

The Righteous Ones

Chapter 1

PITS ARE FOR PIGS was written in English across the dead man's forehead. Gudgeir squinted to better make out the clumsy letters that appeared to have been made with a black marker pen. There had not been enough room for the S in PIGS, so that the final loop had ended up in the man's hair and looked more than anything like a black smudge.

Gudgeir looked at his golfing partners. They were clearly in a state of shock where they stood, silent, outside the invisible perimeter he had drawn around the scene. Just a while before, one of them, the lawyer Magnus Isleifsson, had almost blundered down into the bunker. Gudgeir had only just managed to keep him back before he trampled over everything. Now Magnus's hands were clenched convulsively on his golf trolley. One hand was clad in a black golfing glove but the knuckles of the other were white and the skin set with scars. The peculiar face was taut, the mouth compressed and the lips just a narrow slit. Gudgeir looked away and stared as if in a trance past the close-cropped circular green to the slender pole that stood up from the hole. The hole that just a short while before had been so important to them. The tattered flag flapped in the breeze. Then he looked back at Magnus, who also seemed to have retreated into a world of his own, his eyes fixed on the white-foaming river rushing down on the other side of the green. Gudgeir understood Magnus's reaction. It was somehow easier to focus on the magnificence of the landscape than on what lay before their eyes at hole 13. The third member of the group, however, Freymodur Skaftason, a hearty fellow with a low handicap and a perceptible collar of dandruff round his neck, was looking intently at the death in the bunker.

Gudgeir had made his way cautiously towards the body, trying to detect any sign of life. It was, of course, pointless: he had known so the moment he saw this middle-aged man down in the bunker. Stretched out straight in the pale sand, as if he had chosen the place himself to lie down and rest. Neatly dressed in dark-blue trousers and a beige golfing sweater with little green, yellow and blue diamonds. Under the lifeless head lay a crumpled, dark-blue golf cap with fleece earflaps. The sweater was ripped open at the middle of the chest and the dark-red blood merged into the festive

colours. At first glance the man appeared to be between fifty and sixty. He was in good physical shape, of medium height and with hair of that light-brown colour that is so common in Iceland and that Gudgeir had once heard referred to as 'pâté-brown'.

The mouth was half open, as if he was on the point of saying something. Under the nose, which made you think not so much of an eagle as a falcon, was a wart or a birthmark that set a strong character to the face and gave it an almost feminine quality. The ears were on the large side but lay flat against the skull, making them seem smaller than they otherwise would have. Just below the right ear you could make out a darkish congealed mass that might have come from the ear or the chest, it was hard to tell which. From a distance the eyes appeared to be closed, but when Gudgeir came nearer he saw they were half open. Instinctively, or maybe from habit, he made the sign of the cross in the air in the direction of the dead man, before stopping to consider the conditions and load his mobile with picture after picture.

He then forced himself to stand still. It was an effort, my God it was an effort! The desire to walk around the edge of the bunker was almost overwhelming, but good sense prevailed. His sharp eyes fixed on the surroundings, on the moss-covered rocks to his right, each with its own shape, and from there across the river to the hilly landscape and the open distances. The vivid autumn colours stretched out over the green, yellow and red palette. It was completely still except for the calming sound of the rain and the heavy roar from the river.

The police from Selfoss would doubtless be here before long but it would take his colleagues from Reykjavík a while yet. Gudgeir looked at his watch at regular intervals, counting down the minutes. The rain was coming down steadily harder, and as it did the detective's anxiety increased. His anxiety was not only directed at the weather; the next group of players was now approaching, four of them. It would not be long before there would be more people turning up, not just the golfers but also from the holiday cottages in the surrounding area. Gudgeir let out an audible groan at the thought but consoled himself that there probably would not be many cottage owners about at present, on a weekday so well into autumn. He stepped cautiously back to his two golfing partners, trying to retrace precisely the same route as he had come, which was not far. Magnus and Freymodur both looked at him without saying a word. The former stroked his sleeve across his cheek.

The ring of his phone broke the incessant sound of the raindrops pattering on their outfits. Gudgeir groped inside his waterproof jacket and fished out his mobile. Andres's cheery face appeared on the screen.

'Hello there, are you on your way?'

‘Yes, we’ve just left town,’ answered Andres. His voice was accompanied by the muffled sound of the police car’s siren. For some reason the siren always reminded Gudgeir of the whirr of the humming top he had had as a child out in the country. He remembered that the spindle that stood up from the middle of it had had a gilded knob. If you pressed the spindle down fast and repeatedly the top would dance in countless circles on the wooden floor at home. Suddenly he recalled that his grandmother had always called the toy a sleepy maggy rather than a humming top.

Black streaks leaked out into the man’s hair and the pen marks on his forehead were hardly legible any more.

‘You’d better make it quick,’ said Gudgeir. ‘I don’t know how long I can protect the scene. And it’s bucketing down. We need to get a tent up over this as quickly as possible and get it done right. With all due respect to our colleagues from Selfoss, I reckon it’s better if we see to the job. Did you get the picture I sent of the body? Whoever did that writing on the man’s forehead is presumably not a golfer.’

Gudgeir undid the popper on his golf glove with his teeth and pulled it off by the same method. The leather was wet and left a nasty taste in his mouth.

‘Really, what makes you think that?’ There was doubt in Andres’s voice.

‘No golfer would ever call it a “pit”. It’s a bunker.’

‘Oh, listen to the expert! Was it this year you took up golf? Or was it last?’

‘Everybody knows that,’ answered Gudgeir, once again turning half way round to look behind him up the lush green slope that led down to the thirteenth hole. They didn’t go easy on the fertiliser on this course. He stepped a few paces up the slope to see around a rock that jutted out onto the fairway and was obstructing his view.

‘No,’ said Andres, with emphasis.

‘No what?’ asked Gudgeir, distractedly.

‘No, not everyone knows that. And what’s all this with the umbrella next to the body?’

‘No, the really weird thing is that it’s not an umbrella, let alone a golf umbrella, because they’re enormous. This is a little sunshade sort of thing, with the name of a company that produces popular golfing equipment on it, and it’s standing up out of the sand in the bunker. You can’t really see it properly in the picture. The sunshade has been positioned and set up there. It’s all pretty strange. It looks as if the body’s sunbathing on the beach here in the drizzle at Kidjaberg. And then there was a restaurant menu lying on his stomach. I had to remove it to stop it getting destroyed in the rain.’

Gudgeir gave a good look around him once again to double-check. 'There's no sign of any golf buggy here, as far as I can see. He probably wasn't playing. So it's possible the body was moved here. Unless the buggy's somewhere out in the river.'

'The river? Someone was talking about a lake round there.' Andres seemed confused.

'A river! Hvita. There's a lake called Hestvatn just nearby. You ought to get out of town more often, my friend,' said Gudgeir, fingering a golf ball in his pocket. It was relaxing.

'Isn't it full of holiday cottages around there? For all you know, the murderer could be watching you from one of them,' said Andres tersely.

'Loads of them. But I think that whoever did this is well away by now. Don't know, I just have that feeling. Anyway, how far have you got?'

'We're coming up to the turn-off to the ski centre,' answered Andres just as Gudgeir happened to look back up the slope to the thirteenth fairway.

'Shit, the next group's coming. Get a move on!'

He waved with both arms in the direction of the men who were standing up on the hill, waiting to tee off, before setting off briskly up the slope towards them. It was no great distance, but at regular intervals he turned to look back behind him so as not to let the incident scene and his own group out of his sight. One single careless movement could easily ruin the upcoming investigation.

There were four of them in the group, two of whom Gudgeir knew vaguely. In a few carefully chosen words he described how things stood and gave them the most essential information about the approach to the thirteenth green, and asked them please to stop the next group behind them. Then he explained to them that he had been having major problems contacting the course manager.

'Anyway, it's not going to be long before the whole course is shut,' he said. The men looked at each other in some confusion. 'The meet's off,' Gudgeir reiterated, to make things absolutely clear.

'I nipped into the clubhouse for the toilet after the ninth,' said one of the men. 'As far as I could tell, the course manager was pulling up at the clubhouse in his pickup as I was coming back out again. They're actually shutting down for the winter but they were intending to lay on some soup and bread for us anyway. You were in the first group, so they've obviously turned up to prepare the food. I know the manager a bit because I play here quite often. His name's Valgeir and he's doing a fine job, as you can see from the course. His wife does the catering. They've had the place for a couple of years.'

The man had an amusingly self-important air, as if he was describing some major event or his close friendship with some world leader. He gave Gudgeir a confidential look.

‘Do you think that man down there in the bunker’s had a heart attack?’ he asked, and then added. ‘Or a stroke? Or maybe a ruptured aneurysm of the aorta? One’s heard of a few like that.’ He plainly had a fairly high opinion of his knowledge and unzipped one of the pockets of his golfing jacket, fished out a cigarette and lit it.

Gudgeir could only admire his optimism: the cigarette immediately became soaking wet.

‘It’s all in the dark for the time being. The only thing we know is that the man is dead.’ Gudgeir gave a polite smile and said goodbye before the men had any chance to shower him with more questions.

He walked back down the slope at a vigorous pace but had to slow down as an old, familiar pain that had lain dormant for many months crept in under one kneecap and up the thigh. His nostrils took in the smell of heather and, in an attempt to banish the pain, he cast his eyes up onto the heath beneath the rock face in search of berries. It was well on into September but the autumn had been warm and sunny, so there might still be berries. Gudgeir stopped a moment, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. There is no way of getting used to the nastiness of finding a person who has been murdered, he thought, and his mind went back to a mutilated body from a case two years earlier. The body with its multiple wounds and the invasive smell were seared onto the hard drive of his brain like a computer virus that there was no way of wiping clean. Some nights he would wake up with a start, streaming with sweat and a sense of horror. Gudgeir had not discussed it with a psychologist but knew he would have to do something about it. He could not carry on like this.

His eyes scanned the slope swiftly and at a quick glance he could not see any berries, and felt a pang of disappointment. Then he shook his head. He knew from experience that in horrific circumstances the mind would go searching for something normal and healthy to counteract the ugliness. Gudgeir had become well familiar with this tendency but the problem was that it grew stronger with every case he had to deal with.

As Gudgeir was getting back towards the green he saw to his relief that his two partners were still in the same spot, just as he had instructed. Freymodur had in fact put on his rain trousers and had sat down on the grass, but Magnus was still standing hunched up, leaning against his golf trolley, every bit as preoccupied as before, it seemed. Gudgeir studied the strange lines of his face. A lack of regularity in his features made it difficult to take your eyes off him. He recalled having heard about an accident one New Year’s Eve, that Magnus had got a flare in his face or been messing about with some fireworks. Gudgeir could not remember exactly. He had not met Magnus nor given him a

moment's thought for many years. Not before today at this golf meet in fact, held in memory of an old school friend who had struggled with cancer for years and finally lost his battle that spring.

A group of old friends and acquaintances had organised the golf competition with the purpose of generating money for the family. The youngest children had not even reached school age. The competitors were from all directions, of varying skill on the golf course but all linked in one way or another by their lives having crossed, for a greater or lesser time, with this former school friend of Gudgeir's from senior high school.

It's just madness, these New Year's celebrations in Iceland, thought Gudgeir. Everybody shooting fireworks off all over the place like maniacs, and me no better than the rest. Strange that Magnus should not have had his face seen to better. Plastic surgeons could do the most incredible things now, but then perhaps Magnus had just gotten used to his own reflection in the mirror. In all truth, he was a fine-looking man, in fact an exceptionally fine-looking man. Gudgeir had no idea what area of law he was in but wondered for a moment whether the facial disfigurements did not put customers off. He rejected the idea immediately. His wife, Inga, would presumably know something about it, he thought. They all keep a good eye on each other, these lawyers.

'Magnus, are you quite sure you don't recognise this man?' The other did not answer immediately and Gudgeir noticed that a small shiver went through him.

'Don't know him,' he replied finally, without taking his eyes off the rushing river.

'Can you see something out there?' At the question, it was as if the man was released from a spell. He turned abruptly to the policeman and answered clearly:

'What? In the river? No, nothing, nothing at all!' He shook his head vigorously. 'I was just thinking how strange life can be. Here we are, old acquaintances who haven't met in years, getting together to play a round of golf in memory of Halli, and we walk straight into a corpse, and on the thirteenth fairway!

Freymodur agreed enthusiastically that you'd never heard the like of it and went on about how thirteen was a very unlucky number. He jumped to his feet and strode over to his trolley, grabbed hold of his driver, which had a head the size of a handball, pulled it out of the club bag, took a few steps, set himself in position, closed his fingers carefully on the grip and then set about practising his swing. Gudgeir could hardly believe his eyes.

'I've got a tendency not to follow through properly on my foreswing,' Freymodur called to them. 'I'm going to take a few sessions with this new instructor at Basar and get it sorted out once and for all.'

He made one practice swing after another, always holding the club rigid, high in the air in front of him, at the end of each stroke.

‘See, the nose on the club head has to face the right way, otherwise you’re always going to slice it! With me, it tends to lean to the right. I’d definitely have got a birdie on the second hole if I hadn’t sliced it.’

Gudgeir happened to look towards Magnus and their eyes met. The policeman’s dark eyes fastened involuntarily on the lawyer’s broad and curving eyebrows.

‘If I’m not mistaken, this is Hinrik Eggertsson that is lying there in the bunker. He’s been involved in all kinds of things, for instance the restaurant business,’ said Magnus quietly.

‘Didn’t you say just now that you had no idea who it was?’ asked Gudgeir in surprise. Magnus gave him a weary look.

‘It is a personal principle with me never to assert anything unless I feel I can stand by it with reasonable confidence,’ he answered coldly.

Just then they saw the police arriving, driving down the narrow track that had been laid for golf buggies rather than police cars. With them was the district commissioner from Selfoss, on this occasion not in his official regalia but in jeans and an anorak. Two cars from forensics appeared shortly afterwards. The pathologist, a young German woman, notably meticulous and competent in her field, emerged from one of the cars and gave a good look around her. Gudgeir noticed how she breathed in the beauty of the landscape before setting off in the direction of the bunker.

The rain continued to fall.

Chapter 2

Saeros was in a foul mood. What had she done to deserve being stuck here at the station instead of going out to Kidjaberg with Andres and all the others? She cast her eye around her and tried to find something to do. Then let out an audible sigh at having already thrown out everything it was possible to throw out and sorted everything it was possible to sort. It was Saeros's custom to always file documents and correspondence immediately in their proper place in the system, so she gave up looking for disorder in the computer and ran her eyes along the shelf above her desk, where her matching-coloured files stood in a compact row. Everything in perfect order there too.

Her eyes halted above the shelf where she had hung up her maxim for the week: 'Please take responsibility for the energy you bring into the space.'

'Absolutely,' she muttered under her breath. This cautionary message was her task for the next weeks and she set herself to see it through, as in everything else she did. The previous week she had gone for her so-called staff assessment interview that everyone had once a year. Supremely laid back, Gudgeir had offered her coffee, which he should have known she never drank, before he set about going over how well she had been performing. No one could boast of better attendance than her and her reports were drawn up to a quite exceptional standard. After some while of this kind of empty chit-chat she had started to get uneasy. She was not given to any kind of time wasting but had not liked to call an end to this vacuous conversation on her own initiative. Gudgeir was her superior and if he wanted to waste working hours on something like this, that was of course his business, she had forced herself to say to herself, struggling to suppress her growing impatience. After what seemed to her an age, and after praising her once again for her performance and professionalism in her work, he had given her a determined look with his dark-brown, alert eyes and finally got to the matter.

Her initial reaction was anger and hurt. In her mind she went over each and every one of her colleagues at the station. So who was it that had been whingeing about her? Hardly Gudrun: she was on maternity leave and anyway she had been quite exceptionally happy and tolerant since she became pregnant with the twins after the third round of in vitro. And they had got on so well when Saeros went for a visit to bring her the baby presents from the people in the department – two child seats of the best make that they had bought on her suggestion because it made her feel good to know

of Gudrun's children being safe and sound in the car. Child seats like these did not come cheap, everything had gone up so incredibly, so Gudrun had to be grateful. No, it could not be Gudrun that had been complaining about her.

Gudgeir had actually downplayed the whole matter and had stated quite clearly that this was just a very minor communication problem that it would be easy enough to get sorted out. Saeros should just think about being a tiny little bit more flexible in how she dealt with others; in every other respect she was a quite exceptional member of staff, as everyone was aware. She just did not need to be always right on every matter, however small, or giving people advice they had not asked for. Remember too, he had said casually, with a smile towards her, that it's sometimes a sign of intelligence to give way! It was as if he wanted to minimise the effect of his words with his body language, but the implication was not lost on her. She was so knocked backwards that when her boss pressed her on how she felt about work at the end of the interview she said nothing in reply, and just thanked him primly and left.

Her closest working colleagues were Gudgeir himself, Andres and Gudrun. The four of them usually worked together. Saeros thought it extremely unlikely that Andres would have been making complaints to Gudgeir about her. He was made of sterner stuff than to be making a fuss about nothing – and anyhow he should consider himself fortunate to have kept his job after messing up so badly in the actor case. Andres was not so stupid as to moan about some trivial matter, having just got back to work after an extended absence that was supposed to go down as 'unpaid leave'.

Gudgeir had said that this had come up in conversation with a number of their colleagues, though none of them had made a formal complaint. Far from it. He had leaned forward in his chair, placed his elbows on the desk, and looked at her, smiling but purposeful, and said that someone with her professionalism would take no time getting it put straight. Saeros felt humiliated and had considered for a second handing in her notice, she was so upset, but had rejected the idea almost immediately. But it still rankled.

Even so, this was hardly the reason Gudgeir had asked her to stick around in town instead of heading out east with Andres and the others to this popular and thoroughly normal golf course that now seemed to have turned into a murder scene. But she did not find her boss's explanation up to much either – that she ought to stay in town because of some vague threats of a bomb on a whaling ship. There had been threats of this kind from time to time for years and the one that had come in yesterday was no different from any of the others.

Not a single whale had been hunted this year and precious few the year before, if she remembered right. There was always something people were getting up in arms about and making threats about these days. Society was in turmoil. Saeros stood up from her desk and stretched her well-toned body. She had thankfully been able to get out for a run this morning, and exercise generally ensured a state of personal equilibrium. Her brother had even come jogging with her and having him around gave her particular satisfaction nowadays, at least most of the time. After many years of drug and alcohol abuse, with all the chaos that brought with it, he seemed to have got his life back in order and Saeros knew that she herself had had a large part in this with her unshakeable and active support.

While they had been out running in the fine autumn weather he had talked to her about their half sister, Anita Ros. He had been worried that she was in some kind of trouble, even getting into drugs. Saeros had stopped on the spot and asked what made him think that, whether he had not just started seeing druggies round every corner now he had got himself cleaned up.

‘What the hell are you on about, Saeros! Are we supposed to go sweeping problems under the carpet now so they don’t disturb your perfect life?’ Stebbi had said heatedly.

Perfect life! Saeros recalled the chill that had passed through her. She had spent the greater part of her life trying to get this family sorted out. Even so, she had not said a word, just bit her tongue and let him blather on. He still had difficulties controlling his temper despite two years on the wagon. Actually, Stebbi had always had violent mood swings, would flare up in an instant like an erupting volcano if anyone so much as breathed on him wrong, but then was always quick to cool down again afterwards. Just like their dear beloved father, who could turn times of happiness into tense misery in the blink of an eye.

‘I know the signs. I’ve run into her twice in the last ten days and the second time it was clear she’d been smoking something,’ he shouted so loud that a young man who had been running just in front of them with earphones plugged in turned round to look at them.

‘You don’t need to shout, Stebbi. I can hear you perfectly.’ Saeros had done all she could to calm him down, jogging lightly on the spot so as not to get cold. ‘Let’s run a bit slower and you can tell me about it. I’m listening.’ She had seen, with a sideways glance, how her brother calmed down at her familiar, dependable manner and soothing voice.

He was quicker to regain his composure nowadays, but he was still clearly set on everyone having always to agree with him, and it got on her nerves, though she tried not to show it. She was particularly sensitive about anything that reminded her of her own struggle. She also remembered how the sense of responsibility had lain on her like a dead weight and she could not stand it. Why

did there always have to be some trouble in this messed-up family? While the thoughts had swirled around in her head she had made an effort to smile encouragingly at her brother to hide how she felt.

‘Can you see the glacier? Wow, it always looks so fantastic, even if it’s shrinking more and more now all the time,’ she had said cheerfully, pointing to the shining mountain rising up out of the waters on the other side of the bay. On the foreshore in front of them was a flock of oystercatchers, probably planning its journey across the ocean. Saeros was fond of this black and white bird with its dignified orange beak. The oystercatcher always seemed to know where it was supposed to be going.

‘There’s something really strange about her, our sister. Apathetic, cuts herself off. And she doesn’t seem to take any care about her appearance,’ her brother had gasped at her side, without looking up from the asphalted footpath.

‘Since when has Anita Ros not been apathetic and a bit grubby? I can hardly remember her any other way,’ retorted Saeros, though she knew perfectly well that this was rather overstating the case. ‘I get a shock every time I see her.’

‘Lay off. The tattoos and piercings are just a front. She’s a really nice girl.’

‘Don’t forget the orange hair. Much the same colour as the beaks on those oystercatchers,’ Saeros remarked dryly. ‘I seem to recall her mother having the same style,’ she added, thinking of the tarty-looking woman in the black leather trousers their father had lived with for several years. It had, fortunately, been more than a decade since they had separated but she would bet on it that the woman would still be wearing those leather trousers. Would probably be buried in them.

They had not said anything for a while because Stebbi still was not in shape to talk for long at a time. While Saeros had to make an effort to jog slowly, he was puffing like a steam engine.

‘As it happens, Anita’s hair is jet black these days,’ he informed her, and slowed down even more. ‘So no change as far as that’s concerned. But the thing is that now she’s stopped looking after herself properly, washing and so on. She smelled bad yesterday. An old sweaty smell, as if she was sleeping in her clothes. I looked in on her mother and she said she was terribly worried about her. The girl doesn’t always come home at night either.’

‘How was she?’ asked Saeros, unable to control her curiosity.

‘Who?’

‘The old woman, the one in the leather trousers with the comic book all over her body. And since when are you in the habit of visiting her?’ For a moment Saeros had slipped into her old tone of accusation. ‘I wasn’t aware she had any call on us on this side of the family.’

‘No, I’m not paying her visits. But I look in on Anita from time to time, as you know. And Erla isn’t so much of an old bag, not much older than you. She seemed OK. I suppose it’s generally more or less OK with her, given the circumstances.’

Saeros had not bothered to answer this last comment. Stefan’s life had already started going wrong during Anita Ros’s earliest years, while Saeros kept the home together and tried repeatedly to get her father into rehab. Her patience for presenting things in a better light than they warranted was limited. In fact, she had never really had any, but recently she had been even less inclined to suppress her opinions. Much less. She had worked so hard on her own issues.

‘Yes, well, so things are OK with her nowadays then? If you say so. Take care, Stebbi, you don’t want to get yourself too wrapped up in someone else’s problems.’

‘Don’t talk to me as if I was a child, Saeros!’ He had flared up and was almost shouting. They ran on a bit in silence, with a feeling of resentment hanging in the air, until Saeros got a grip on herself and changed tack.

‘Anyway, were Anita’s little brother and sister at home when you turned up?’

‘No, I imagine they’d have been at pre-school.’ The question seemed to take Stefan by surprise. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘Oh, it’s nothing. Only I started thinking about their names. They always put me in a good mood!’ Saeros’s stomach started to quiver. ‘Isn’t it Jasmin Dis and Tristan Falur?’ The wobble in her belly worked its way up to her throat. ‘Or was it Dustbin Fleece and Tristan Dalai?’ Suddenly the laughter erupted from her and she collapsed on the grass beside the footpath. ‘You know, they always manage to take things a step too far, that lot, doesn’t matter what it is,’ she laughed. Stefan stared at her a moment, mouth open in bewilderment, and then he burst out laughing too.

‘Don’t be cruel, Saeros! Those are lovely names!’ he said with heavy sarcasm, but even so the laughter could be heard rumbling inside him.

‘Anyway, just as well they don’t have our dear beloved father as their dad. Those names would sound priceless followed by Josafatsdottir and Josafatsson. New Age meets Old Testament.’ He threw himself down on the grass beside her and laughed like an idiot.

‘And don’t forget they wanted to spell Anita with two i’s and a d!,’ he wheezed out once he had recovered enough to speak. ‘Aniida! Luckily, our dear beloved father said “Anita” quite clearly at the christening. Though, if my memory serves me, he was drunk at the time!’

Saeros smiled at the memory of the laughing fit that had overwhelmed them. It was such a long time since they had laughed so unreservedly together and the uneasiness she had been feeling before had evaporated with the first gush of hilarity that had erupted from her mouth. There had been such a sense of release in the laughter that they had walked back at their ease rather than jogging, chatting about everything and nothing. Even so, Saeros could not resist taking a look at her jogging watch when they got back to the gym. They had done four kilometres before the laughing fit. That would do, sort of, but she had set herself to get down to it better tomorrow, or nip over to the mountain around the bay this evening for a hike.

The memory made her feel warmer inside and she opened the file on her computer where she kept the records of her running and swimming. For a while she played around working out her averages over the last months. She had lost all track of time and place in the calculations when the phone rang.

The sprint she took out through the door made all previous averages look very tame indeed.