

# Cold Case Redux: *Scandinavian cop's life on the line*

---

## *Suspended Sentences*

---

by Jim Napier

Stockholm in the summer of 2010: an elderly man stands in line at Günters, a hot dog kiosk, reputedly the best of its kind in all of Sweden. Lars Martin Johansson, the former head of the National Criminal Police, has a soft spot for Ziegeuners on a baguette with sauerkraut and French mustard, and, as it turns out, an almost-fatal weakness. Reminiscing with a pair of young officers, Johansson collects his food and re-enters his car when his world suddenly drops out from under him.

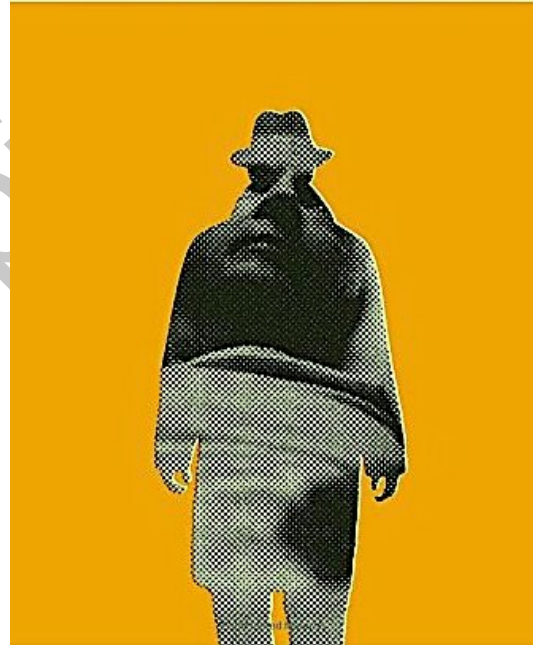
Two days later he awakens in the Karolinska Hospital. His wife Pia is by his bedside, and although she's content for the moment to let him rest, it's clear that when he's a bit better they need to talk.

A full week passes before Johansson's doctor, Ulrika Stenholm, is ready with her verdict. The retired detective has suffered a stroke, something they can deal with if only Johansson will follow their advice. But the doctor has something else for him; it is a

question, and it centers on an old police case.

### THE DYING DETECTIVE

A MYSTERY \ LEIF GW PERSSON



A nine-year-old girl had been raped and murdered in Stockholm in 1985, just over twenty-five years earlier. Her name was Yasmine Ermegan, and she and her parents had migrated from Iran when she was three. At the time the police investigation stalled, in part due to vital resources being redirected to the recent murder of the Swedish

Prime Minister, Olof Palme, and the case had never been solved.

But the previous winter, and only two days before Dr. Stenholm's father, a vicar, had died, he revealed to his daughter that a parishioner had come to him and confessed that she knew the identity of the murderer. As the admission was given under the seal of the confession, he could say nothing, and went to his grave concealing the specifics.

Now, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the crime, the newspapers have revived the story of the girl's death, and Dr. Stenholm is bothered by her father's dying remarks. She asks Johansson to revisit the case to see if anything can be done. A major complication is that the statute of limitations prevents prosecuting the case, now slightly more than twenty-five years old.

Not one to let such challenges defeat him, Johansson agrees to look into the matter. But he's faced with several formidable obstacles. First, the statute of limitations means that even if the killer is definitively identified, the person can't be prosecuted. Second, Dr. Stenholm's father never named the parishioner who made the confession. And finally, Johansson is facing his own challenge: his medical condition is serious, and his own life may very

well be on the line. Taking on a new investigation could prove fatal.



*Author Leif G. W. Persson*

A confession of my own: normally generally I avoid reading Scandinavian crime fiction; despite the many fine writers out there, I simply find the genre rather bleak. If I want to be depressed, I reason, I can simply look over my old tax returns.

But I make an exception for Leif Persson. His credentials are impeccable: a professor of criminology and advisor to the Swedish Minister of Justice, he is able to draw on his considerable experience to fashion original and fascinating crime tales. *The Dying Detective* is a case in point: we are drawn to the aging Lars Johansson and his dogged determination not only to solve the case, but to resolve it—to discover a way that, limitations of the law aside, justice can be served.

*The Dying detective* is, then, a finely written, perfectly paced tale, with an engaging protagonist and

evocative dialogue that rings true to life, without resorting to the overused devices of a desolate rural landscape populated by

---

deranged serial killers. Readers in search of an intelligent and entertaining tale rooted in strong social issues will be well pleased.

Previously posted on *Reviewing the Evidence*, November 2017.

Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on various crime fiction and literary websites. His own crime novel, *Legacy*, was published in the Spring of 2017. He can be reached at [jnapier@deadlydiversions.com](mailto:jnapier@deadlydiversions.com)

© Jim Napier 2018