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KILLING MOON

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A HARRY HOLE THRILLER

VINTAGE

About the Author

Jo Nesbo is one of the world's bestselling crime writers. When commissioned to write a memoir about life on the road with his band, Di Derre, he instead came up with the plot for his first Harry Hole crime novel, *The Bat*. His books *The Leopard*, *Phantom*, *Police*, *The Son*, *The Thirst*, *Macbeth* and *Knife* have all since topped the *Sunday Times* charts. He's an international number one bestseller and his books are published in 50 languages, selling over 55 million copies around the world.

Sign up to the Jo Nesbo newsletter for all the latest news:

jonesbo.com/newsletter

Seán Kinsella holds an MPhil in literary translation from Trinity College Dublin. His translations have been longlisted for both the Best Translated Book Award and International Dublin Literary Award. He lives in Norway.

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The Jealousy Man

Jo Nesbo

KILLING MOON

Translated from the Norwegian by Seán Kinsella

VINTAGE

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*The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon
into blood, before the great and terrible day of the
Lord come.*

Book of Joel 2:31

Prologue

‘OSLO,’ THE MAN SAID, RAISING the glass of whiskey to his lips.

‘That’s the place you love the most?’ Lucille asked.

He stared ahead, seeming to think about his answer before he nodded. She studied him while he drank. He was tall; even sitting down on the bar stool next to her he towered above her. He had to be at least ten, maybe twenty years younger than her seventy-two; it was hard to tell with alcoholics. His face and body seemed carved from wood, lean, pure and rigid. His skin was pale, a fine mesh of blue veins visible on his nose, which together with bloodshot eyes, the irises the colour of faded denim, suggested he had lived hard. Drunk hard. Fallen hard. And loved hard too, perhaps, for during the month he had become a regular at Creatures she had glimpsed a hurt in his eyes. Like that of a beaten dog, kicked out of the pack, always on his own at the end of the bar. Next to Bronco, the mechanical bull that Ben, the bar owner, had taken from the set of the giant turkey *Urban Cowboy*, where he had worked as a propman. It served as a reminder that Los Angeles wasn’t a city built on movie successes but on a garbage heap of human and financial failure. Over eighty per cent of all the films made bombed completely and lost money; the city had the highest homeless population in the USA, living at a density comparable to Mumbai. Traffic congestion was in the process of choking the life out of the city, though street crime, drugs and violence might get there first. But the sun was shining. Yes, that damn Californian dentist’s lamp never switched off, but shone relentlessly, making all the baubles in this phoney town glitter like real diamonds, like true stories of success. If only they knew. Like she, Lucille, knew, because she had been there, on the stage. And backstage.

The man sitting next to her had definitely not been on the stage; she recognised people in the industry immediately. But neither did he look like someone who had stared in admiration, hope or envy up at the stage. He looked more like someone who couldn’t care less. Someone with their own thing going on. A musician, perhaps? One of those Frank Zappa types,

producing his own impenetrable stuff in a basement up here in Laurel Canyon, who had never been – and would never be – discovered?

After he had been in a few times, Lucille and the new guy had begun to exchange nods and brief words of greeting, the way morning guests at a bar for serious drinkers do, but this was the first time she had sat down next to him and bought him a drink. Or rather, she had paid for the drink he had already ordered when she saw Ben hand him back his credit card with an expression that told her it was maxed out.

‘But does Oslo love you back?’ she asked. ‘That’s the question.’

‘Hardly,’ he said. She noticed his middle finger was a metal prosthetic as he ran a hand through a brush of short, dirty-blond hair, tinged with grey. He was not a handsome man, and the liver-coloured scar in the shape of a J running from the corner of his mouth to his ear – as though he were a fish caught on a hook – didn’t help matters. But he had something, something almost appealing and slightly dangerous about him, like some of her colleagues here in town. Christopher Walken. Nick Nolte. And he was broad-shouldered. Although that might have been down to the rest of him being so lean.

‘Uh-huh, well, they’re the ones we want the most,’ Lucille said. ‘The ones who don’t love us back. The ones we think will love us if we just try that *little* bit more.’

‘So, what do you do?’ the man asked.

‘Drink,’ she said, raising her own whiskey. ‘And feed cats.’

‘Hm.’

‘What you really want to know, I guess, is who I am. Well, I’m ...’ She drank from her glass while considering which version to give him. The one for parties or the truth. She put down her drink and decided on the latter. Screw it.

‘An actor who played one big role. Juliet, in what remains the best film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, but which nobody remembers any more. One big part doesn’t sound like much, but it’s more than most actors in this town get. I’ve been married three times, twice to well-off film-makers who I left with favourable divorce settlements, also more than most actors get. The third was the only one I loved. An actor, and an Adonis, lacking in money, discipline and conscience. He used up every penny I had then left me. I still love him, may he rot in hell.’

She finished the contents of her glass, put it on the bar and signalled to Ben for one more. ‘And, because I always fall for what I can’t get, I’ve invested money I don’t have in a movie project with an enticingly big part for an older lady. A project with an intelligent script, actors who can

actually act, and a director who'll give people food for thought, in short, a project that any rational individual would realise is doomed to failure. So that's me, a daydreamer, a loser, a typical Angelino.'

The man with the J-shaped scar smiled.

'OK, I'm all out of self-deprecation here,' she said. 'What's your name?'

'Harry.'

'You don't talk much, Harry.'

'Hm.'

'Swedish?'

'Norwegian.'

'You running from something?'

'That what it looks like?'

'Yeah. I see you're wearing a wedding ring. You running from your wife?'

'She's dead.'

'Ah. You're running from grief.' Lucille raised her glass in a toast. 'You wanna know the place I love the most? Right here, Laurel Canyon. Not now, but at the end of the sixties. You should've been here, Harry. If you were even born then.'

'Yeah, so I've heard.'

She pointed towards the framed photos on the wall behind Ben.

'All the musicians hung out here. Crosby, Stills, Nash and ... what was the name of that last guy?'

Harry smiled again.

'The Mamas and the Papas,' she continued. 'Carole King. James Taylor. Joni Mitchell.' She wrinkled her nose. 'Looked and sounded like a Sunday-school girl, but she laid some of the aforementioned. Even got her claws into Leonard – he shacked up with her for a month or so. I was allowed to borrow him for one night.'

'Leonard Cohen?'

'The one and only. Lovely, sweet man. He taught me a little something about writing rhyming verse. Most people make the mistake of opening with their one good line, and then write some half-decent forced rhyme on the next one. The trick is to put the forced rhyme in the first sentence, then no one will notice it. Just take a look at the banal first line of "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye" and compare it with the beauty of the second line. There's a natural elegance to both sentences. We hear it that way, because we think the writer is thinking in the same sequence as he writes.'

Little wonder really; after all, people are inclined to believe that what is happening is a result of what's gone before, and not the other way around.'

'Hm. So what happens is a result of what will happen?'

'Exactly, Harry! You get that, right?'

'I don't know. Can you give me an example?'

'Sure.' She downed her drink. He must have heard something in her tone because she saw him raise an eyebrow and quickly scan the bar.

'What's happening, at present, is that I'm telling you about how I owe money on a movie in development,' she said, looking through the dirty window with the half-closed blinds at the dusty parking lot outside. 'That's no coincidence, rather a consequence of what *will* happen. There's a white Camaro parked next to my car outside here.'

'With two men inside,' he said. 'It's been there for twenty minutes.'

She nodded. Harry had just confirmed that she was not mistaken in what she guessed to be his line of work.

'I noticed that car outside my place up in the Canyon this morning,' she said. 'No big surprise, they've already given me a warning and told me they'd send collectors. And not the certified type. This loan wasn't taken out at a bank, if you follow me. Now, when I walk out to my car these gentlemen are probably going to want to have words with me. I'm guessing they'll still make do with that, warnings and threats, that is.'

'Hm. And why tell me this?'

'Because you're a cop.'

Once more he raised an eyebrow. 'Am I?'

'My father was a cop and, clearly, you guys are recognisable the world over. The point is I want you to keep an eye out from here. If they get vocal and turn threatening, I'd like you to come out onto the porch and ... you know, look like a cop, so they beat it. Listen, I'm pretty sure it's not going to come to that, but I'd feel safer if you kept an eye out.'

Harry studied her for a moment. 'OK,' he simply said.

Lucille was surprised. Hadn't he allowed himself to be persuaded a little too easily? At the same time there was something unwavering in his eyes that made her trust him. On the other hand, she had trusted the Adonis. And the director. And the producer.

'I'm leaving now,' she said.

Harry Hole held the glass in his hand. Listened to the almost inaudible hiss of ice cubes melting. Didn't drink. He was broke, at the end of the line, and was going to drag this drink out and enjoy it. His gaze settled on one of the pictures behind the bar. It was a photograph of one of the favourite

authors of his youth, Charles Bukowski, outside Creatures. Ben had told him it was from the seventies. Bukowski was standing with his arm around a buddy, at what looked like dawn; both were wearing Hawaiian shirts, their eyes swimming, pinpricks for pupils, and grinning triumphantly, as though they had just reached the North Pole after a gruelling journey.

Harry lowered his eyes to look at the credit card which Ben had tossed on the bar in front of him.

Maxed out. Emptied. Nothing left. Mission accomplished. Which had been this, to drink until there was indeed nothing left. No money, no days, no future. All that remained was to see if he had the courage – or the cowardice – to round it all off. There was an old Beretta handgun underneath the mattress in his room back at the boarding house. He had bought it for twenty-five dollars from a homeless guy living in one of the blue tents down on Skid Row. There were three bullets in it. He laid the credit card in the flat of his hand and curled his fingers around it. Turned to look out the window. Watched the old lady as she strutted out to the parking lot. She was so small. Slight, delicate and strong as a sparrow. Beige trousers and a short matching jacket. There was something 1980s about her archaic, but tasteful, clothing style. Walking the same way as how she swept into the bar every morning. Making an entrance. For an audience of between two and eight people.

‘Lucille is here!’ Ben would proclaim before, unbidden, he began mixing her usual poison, whiskey sour.

But it wasn’t the way she took a room that reminded Harry of his mother, who had died at the Radium Hospital when he was fifteen, putting the first bullet hole through his heart. It was the gentle, smiling, yet sad look in Lucille’s eyes, like that of a kind, but resigned soul. The concern she displayed for others when she asked for the latest news about their health problems, love lives, and their nearest and dearest. And the consideration she showed by letting Harry sit in peace at the far end of the bar. His mother, that taciturn woman who was the family’s control tower, its nerve centre, who pulled the strings so discreetly one could easily believe it was his father who called the shots. His mother, who had always offered a safe embrace, had always understood, whom he had loved above all else and who therefore had become his Achilles heel. Like that time in second grade when there had been a gentle knock on the classroom door and his mother was standing there with the lunch box he had left at home. Harry had brightened up automatically at the sight of her, before hearing some of his classmates laugh, whereupon he had marched out to her in the hall and, in a fury, had told her she was embarrassing him, she had to

leave, he didn't need food. She had merely smiled sadly, given him the lunch box, stroked his cheek and left. He didn't mention it later. Of course, she had understood, the way she always did. And when he went to bed that night, he also understood. *She* was not the reason he had felt uncomfortable. It was the fact they had all seen it. His love. His vulnerability. He had thought about apologising several times over the following years, but that would probably just have felt stupid.

A cloud of dust rose up on the gravelled area outside, enveloping for a moment Lucille, who was holding her sunglasses in place. He saw the passenger door of the white Camaro open, and a man in sunglasses and a red polo shirt emerge. He walked to the front of the car, blocking Lucille's path to her own.

He expected to observe a conversation between the two. But instead the man took a step forward and grabbed hold of Lucille's arm. Began pulling her towards the Camaro. Harry saw the heels of her shoes dig into the gravel. And now he also saw that the Camaro didn't have American number plates. In that instant he was off the bar stool. Running towards the door, he burst it open with his elbow, was blinded by sunlight and almost stumbled on the two steps down from the porch. Realised he was far from sober. Then zeroed in on the two cars. His eyes gradually adjusting to the light. Beyond the parking lot, on the other side of the road winding its way up the green hillside, lay a sleepy general store, but he couldn't see any other people apart from the man and Lucille, who was being dragged towards the Camaro.

'Police!' he shouted. 'Let her go!'

'Please stay out of this, sir,' the man called back.

Harry surmised the man must have a similar background to his own, only policemen employed polite language in this type of situation. Harry also knew that a physical intervention was unavoidable, and that the first rule in close combat was simple: don't wait, he who attacks first and with maximum aggression wins. So he didn't slow down, and the other man must have realised Harry's intention, because he let go of Lucille and reached for something he had behind him. His hand swung back around. In it he held a shiny handgun Harry recognised instantly. A Glock 17. Now pointed directly at him.

Harry slowed down but continued moving forwards. Saw the other man's eye aiming from behind the gun. His voice was half drowned out by a passing pickup on the road.

'Run back to where you came from, sir. Now!'

But Harry carried on walking towards him. Became aware he was still holding the credit card in his right hand. Was this how it ended? In a dusty parking lot in a foreign country, bathed in sunlight, broke and half drunk, while trying to do what he hadn't been able to do for his mother, hadn't been able to do for any of those he had ever cared about?

He almost closed his eyes and squeezed his fingers around the credit card, so his hand formed a chisel.

The title of the Leonard Cohen song swirled through his mind: 'Hey, that's no way to say goodbye.'

Fuck that, the hell it wasn't.

Friday

EIGHT O'CLOCK. HALF AN HOUR since the September sun had gone down over Oslo, and past bedtime for three-year-olds.

Katrine Bratt sighed and whispered into the phone: 'Can't you sleep, darling?'

'Gwanny is singing wong,' the child's voice answered, sniffing. 'Whe ah you?'

'I had to go to work, darling, but I'll be home soon. Would you like Mummy to sing a little?'

'Yeah.'

'Well, then you have to close your eyes.'

'Yeah.'

'“Blueman”?’

'Yeah.'

Katrine began singing the melancholy song in a low, deep voice.

Blueman, Blueman, my buck, think of your small boy.

She had no idea why children had, for over a century, felt happy to be lulled to sleep by the story of an angst-ridden boy who wonders why Blueman, his favourite goat, hasn't returned home from grazing, and who fears it's been taken by a bear and now lies mutilated and dead somewhere in the mountains.

Still, after just one verse she could hear Gert's breathing become more regular and deep, and after the next verse she heard her mother-in-law's whispered voice on the phone.

'He's asleep now.'

'Thanks,' said Katrine, who had been squatting on her haunches so long she had to put her hand on the ground. 'I'll be back as soon as I can.'

'Take all the time you need, dear. And I'm the one who should be thanking you for wanting us here. You know, he looks so much like Bjørn when he's asleep.'

Katrine swallowed. Unable, as usual, to respond when she said that. Not because she didn't miss Bjørn, not because she wasn't happy that Bjørn's parents saw him in Gert. But because it simply wasn't true.

She concentrated on what lay in front of her.

'Intense lullaby,' said Sung-min Larsen, who had come and crouched down next to her. "*Maybe now you lay dead*"?'

'I know, but it's the only one he wants to hear,' Katrine said.

'Well, then that's what he gets.' Her colleague smiled.

Katrine nodded. 'Have you ever thought about how as children we expect unconditional love from our parents, without giving anything in return? That we are actually parasites? But then we grow up and things change completely. When exactly do you think we stop believing that we can be loved unconditionally just for being who we are?'

'When did *she* stop, you mean?'

'Yeah.'

They looked down at the body of the young woman lying on the forest floor. Her trousers and knickers were pulled down to her ankles, but the zip on the thin down jacket was pulled up. Her face – which was turned to the starry skies above – appeared chalk-white in the glare of the Crime Scene Unit's floodlights, which were positioned among the trees. Her make-up was streaked, and looked like it had run and dried out several times. Her hair – bombed blonde by chemicals – was sticking to one side of her face. Her lips were stuffed with silicon, and false eyelashes protruded like the eaves of a roof over one eye, which was sunken down in its socket, staring glassily up and past them, and also over the other eye, which was not there, only an empty socket. Perhaps all the barely degradable synthetic materials were the reason the body had remained in as good condition as it had.

'I'm guessing this is Susanne Andersen?' Sung-min said.

'I'm guessing the same,' Katrine replied.

The detectives were from two different departments, she was with Crime Squad at the Oslo Police and he was with Kripos. Susanne Andersen, twenty-six years old, had been missing for seventeen days and was last spotted on a security camera at Skullerud metro station around a twenty-minute walk from where they were now. The only lead on the other missing woman, Bertine Bertilsen, twenty-seven years old, was her car, which was found abandoned in a car park in Grefsenkollen, a hiking area in another part of the city. The hair colour of the woman in front of them tallied with the security camera footage of Susanne, while Bertine was, according to family and friends, currently a brunette. Besides, the body

had no tattoos on the naked lower body, while Bertine was supposed to have one – a Louis Vuitton logo – on her ankle.

So far, it had been a relatively cool and dry September, and the discoloration on the corpse's skin – blue, purple, yellow, brown – might be consistent with it lying outdoors for close to three weeks. The same went for the smell, owing to the body's production of gas, which gradually seeped out from all orifices. Katrine had also noted the white area of thin hair-like filaments below the nostrils: fungus. In the large wound on the throat, yellowish-white, blind maggots crawled. Katrine had seen it so often she no longer had any particular reaction. After all, blowflies were – in Harry's words – as loyal as Liverpool fans. Turning up at a moment's notice no matter the time or place, rain or shine, attracted by the smell of dimethyl trisulfide which the body begins to excrete from the moment of expiration. The females lay their eggs, and a few days later the larvae hatch and begin gorging on the rotting flesh. They pupate, turning into flies, which look for bodies to lay their own eggs in, and after a month they have lived their life to the end and die. That's their life cycle. Not so different to ours, Katrine thought. Or rather, not so different to mine.

Katrine looked around. White-clad members of Krimteknisk, the Forensics Unit, moved like soundless ghosts among the trees, casting eerie shadows every time the flashes on their cameras lit up. The forest was large. Østmarka continued on, for mile after mile, virtually all the way to Sweden. A jogger had found the body. Or rather, the jogger's dog, which had been allowed off the lead and had disappeared from the narrow gravel road and into the woods. It was already getting dark. The jogger – running with a headlamp – had followed after while calling out to the dog and had eventually found it, next to the body, wagging its tail. Well, no wagging had been mentioned, it was something Katrine had pictured.

'Susanne Andersen,' she whispered, not knowing quite to whom. Perhaps to the deceased, as comfort and assurance that she had finally been found and identified.

The cause of death appeared obvious. The cut that had been made across her throat, running like a smile over Susanne Andersen's narrow neck. The fly larvae, various forms of insects and perhaps other animals had probably helped themselves to most of the blood; however, Katrine still saw traces of blood spatter in the heather and on the trunk of one tree.

'Killed here *in situ*,' she said.

'Looks that way,' Sung-min replied. 'Do you think she was raped? Or just sexually assaulted after he killed her?'