grin. A couple more car switches, and the job would be over. Nothing could go wrong anymore.

In the midst of the second car switch a hollow thunder rolled from the forest.

- Vad is det? Goran wondered at the backdoor of the black Volvo 4x4. He had a money bag in his hand.

- So, what's happenin' tonite? Rune hollered by the driver's door in Swedish. - Shall we get juiced?

- Surely not juiced, Ernesto said in the same language and threw the next bag from the back of Chevy towards Ernesto. - That's a state of intoxication, I've heard.

The bag hit Goran in the arm. Frozen on his feet, he dropped the previous bag on the ground as well.

- Uhh, Goran said but continued staring somewhere over Ernesto, to the north.

Ernesto looked at the direction of the noise. There was nothing. It just sounded like a big airplane was conducting an emergency landing into the woods and booming towards them. The sky was dark, the lake Tullinge surged gloomy behind the trees on the right. There were no joggers or Nordic walkers about on the sawdust track.

A gust of wind shook Ernesto. Rune already sat at the wheel of the 4x4 and tried the key in the ignition. The actual wheels had been blown from the car dealers' in the neighborhood, with the help of keys. Many of the businesses still held the keys of used cars on a hook on the office wall or in the desk drawer at the most.

- What the hell...?

A good question, Rune. That's exactly what Ernesto was wondering as well.

The forest appeared to be moving. It came towards them. Big spruces left the ground flying by the root, collapsing back down immediately. Then Ernesto saw a dark funnel cloud, which was approaching the clearing through the woods at a dreadful speed, lifting trees and bushes and rocks from the ground.

Rune started the car but the car didn't have time to move before the funnel was there. Ernesto managed to realize that they should've run in time. Tornado - or whatever twister it was - grasped him and Goran and the bags of money lying on the ground and the Chevy and the Volvo and whirled them up towards the sky, the black hole that would suck them in forever.

Ernesto tried to grab the air for nothing. The centrifugal force pressed the air from his lungs

and inhaling was out of the question. The spinning got to his head, his vision grew dim and so did his consciousness. He still understood that the cars fell down but that the whirl sucked the money bags and all things loose with it, even Rune, and they all span with an enormous speed higher yet, at the same time traveling towards the south.

Towards death.

Ernesto was expecting to see his whole life run before his eyes like a movie but the film snapped before it even started. Black skies fell upon him. There was no longer light, no life. Nothing.

And then Ernesto woke up. He cautiously breathed air into his lungs, held his breath, then exhaled, still careful. The second inhale was already more ardent. After that he no longer held back but breathed with full speed. The lungs hurt, the sides hurt, everything hurt. But it only proved that he was alive.

He cautiously moved his limbs, realizing that he was lying on his back on a firm foundation. Firm and slightly sticky and wet. He cautiously opened his eyes, they hurt as well but one could see with them when they got used to the bleak light gleaming from behind the grayish clouds. It was no longer raining but the flat bitumen roof was covered with puddles. Ernesto was soaking wet. His clothes were

torn into pieces. He was bruised and battered all over but capable of moving. None of his limbs were broken or dislocated, no bone had broken. Probably. The twister had just whirled him around like the drum of a washing machine whirls ice fishing overalls and when it had ran out of strength, abandoned him on some roof top.

Where were the others? Where was the money?

Besides the occasional branches and some loose trash and the metal-grey chunks of AC machines, the roof the size of a couple of soccer fields was deserted and empty.

Ernesto didn't know whether an hour or a century had passed. Or whether he had moved faster than light and returned to the time before his birth as in that movie, was it Back to the Future or what?

The skies roared again, flashing lights followed by a jet plane stream were sketched underneath a dark cloud. Obviously the leap backwards hadn't been a great one.

Ernesto cautiously dragged onto one side, tumbled on his belly and rested there for a while. The sound of traffic echoed from nearby. A magpie chattered somewhere very close. The seagulls were screeching as well.

On we go, by scowling the brows if nothing else. After a while Ernesto managed to get on all fours

and move his hands and knees in front of each other. Every now and then he plunged face forward into a puddle or rough bitumen but both only perked him up. He wanted to know where he was, where the loot had gone to. Goran and Rune were on their own, as was he.

Once he got going he nearly went over the edge. Luckily there was an elevation onto which his hand stopped. His jaw bumped onto the metal reinforcement and he bit his tongue. He remembered Zen and accepted the pain, and it no longer bothered him.

In front of him there was an endless ocean of asphalt, cars all over the place like small islets. The motorway grumbled nearby, the exit sign told that it was only six kilometers from E4 to Södertälje.

There was a gigantic red-and-white neon sign of ICA set up on the wasteland between the motorway and the parking lot. In the vicinity, there were other Moraberg businesses and service stations.

Ernesto looked at his watch. It had stopped quarter past twelve. That was when the twister had struck. Sun was out of sight but based on the amount of traffic Ernesto figured that the lunch traffic was over and the commuter traffic hadn't started yet.

On the backyard side, a ladder was found. On the backyard, there was a loading platform, garbage containers with cardboard balers and staff cars and bicycles. At the edge of the asphalt the forest began, a clump of spruces into which the twister had left a scattered trail. At the store, it had grown tired and evaporated.

A dark middle-aged woman was smoking a cigarette next to the loading platform. Waiting for her to disappear Ernesto pondered upon what to do. If he'd follow the twister trail back, he might find the money bags. He might also find the cops, if someone else had already found the money. He'd never find all of the money, and neither would he probably find Goran or Rune for that matter. Alive anyway. He'd been incredibly lucky himself, having survived the hurricane.

A whole other story was the way he'd explain the boss about the disappearance of the money and buddies.

There was no way. The boss would never swallow a twister. The boss would spit it right out of his mouth and that would wipe Ernesto out.

Like the white tornado in that old TV commercial.