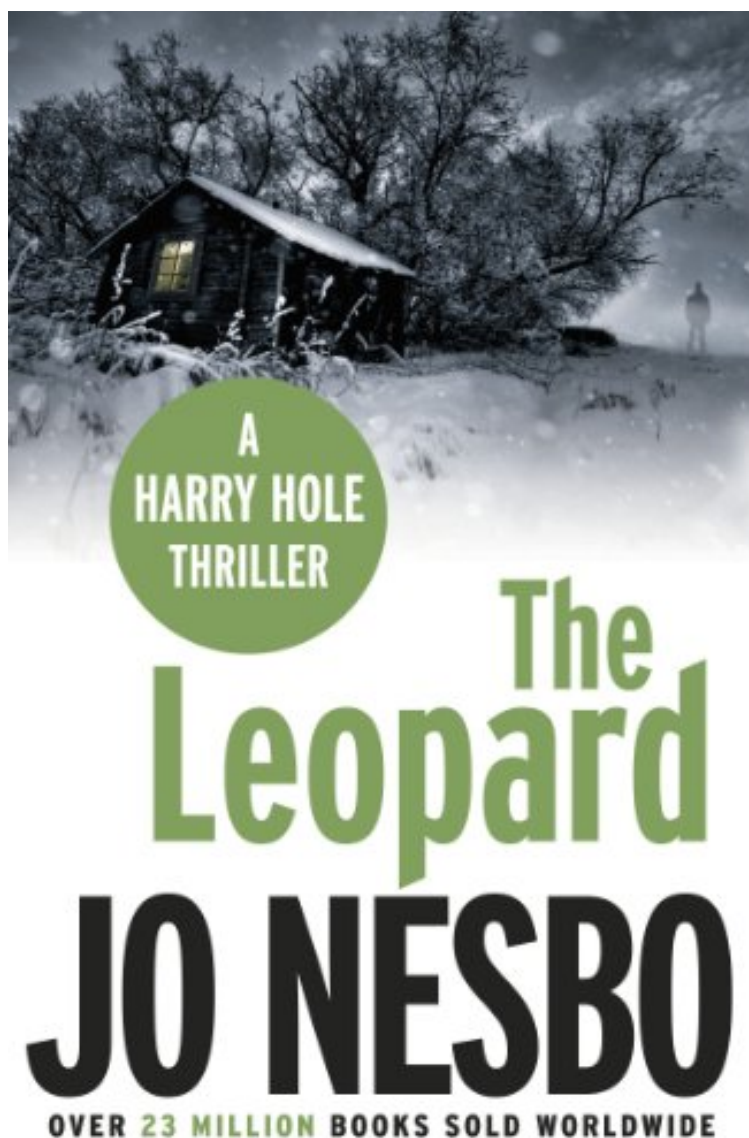


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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOVER 33 MILLION BOOKS SOLD WORLDWIDEIn the depths of winter a killer stalks the city streets. Two women are found drowned in their own blood. A third woman is hanged from a diving board.YOU ARE ALLOWING THIS KILLING TO GO ON.The crime scenes offer no clues, the media is reaching fever pitch, and the police are running out of options.IT'S TIME THIS WAS STOPPED...There is only one man who can help them catch the killer. But Inspector Harry Hole doesn't want to be found. ...BECAUSE I HAVE APPOINTED THE NEXT VICTIM.Extrait1The DrowningShe awoke. Blinked in the pitch darkness. Yawned, and breathed through her nose. She blinked again. Felt a tear run down her face, felt it dissolve the salt of other tears. But saliva was no longer entering her throat; her

mouth was dry and hard. Her cheeks were forced out by the pressure from inside. The foreign body in her mouth felt as though it would explode her head. But what was it? What was it? The first thing she thought when she awoke was that she wanted to go back. Back into the dark, warm depths that had enveloped her. The injection he had given her had not worn off yet, but she knew pain was on the way, felt it coming in the slow, dull beat of her pulse and the jerky flow of blood through her brain. Where was he? Was he standing right behind her? She held her breath, listened. She couldn't hear anything, but she could sense a presence. Like a leopard. Someone had told her leopards made so little noise they could sneak right up to their prey in the dark. They could regulate their breathing so that it was in tune with yours. Could hold their breath when you held yours. She was certain she could feel his body heat. What was he waiting for? She exhaled again. And at that same moment was sure she had felt breath on her neck. She whirled around, hit out, but was met by air. She hunched up, tried to make herself small, to hide. Pointless. How long had she been unconscious? The drug was wearing off. The sensation lasted only for a fraction of a second. But it was enough to give her the foretaste, the promise. The promise of what was to come. The foreign body placed on the table in front of her had been the size of a billiard ball, made of shiny metal with punched-out small holes and figures and symbols. From one of the holes protruded a red wire with a looped end, which instantly made her think of the Christmas tree that would need decorating at her parents' house on December 23, in seven days. With shiny balls, Christmas pixies, hearts, candles and Norwegian flags. In eight days they would be singing a traditional Christmas carol, and she would see the twinkling eyes of her nephews and nieces as they opened their presents. All the things she should have done differently. All the days she should have lived to the full, avoiding escapism, should have filled with happiness, breath and love. The places she had merely traveled through, the places she was planning to visit. The men she had met, the man she had still not met. The fetus she had gotten rid of when she was seventeen, the children she had not yet had. The days she had wasted for the days she thought she would have. Then she had stopped thinking about anything except the knife that had been brandished before her. And the gentle voice that had told her to put the ball in her mouth. She had done so; of course she had. With her heart thumping she had opened her mouth as wide as she could and pushed the ball in, with the wire left hanging outside. The metal tasted bitter and salty, like tears. Then her head had been forced back, and the steel burned against her skin as the knife was laid flat against her throat. The ceiling and the room were illuminated by a standard lamp, leaning against the wall in one of the corners. Bare, gray concrete. Apart from the lamp, the room contained a white plastic picnic table, two chairs, two empty beer bottles and two people. Him and her. She smelled a leather glove as a finger tugged lightly at the red loop hanging from her mouth. And the next moment her head seemed to explode. The ball had expanded and forced itself against the inside of her mouth. But however wide she opened her jaws, the pressure was constant. He had examined her with a concentrated, engaged expression, like an orthodontist checking to see whether the braces were fitting as they should. A little smile intimated satisfaction. With her tongue she could feel circular ridges around the holes in the ball, and that was what was pressing against her palate, against the soft flesh of her tongue, against her teeth, against the uvula. She had tried to say something. He had listened patiently to the inarticulate sounds emerging from her mouth. Had nodded when she gave up, and had taken out a syringe. The drop on the tip had glinted in the flashlight's beam. He had whispered something in her ear: "Don't touch the wire." Then he had injected her in the neck. She was out in seconds. . . She listened to her own terrified breathing as she blinked in the darkness. She had to do something. She placed her palms on the chair seat, which was clammy from her perspiration, and pushed herself up. No one stopped her. She advanced with tiny steps until she hit a wall. Groped her way along to a smooth, cold surface. The metal door. She pulled at the bolt. It didn't budge. Locked. Of course it was locked. What had she been thinking? Was that laughter she could hear, or was the sound coming from inside her head? Where was he? Why was he playing with her like this? Do something. Think. But to think, she would first have to get rid of this metal ball before the pain drove her insane. She put her thumb and first finger in the corners of her mouth. Felt the ridges. Tried in vain to get her fingers under one of them. Had a coughing fit and a panic attack when she couldn't breathe. She realized that the ridges had made the flesh around her windpipe swell, that soon she would be in danger of suffocating. She kicked the metal door, tried to scream, but the ball stifled the sound. She gave up again. Leaned against the wall. Listened. Was that his wary tread she could hear? Was he moving around the room? Was he playing blindman's buff with her? Or was it her blood throbbing past her ears? She steeled herself against the pain and forced her mouth shut. The ridges were hardly down before they sprang back and forced her mouth open again. The ball seemed to be pulsating now, as though it had become an iron heart, a part of her. Do

something. Think.Springs. The ridges were spring-loaded.They had jumped up when he pulled the wire."Don't touch the wire," he had said.Why not? What would happen?She slid down the wall until she was sitting. Cold damp rose from the concrete floor. She wanted to scream again, but she couldn't. Quiet. Silence.All the things she should have said to those she loved, instead of the words that had served to fill the silence with those to whom she was indifferent.There was no way out. There was just her and this unbelievable pain, her head exploding."Don't touch the wire."If she pulled it, the ridges might retract into the ball, and she would be spared the pain.Her thoughts ran in the same circles. How long had she been here? Two hours? Eight hours? Twenty minutes?If all she had to do was pull the wire, why hadn't she already done it? Because the warning had been given by an obvious sicko? Or was this part of the game? Being tricked into resisting the temptation to stop this quite unnecessary pain? Or was the game about defying the warning and pulling the wire, causing . . . causing something dreadful to happen? What would happen? What was this ball?Yes, it was a game, a brutal game. And she had to play. The pain was intolerable, her throat was swelling; soon she would suffocate.She tried to scream again, but it subsided into a sob, and she blinked and blinked, without producing any further tears.Her fingers found the string hanging from her lips. She pulled tentatively until it was taut.There was so much she regretted not having done, naturally. But if a life of self-denial would have placed her anywhere else besides here, right now, she would have chosen that. She just wanted to live. Any sort of life. As simple as that.She pulled the wire.The needles shot out of the circular ridges. They were two and a half inches long. Four burst through her cheeks on each side, three into the sinuses, two up the nasal passages and two out through the chin. Two needles pierced the windpipe and one the right eye, one the left. Several needles penetrated the rear part of the palate and reached the brain. But that was not the direct cause of her death. Because the metal ball impeded movement, she was unable to spit out the blood pouring from the wounds into her mouth. Instead it ran down her windpipe and into her lungs, not allowing oxygen to be absorbed into her bloodstream, which in turn led to cardiac arrest and what the pathologist would call in his report cerebral hypoxia-that is, lack of oxygen to her brain. In other words, Borgny Stem-Myhre drowned.²The Illuminating DarknessDECEMBER 18The days are short. It's still light outside, but here, in my clipping room, there is eternal darkness. In the light from my work lamp the people in the pictures on the wall look so irritatingly happy and unsuspecting. So full of expectations, as though they take it for granted that all life lies before them, a perfectly calm ocean of time, smooth and unruffled. I have taken clippings from the newspaper, snipped off all the lachrymose stories about the shocked family, edited out the gory details about the finding of the body. Contented myself with the inevitable photo a relative or a friend has given a persistent journalist, the picture of when she was in her prime, smiling as though immortal.The police don't know a lot. Not yet. But soon they will have more to work with.What is it, where is it, whatever it is that makes a murderer? Is it innate, is it in a gene, inherited potential that some have and others do not? Or is it shaped by need, developed in a confrontation with the world, a survival strategy, a lifesaving sickness, rational insanity? For just as sickness is a fevered bombardment of the body, insanity is a vital retreat to a place where one can entrench oneself anew.For my part, I believe that the ability to kill is fundamental to any healthy person. Our existence is a fight for gain, and whoever cannot kill his neighbor has no right to an existence. Killing is, after all, only hastening the inevitable. Death allows no exceptions, which is good, because life is pain and suffering. In that sense, every murder is an act of charity. It just doesn't seem like that when the sun warms your skin or water wets your lips and you recognize your idiotic lust for life in every heartbeat and are ready to buy mere crumbs of time with everything you have accrued through life: dignity, status, principles. That is when you have to dig deep, to give a wide berth to the confusing, blinding light. Into the cold, illuminating darkness. And perceive the hard kernel. The truth. For that is what I had to find. That is what I found. Whatever it is that makes a person into a murderer.What about my life? Do I also believe it is a calm, unruffled ocean of time?Not at all. Before long I, too, will be lying on death's refuse heap, together with all the other role players in this little drama. But whatever stage of decay my body may attain, even if all that remains is the skeleton, it will have a smile on its lips. This is what I live for now: my right to exist, my chance to be cleansed, to be cleared of all dishonor.But this is only the beginning. Now I am going to switch off the lamp and go out into the light of day. The little that is left.³Hong KongThe rain did not stop first thing. Nor second thing. In fact, it didn't stop at all. It was mild and wet, week upon week. The ground was saturated, European highways caved in, migratory birds did not migrate and there were reports of insects hitherto unseen in northern climes. The calendar showed that it was winter, but Oslo's parkland was not just snowless, it was not even brown. It was as green and inviting as the artificial turf in Sogn, where despairing keep-fit fans had resorted to jogging in their Bjrnlights as

they waited in vain for conditions around Lake Sogsvann to allow skiing. On New Year's Eve the fog was so thick that the sound of fireworks carried from the center of Oslo right out to suburban Asker, but you couldn't see a thing, even if you set them off in your backyard. Nevertheless, that night Norwegians lit six hundred kroner's worth of fireworks per household, according to a consumer survey, which also revealed that the number of Norwegians who realized their dream of a white Christmas on Thailand's white beaches had doubled in just three years. However, it seemed as if the weather had run amok also in Southeast Asia: Ominous clouds usually seen only on weather charts in the typhoon season were now lined up across the China Sea. In Hong Kong, where February tends to be one of the driest months of the year, rain was bucketing down, and poor visibility meant that Cathay Pacific Flight 731 from London had to circle again before coming in to land at Chek Lap Kok Airport. "You should be happy we don't have to land at the old airport," said the Chinese-looking passenger next to Kaja Solness, who was squeezing the armrests so hard her knuckles were white. "It was in the center of town. We would have flown straight into one of the skyscrapers." Those were the first words the man had uttered since they had taken off twelve hours earlier. Kaja eagerly grabbed the chance to focus on something other than the fact that they were temporarily caught in turbulence. "Thank you, sir—that was reassuring. Are you English?" He recoiled as if someone had slapped him, and she realized she had mortally offended him by suggesting that he belonged to the previous colonialists: "Erm . . . Chinese, perhaps?" He shook his head firmly. "Hong Kong Chinese. And you, miss?" Kaja Solness wondered for a moment if she should reply, "Hokksund Norwegian," but confined herself to "Norwegian," which the Hong Kong Chinese man mused on for a while, then delivered a triumphant "Aha!" before amending it to "Scandinavian" and asked her what her business was in Hong Kong. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Outstanding . . . Probably the best big crime novel you could lay your hands on this year. BBC Radio 4 This one stands up to the ante one more time . . . Harry Hole [is] crime fictions most tortured and compelling hero. *Booklist* (starred) Intense . . . Nesb moves the action easily from Hong Kong to Norway, with side trips to the Democratic Republic of Congo, without ever losing the plots sense of urgency. *Publishers Weekly* (starred) Nesb knows exactly what hes doing [in] this gripping, intricately plotted tale . . . Like all intelligent crime fiction, this book is not only about multiple murders by heinous means. It is also about legacies, most specifically about the good and evil, love and hate, passed from one generation to the next. This vivid, violent novel promises to speak on many levels to many readers. *Library Journal* In *The Leopard*, Nesb deploys all the key ingredients of a cracking good thriller with expertise and verve. The ticking clock, the tension expertly ratcheted ever upwards, the changing scenery, the constantly shifting goalposts, and his effortless, triumphant outpacing of the readers ability to guess whats going to happen will keep you gripped to the last page. *The Guardian* (U.K.)