

Stephan Berg



HE

THE DARK WINDS  
OF THIS WORLD

A TRUE STORY!

by

Stephan Berg

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*This book is dedicated to my wife and my three sons, Ethan Leon, Noah Joel and Marc-Andre. You have given my life fortitude, love and meaning. Each one of you is valued and precious. Without you, this book would never have been written.*

ALTHOUGH THIS IS A TRUE STORY, MOST NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED AND ARE FICTITIOUS. PLACE NAMES AND THE NAMES OF ORGANIZATIONS AND RESPONSIBLE PERSONS WITHIN THEM HAVE BEEN LEFT UNCHANGED.

## PROLOGUE

**R**AIN SPLASHED AGAINST the window pane and the wind howled through the narrow streets of the historic quarter. The ancient half-timbered houses from the thirteenth century had seen worse. It all got on my nerves. I didn't like the fall this year; least of all here in Germany!

I'd arrived back a few days ago after fleeing from Morocco and was taking refuge once again at my ex-wife Christine's place. It wasn't ideal, but at the moment I had little choice. As an ex-convict, my options were limited. I could count myself lucky that she'd agreed to take me in at all. She'd probably only done it for the sake of our son Lucas, three years old at the time.

I was lying on the bed, enjoying the peace and quiet while I read a book and mused on its meaning. I didn't really care much for books; but this one was fascinating and moved me. In fact, I could hardly believe what I was reading.

A few hours ago an acquaintance of mine, Julian, had been here and given me the book. I'd known Julian for some time. He was in his mid-thirties, blond, wore steel-framed glasses and was a forthright optimist. He was well-known around town. Anyone finding themselves in a seemingly hopeless situation or in need of help went to see Julian.

My life was a total mess, doomed to failure. I was a criminal, burglar and drug dealer, but none of that seemed to bother Julian. Just a few hours ago, we'd sat here in the living room while he talked about his own life, which hadn't always gone to plan; but his faith in God had helped him back onto the straight and narrow.

In my life I'd never known compassion from others, nor had I shown compassion. I used to beat people up at the slightest provocation. I never felt sorry for the junkies who bought drugs from me. Nobody was forcing them to. All I

was interested in was the dough! I used women whenever and wherever it suited me – and I didn't give a damn if Christine was in the living room and had to listen to my shenanigans with other women.

“Everyone gets a second chance,” Julian had said. Could it be that my life wasn't so hopeless after all, I wondered.

The sound of the doorbell ringing shattered the peace. Who could that be, this late? I got up and looked out through the window. Oliver was standing in the street. What did he want at this hour? He was the one person I definitely didn't want to see! Sure, he was my best friend, but after what happened in Morocco, I trusted nobody. He'd probably seen the lights still on. He hung out a lot with my ex-wife Christine, and so he knew that she and my son wouldn't be home today. Something inside me was reluctant to let him in, but in the end I opened the door. One hell of a mistake that was!

“Hey! What's happening?” he asked in his usual flippant way and sat down on a chair.

“Got any dope?” he asked. Fortunately, I had none. I'd decided to leave those times well behind me.

“No,” I told him, “I'm trying to stop smoking dope.”

He grinned, got up, and went over to the window. Why did he have that dumb-ass grin on his face? He seemed nervous, but I gave it no further thought. I got him a beer and we talked about his job as a waiter in a hotel. After a while he started to steer the conversation towards Morocco; he seemed to know about some of the things that had taken place there. I found that strange and it set my alarm bells ringing. I had no desire to talk to him about what had happened there in the Rif Mountains. I was the one who had put Oliver in touch with the Mafia in the first place, and now he was doing deals with them. No, I wasn't going to tell him a thing, not even that I'd fled. It was none of his goddamn business! When it came down to it, he was as much of a dirty rat as I was.

Suddenly the doorbell rang f the second time. Before I was



able to react, Oliver had leapt up and opened the door. What was the meaning of that? Sensing nothing good, I followed him into the hallway.

Two guys burst into the apartment; I knew them only too well. One of them was Harry, a real junkie, always 'full on'. He marched straight through the kitchen into the living-room, laughing hysterically.

"You're next, dude!" he said.

Then Greg strode in. The bullish face of the two hundred-pound heavyweight glared at me with eyes full of hatred. Ready to do business, he stood in the hall, blocking my exit. The only escape route I could see now was to get from the kitchen to the living room and find a way out from there, but Harry stood in the way. He scared the shit out of me! Was he going to kneecap me as the Mafia was known to have done before, or did he have worse things in mind? I was in a panic and drew back, keeping a close eye on him

Shit, I had to get out of here. Damn! I had to get out. Just get away! But how? Greg drew closer.

"I want my dough!" he yelled, enraged.

I was trapped. In his rage the Mafia boss Greg knocked over everything that got in his way. To him I was nothing but an insect that he wanted to crush under his foot.

"I want my dough and the drugs!"

I moved backwards, but there was no escaping him. I was stuck like an animal caught in a trap. In a state of panic, I looked around. Oliver was standing by the window. I wasn't expecting any help from him.

In the kitchen Greg grabbed the big butcher's knife and came straight for me. Shit. This was it. The end! My life was finished. Harry, high as a kite, merely grinned darkly. He was enjoying seeing me panic; he wanted to see me suffer.

Oliver just stood there, doing nothing, watching it all. In an instant I realized that my best friend had betrayed me; Oliver was delivering me to the knife. I couldn't believe it. After all

we'd been through together, with him coming and going in this place as he pleased, spending time almost daily with Christine and my son. What a goddamn son of a bitch! He doesn't give a shit about me! All he cares about is himself. All that waffle about friendship. Lies, all of it!

Suddenly Greg freaked out and came charging at me with the knife in his hand.

"I'm going to chop you up, you bastard! You're not going to take the piss out of us ever again!" he snarled.

I retreated backwards as far as I could before falling onto the sofa. Greg positioned himself above me like a colossus. His face was full of hatred; his look stony and uncompromising; he was ready to kill! He raised his arm, knife in hand. This was it! Paralyzed with fear, I watched the long shiny blade come closer and closer.

## I THE BREAK-IN

A few years prior ...

I HAD THE PERFECT PLAN! I'd been watching the villa for days now. An advert in the local paper had provided the dates when the doctor's pediatric clinic would be closed. I had planned my first burglary painstakingly and was feeling pretty cool about everything. It reminded me of a movie I'd seen a couple of times, where everything had gone to plan; it all seemed relatively simple.

I'd thought of absolutely everything – dark clothing, gloves and new shoes. I'd dispose of them all afterwards. I'd parked the car a few streets away and I'd be able to get a lot of stuff into my backpack.

Slowly I slunk through the garden towards the villa, stopping for a moment behind every bush and tree to check that the air was still clear. The doctor's office was downstairs, the living quarters on the upper floor. The closer I got to the house, the more nervous I was. Shit! In the movies it had all looked so simple. My heart began to race, my breathing became more rapid. Cold sweat broke out on my forehead. Before I had been so cool, and now this!

Keep calm, just keep calm, I told myself. This can't be more difficult than breaking into cars! I had plenty of experience in that field! Breaking into cars was no longer a challenge for me.

With trembling knees I moved towards the house. Nervously I looked around for signs of a burglar alarm. Suddenly, I was no longer the 'cool burglar', but the complete opposite! And the longer this whole thing was taking, the more nervous I was becoming. There didn't appear to be an alarm system. At least I couldn't see one. Or had I missed it? Oh man! I had to get this over with somehow! As soon as another car drove past I used the noise cover to smash one of the windows. Silence!

Was that a car pulling up? Was it the cops already? Minutes passed and nothing happened.

I climbed through the window into the house. Moonlight reflected on the polished floors. Even if I had overlooked the alarm system, it was too late now. Nonetheless, everything was quiet. The door separating the doctor's office from the rest of the house was locked. I tried to pick the lock, but without success. I was becoming restless. The whole thing was taking too long. It infuriated me. Finally I just kicked in the door. The owners of this place aren't poor, I consoled myself and they'll be insured.

Slowly I crept forward. Wait! What was that noise? Was there someone here after all? I waited, tense, in the stairwell. My heart beat was so loud I thought of quitting. Step by step I inched my way towards the living room. In the light of my flashlight I made out an expensive stereo system and a television set. I immediately set about dismantling them and placing on the ground near the door, ready to be carried out. Despite my nervousness and fear, I tried to stay focussed. Suddenly I heard another sound! Had it come from inside or out? Nervously I listened into the darkness. All was still in the house.

"Get over it, there's nobody here," I said as if to reassure myself. I stepped up to the window. My hand trembled as I pushed the curtains aside. I could feel the sweat running down my back.

Well, that's how you feel on your first break-in I told myself, wiping beads of sweat off my forehead. In the movies everything looks so easy, but it wasn't like that at all. A car passing at a slow speed made me nervous again. What if the cops turned up now? Maybe this place has a silent alarm with direct connection to the police station. Shit, I hadn't thought of that. Panic overcame me again and my whole body started shaking.

"Keep your cool, it's not the police," I said out loud. "Hurry up now!" I moved quickly through the rest of the house.

If I found anyone in here now I'd have to knock them down. In the bedroom, I came across some jewelry and a valuable antique clock. I stuffed it all in my backpack. Then I hurried back into the living room, opened the balcony door and lugged the stereo system and the TV set into the garden and hid them in the bushes. I'd be back later for them. Then I grabbed my bulging bag and disappeared into the darkness. Job done!