



**Two** hours later Sturla stands outside Zara. He is wearing a stone-grey cotton scarf around his neck, and his thoughts turn to Stella, the shop on Bankastræti, where he'd stood just a few days earlier in a new overcoat which now protects an entirely different person than it was intended to. He lights himself a cigarette, and when he blows out the smoke, he tastes the beer he drank inside McDonald's in his mouth. As he heads towards the Ambassador Hotel, intending to sit down in the cafeteria and have another beer, he sets eyes on a man who is standing outside the shining, well-polished glass door of the high-rise Novotel Hotel; he's wearing a beige overcoat. Sturla can tell, even at a distance—at least, over the ten meters or so that separate him from the man in the overcoat—that it is a well-made, expensive item of clothing, which perhaps isn't surprising given that the owner appears to be a guest at the hotel, which Sturla knows is one of the most expensive and best hotels in the city. [ . . . ]

Sturla adjusts his scarf and looks up at the hotel building, with one eye on the man in the overcoat; just then he greets two women who have come cheerfully out of the hotel and onto the sidewalk. They embrace him in a very Southern European way, with three kisses, and then they set off at a stroll in the same direction as Sturla had been heading. The women are somewhat younger than the man. One of them wears a light gray suit; the other a white coat. Nothing about those people—except perhaps the man's overcoat—should give Sturla a reason to follow them, but he doesn't want to let them out of his sight; he finds himself following along the street. He suspects that these well-dressed people come from France or Italy, that they are probably educated people who are somehow connected with the business of art or culture. Just before they reach Sturla's hotel, they decide to cross to the other sidewalk, as if they're reluctant to mix with the wretched appearance the Ambassador Hotel presents to the sidewalk. They are gallery owners or art collectors, thinks Sturla, and it comes as no surprise when he sees them stop in front of the bronze figures on the National Theater. When he, too, comes to a halt, he hears them speaking English: they are American. He hears one of the women say *interesting* in a way that doesn't match other English-speaking regions. The one in the white coat takes a photograph of them, with the theater in background, and they continue along the street in the direction of the cathedral square. [ . . . ]

Afterwards, he realizes he hasn't any reason to dwell on what happened after

he pursued the American friends of the arts inside Literatu Svetainé. He'd sat at the bar, ordered a glass of beer, and loosened his scarf, which was becoming sweaty around his neck. He'd heard the man in the overcoat (who had actually removed his overcoat before sitting down with the women at a table a little way from the bar) order himself smoked salmon and something which sounded to Sturla like Baby Tomato Soup; they also asked the waiter for some chilled Riesling wine and sparkling water. There was no bass player in a hat on the sidewalk outside this tastefully designed place. When Sturla left his half-empty beer glass at the bar and went towards the entrance, five or six items were hanging from the coat rack, but by the time he opened the door to the street and saw that the sun had broken out from the clouds which a few minutes earlier had lain over the day like a plastic wrapper, there were only four or five items left. Sturla took as long as he needed: he buttoned his jacket as he stood in front of the coat hooks; he wrapped the scarf around his neck—though there was no need to since the sun was beginning to shine—and very calmly placed the overcoat he'd taken from the coat hanger over his forearm. He noticed that the texture of the material was similar, if not identical, to the Aquascutum overcoat from Bankastræti. It isn't until he is approaching the National Theatre, having crossed to that side of the street, that he allows himself to peek at the inside of the coat. There, in gilt embroidered ornamental letters on a dark blue silk square, he reads: Brooks Brothers; in smaller letters below that: Established 1818.

Sturla nods his head to the bronze figures on top of the playhouse and hurries along the crowded sidewalk in the direction of his hotel. He is hot by the time he goes inside, and can smell in his sweat the stale smell of morning beers. The Nordic guy he'd seen before with a cup of tea and rolled cigarettes is back at the same table in the cafeteria, and when Sturla glances in through the glass door, he sees Liliya sitting there, in the company of some other people. She has a red kerchief bound around her head. He speeds through the lobby in the direction of the stairs, nodding his head to a young woman at the front desk who he has not previously seen, and the first thing he does when he enters his room is slip on the overcoat and look at himself in the mirror.

It is really unbelievable, thinks Sturla, how similar this American's overcoat is to my own overcoat. ■