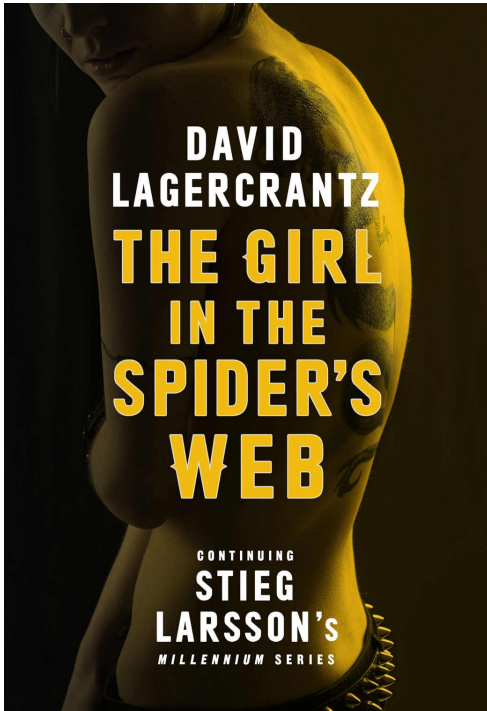
A woman's back is shown from the shoulders down to the waist, illuminated by a yellow light. She has several spiderweb tattoos on her back, including a large one on her right shoulder and another on her lower back. She is wearing a black bra and a black studded belt.

**DAVID
LAGERCRANTZ**
**THE GIRL
IN THE
SPIDER'S
WEB**

CONTINUING
**STIEG
LARSSON'S**
MILLENNIUM SERIES





David Lagercrantz THE GIRL IN
THE SPIDER'S
WEB



MACLEHOSE PRESS
QUERCUS · LONDON

Translated from the Swedish by George Goulding

Continuing Stieg Larsson's Millennium

Trilogy

The Girl with the Dragon

Tattoo

The Girl Who Played with

Fire

The Girl Who Kicked the

Hornets' Nest

Also by David

Lagercrantz in English

translation

Non-Fiction

I am Zlatan Ibrahimović

Fiction

Fall of Man in Wilmslow

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places and events are either the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely

coincidental

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Continuing Stieg Larsson's](#)

[*Millennium* Trilogy.](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Map of Stockholm](#)

Characters in the *Millennium*

series

Prologue

Part I: The Watchful Eye

Part II: The Labyrinths of

Memory.

Part III: Asymmetric

Problems

Map of Stockholm

[Archipelago](#)

[A Letter to my Readers](#)

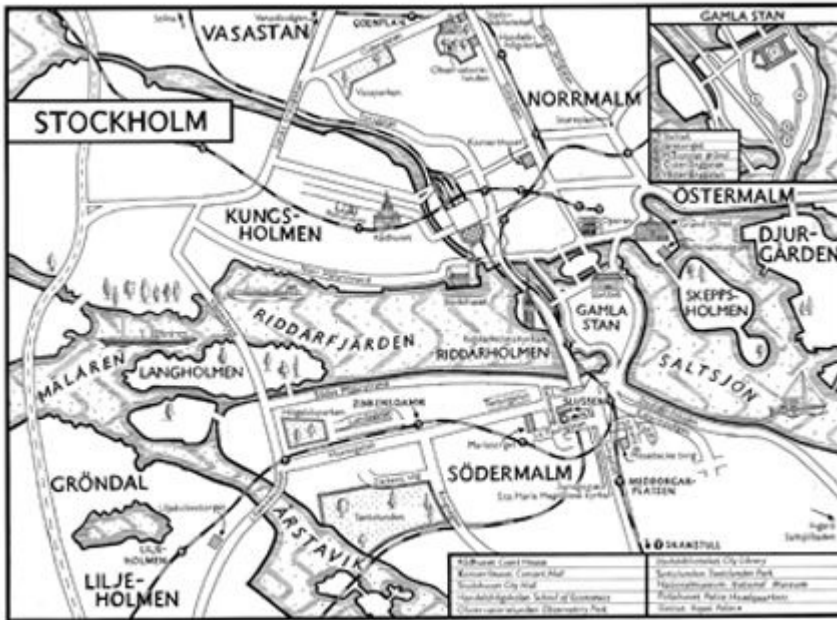
[Author and Translator](#)

[Biographies](#)

[Author's Acknowledgements](#)

[Also Available](#)

[Lisbeth Quotation](#)



CHARACTERS IN THE

MILLENNIUM SERIES

LISBETH

SALANDER

—

an

exceptionally

talented

hacker

with

tattoos,
piercings and a troubled
past.

MIKAEL

BLOMKVIST

– an

investigating journalist at

Millennium magazine.

Salander helped him to

research one of the biggest stories of his career, about the disappearance of Harriet Vanger. He later helped to clear her of murder and vindicate her in a legal battle over her right to determine her own affairs.

ALEXANDER

ZALACHENKO

–

also known as Zala, or his alias Karl Axel Bodin. A

Russian spy who defected

to

Sweden

and

was

protected for years by a
special group within Säpo.
He is Lisbeth Salander's
father, and used violently to
abuse
her
mother,
Agneta Salander. He was
also the head of a criminal empire.

RONALD

NIEDERMANN

—

Salander's half-brother, a blond giant impervious to pain. Salander arranged for his murder.

CAMILLA

SALANDER

–

Salander's twin sister, from whom she is estranged.

AGNETA SALANDER – Salander and Camilla's mother, who died in a nursing home at the age of forty-three.

HOLGER

PALMGREN

–

Salander's

former

guardian, a lawyer. One of the few people who knows

Salander well and whom

she trusts.

DRAGAN

ARMANSKY

—

Salander's former, now-

occasional, employer, the

head of Milton Security.

Another of the few she

trusts.

PETER

TELEBORIAN

—

Salander's sadistic child

psychiatrist.

Chief

prosecution

witness

in

Salander's

incompetency

trial.

IRENE NESSER – a woman

whose Norwegian passport

has fallen into Salander's hands, allowing Salander

to assume her identity.

HANS-ERIK WENNERSTRÖM – a

shadowy

magnate

who

tricks

Blomkvist

into

publishing

an

unsubstantiated defamatory

article about his business, landing

Blomkvist

in

prison. Salander uses her

talents to empty his bank accounts in retribution.

ERIKA BERGER – editor in chief of *Millennium* magazine,
occasional

lover

of

Blomkvist.

GREGER BECKMAN – Erika

Berger's husband.

MALIN ERIKSSON – managing

editor of *Millennium*.

CHRISTER MALM – art director and partner at *Millennium*.

ANNIKA

GIANNINI

–

Blomkvist's

sister,

a

lawyer who represented

Salander in her trial.

HARRIET VANGER – scion of a wealthy industrial family,

who disappeared as a girl and

was

found

by

Blomkvist and Salander at

the behest of her great-uncle, Henrik Vanger. She

became a shareholder in

Millennium.

SVAVELSJÖ M.C. – a motorcycle gang closely associated

with Zalachenko. Members

of the gang were seriously injured by Salander.

HACKER REPUBLIC – a coalition of hackers, among whom

Salander, who goes by the handle “Wasp”, is the star.

Includes Plague, Trinity

and Bob the Dog.

SÄPO – the Swedish security police, which harboured a

secret faction known as

“the Section” dedicated to protecting Zalachenko.

JAN BUBLANSKI – detective

inspector

with

the

Stockholm

police,

who

headed

the

team

investigating the Salander case. Now promoted to chief inspector. Known as “Officer Bubble”.

SONJA MODIG – a police officer who works closely with Bublanski.

JERKER HOLMBERG – a police officer who, in Bublanski’s eyes, is perhaps the best crime scene investigator in the Swedish police force.

HANS FASTE – a Stockholm
policeman who clashed
with Bublanski and leaked
information to Prosecutor
Ekström
during
the
Salander investigation.

RICHARD

EKSTRÖM

– the

prosecutor who brought the
case against Salander, now chief
prosecutor.

A

manipulative and venal
man, believed within the
police to be interested only

in self-advancement.

PROLOGUE

One Year Earlier

This story begins

with a dream, and

not a particularly spectacular one at

that. Just a hand

beating rhythmically

and relentlessly on a

mattress in a room

on Lundagatan.

Yet it still gets

Lisbeth Salander out

of her bed in the

early light of dawn.

Then she sits at her

computer and starts the hunt.

PART I

THE WATCHFUL

EYE

1 – 21.xi

The

N.S.A.,

or

National

Security Agency, is a United States federal authority that reports to the Department of Defense. The head office is in Fort Meade, Maryland, by the Patuxent Freeway.

Since its foundation in 1952, the N.S.A. has been engaged in signals surveillance – these days mostly in connection with Internet and telephone traffic.

Time after time its powers have been increased, and now it monitors more than twenty billion

conversations

and

messages every twenty-four

hours.

CHAPTER 1

Early November

Frans Balder always thought of himself as a lousy father.

He had hardly attempted to shoulder the role of father before and he did not feel comfortable with the task

now that his son was eight.

But it was his duty, that was how he saw it. The boy was having a rough time living with his ex-wife and her

bloody

partner,

Lasse

Westman.

So Balder had given up his

job in Silicon Valley, got on a

plane home and was now standing at Arlanda airport, almost in shock, waiting for a taxi. The weather was hellish.

Rain whipped into his face and for the hundredth time he wondered if he was doing the

right thing.

That he of all self-centred idiots should become a full-time father, how crazy an idea was that? He might as well have got a job at the zoo.

He knew nothing about children and not much about life in general. The strangest thing of all was nobody had asked him to do it. No mother or grandmother had called

him, pleading and telling him to

face

up

to

his

responsibilities.

It was his own decision. He

was proposing to defy a long-standing custody ruling and, without warning, walk into his ex-wife's place and bring home his boy, August. No doubt all hell would break loose. That bloody Lasse Westman would probably give him a real beating. But he put that out of his mind and got into a taxi with a woman driver who was dementedly chewing gum and at the same time trying to strike up a conversation with him. She would not have

succeeded even on one of his better days. Balder was not one for small talk.

He sat there in the back seat thinking about his son and everything that had

happened recently. August

was not the only – or even the main – reason why he had stopped working at Solifon.

His life was in turmoil and for a moment he wondered if

he really knew what he was

getting himself into. As the taxi came into the Vasastan neighbourhood it felt as if all the blood was draining from his body.

But there was no turning back now.

He paid the taxi on

Torsgatan and took out his luggage, leaving it just inside the building's front entrance.

The only thing he took with him up the stairs was an empty suitcase covered with a

brightly coloured map of the world, which he had bought at

San

Francisco

International.

He

stood

outside the apartment door, panting. With his eyes closed he imagined all the possible scenarios of fighting and

screaming, and actually, he thought, you could hardly

blame them. Nobody just

turns up and snatches a child from his home, least of all a

father whose only previous involvement has consisted of depositing money into a bank

account. But this was an

emergency, so he steeled
himself and rang the doorbell, fighting off the urge to run away.
At first there was no
answer. Then the door flew open and there was Westman
with his piercing blue eyes and
massive
chest
and

enormous fists. He seemed built to hurt people, which was why he so often got to play the bad guy on screen, even if none of his roles –

Balder was convinced of this

– was as evil as the person he played in real life.

“Christ,” Westman said.

“Look what we have here.

The genius himself has come to visit.”

“I’m here to fetch August,”

Balder said.

“You what?”

“I’m taking him with me,

Lasse.”

“You must be joking.”

“I’ve never been more

serious,” he tried, and then Hanna appeared from a room

across to the left. True, she was not as beautiful as she had once been. There had

been too much unhappiness

for that and probably too many cigarettes and too much
drink as well. But still he felt an
unexpected
wave
of
affection, especially when he noticed a bruise on her throat.
She seemed to want to say something welcoming, even
under the circumstances, but she never had time to open her
mouth.

“Why should you care all
of a sudden?” Westman said.

“Because August has been through enough. He needs a stable
home.”

“And you think that you
can provide that, you freak?

Since when have you done
anything except stare at a computer screen?”

“I’ve changed,” he said,

feeling

pathetic,

in

part

because he doubted that he had changed one little bit.

A shiver ran through him as Westman came towards

him with his mighty bulk and

his pent-up rage. It was

crushingly clear that he

would have no means of

resistance if that madman let fly. The whole idea had been

insane from the start. But the strange thing was that there was no outburst, no scene, just a grim smile and then the words, “Well, isn’t that just

great!”

“What do you mean?”

“That it’s about time, isn’t it, Hanna? Finally some sense of responsibility from Mr

Busy.

Bravo,

bravo!”

Westman clapped his hands

theatrically. Afterwards that is what Balder found the most frightening – how easily they let the boy go.

Perhaps they saw August

only as a burden. It was hard

to tell. Hanna shot Balder some glances which were

difficult to read and her hands shook and her jaw was

clenched. But she asked too few questions. She should
really
have
been
cross-
examining
him,
making
thousands

of

demands,

warning him and worrying

that the boy's routine would be upset. But all she said was:

“Are you sure about this?

Will you manage?”

“I'm sure,” he said. Then they went to August's room.

Balder had not seen him for more than a year and he felt ashamed. How could he have abandoned such a boy? He

was

so

beautiful

and

strangely wonderful with his curly, bushy hair and slender body and serious blue eyes, engrossed in a gigantic jigsaw

puzzle of a sailing boat. His body seemed to cry out

“Don’t disturb me!” and

Balder walked up to him

slowly, as if approaching an unknown and unpredictable creature.

He nonetheless managed to get the boy to take hold of his hand and follow him out into the corridor. He would never forget it. What was August thinking?

What

did

he

imagine was happening? He neither looked up at him nor at his mother and of course he ignored all the waving and the words of farewell. He just vanished into the lift with Balder. It was as simple that.

August was autistic. He was most likely also mentally

disabled, even though they had not received unequivocal

advice on that point and anyone who saw him from

afar might easily suspect the opposite. His exquisite face radiated an air of majestic detachment,

or

at

least

suggested that he did not think it worth bothering with his surroundings. But when you looked at him closely there

was

something

impenetrable in his gaze. And

he had yet to say his first word.

In this he had failed to live up to all the prognoses made when he was two years old.

At the time, the doctors had said that August probably

belonged to that minority of autistic children who had no learning impairment, and that provided

he

was

given

intensive behavioural therapy his prospects were quite

good. But nothing had turned out as they had hoped and Balder had no idea what had become of all that remedial care and assistance or even the boy's schooling. Balder had run away to the U.S.A.

and lived in his own world.

He had been a fool. But now he was going to repay his debt and take care of his son. Right away he ordered up casebooks and called specialists and educational experts and one thing became immediately apparent: none of the money he had been sending had gone towards August's care, but instead had trickled out to pay for other things, probably Westman's extravagances and gambling debts. The boy seemed to

have been left pretty much to his own devices, allowed to become set in his compulsive

ways, and probably worse –

this was also the reason why Frans had come home.

A psychologist had called

to express concern about

unexplained bruises covering August's arms and legs, chest and shoulders. According to Hanna they were because the boy had fits and hurt himself thrashing back and forth.

Balder witnessed one already on the second day, and it

scared him out of his wits.

But that could not account for the sheer number and type of bruises, he thought.

He suspected violence and

turned for help to a G.P. and a former policeman whom he

knew privately. Even if they were not able to confirm his fears with any degree of

certainty he grew more and more angry and set about

submitting a series of formal

letters and reports. He almost forgot all about the boy. He realized that it was easy to forget him. August spent

most of his time sitting on the floor in the room Balder had made ready for him in the house in Saltsjöbaden, doing his

exceedingly

difficult

jigsaws, assembling hundreds

of pieces only to break them up and start afresh.

At

first,

Balder

had

observed him in fascination.

It was like watching a great artist at work, and sometimes he was taken by the fantasy that the boy would glance up at any moment and say

something

grown-up.

But

August never uttered a word.

If he raised his head from the puzzle it was to look straight past him towards the window

overlooking the sea and the

sunshine reflected in the water, and eventually Balder just left him alone. Balder seldom even took him outside

into the garden.

From a legal point of view

he did not have custody of the boy and he did not want to take any chances until he had sorted this out. So he let the housekeeper, Lottie Rask, do all the shopping – and all the cooking and cleaning. Balder

was no good at that side of things.

He

understood

computers and algorithms but

not much else, and he

immersed himself in them

even more. At night he slept as badly as he had in

California.

Lawsuits

and

storms

loomed on the horizon and every evening he drank a

bottle of red wine, usually Amarone, and probably that

did little good either, except in the short term. He began to feel worse and worse and

fantasized about vanishing in a puff of smoke or taking himself

off

to

some

inhospitable

place,

somewhere remote. But then, one Saturday in November,

something happened. It was a

cold, windy evening and he and August were walking

along

Ringvägen

in

the

Södermalm district, feeling frozen.

They had been having

dinner at Farah Sharif's on Zinkens väg. August should have been asleep long since, but dinner had gone on late and Balder had revealed far too

much.

Farah

Sharif

tended to have that effect on people. Balder and she had known each other since they read computer sciences at

Imperial College in London and now Farah Sharif was

one of the few people at his level in Sweden, or at least one of the few who was by and large able to follow his thinking. It was an incredible relief for him to meet

someone

who

could

understand.

He
also
found
her
attractive,
but
despite
numerous attempts he had
never managed to seduce her.

Balder was not much good at seducing women. But this time he had received a farewell hug that almost turned into a kiss, which was a big step forward. He was still thinking about it as he and

August

passed

Zinkensdamm sports centre.

Maybe next time he should get a babysitter and then perhaps ...
Who knows? A

dog was barking some way off and there was a woman's voice shouting behind him, hard to tell if she was upset or happy.

He

looked

over

towards Hornsgatan and the crossroads where they could pick up a taxi or take the Tunnelbana down to Slussen.

It felt as if it might rain. Once they got to the crossing the light turned to red and on the other side of the street stood a

worn-looking man in his forties who seemed vaguely familiar. At precisely that moment Balder took hold of August's hand.

He only wanted to make

sure his son stayed on the pavement, but then he felt it: August's hand tensed as if the boy were reacting strongly to something. His look was

intense and clear, as though the veil which always seemed

to cover his eyes had been magically drawn aside, and instead of staring inwards at his own complexities, August

had apparently understood

something uniquely deep and great about that crossing. So Balder ignored the fact that the lights had turned green.

He just let his son stand there and observe the scene, and without knowing why, he was

overcome

by

a

strong

emotion, which he found strange. It was only a look, after all, and not even an especially bright or joyful one at that. Yet it rang a

distant bell, stirred something long dormant in his memory. For the first time in an age he felt hopeful.

CHAPTER 2

20.xi

Mikael Blomkvist had slept for only a few hours, having stayed up late to read a detective novel by Elizabeth George. Not a particularly sensible thing to do. Ove Levin, the newspaper guru from Serner Media, was due to present a strategy session for

Millennium

magazine

later

that

morning

and

Blomkvist ought really to be rested and ready for combat.

But he had no desire to be sensible. Only reluctantly did

he get up and make himself an

unusually

strong

cappuccino with his Jura

Impressa X7, a machine

which had been delivered to his home a while ago with a note saying, “According to you, I don’t know how to use

it anyway”. It stood there in the kitchen now like a

memorial to a better time. He no longer had any contact

with the person who had sent it.

These days he was hardly

stimulated by his work. Over the weekend he had even

considered looking around for something new, and that was a pretty drastic idea for a man like

Mikael

Blomkvist.

Millennium had been his passion and his life, and many of his life's best, most dramatic events had occurred

in

connection

with

the

magazine. But nothing lasts for ever, perhaps not even a love for *Millennium*. Besides, this was not a good time to be owning a magazine dedicated

to investigative journalism.

All

publications

with

ambitions for greatness were bleeding to death, and he could not help but reflect that while his own vision for

Millennium may have been

beautiful and true on some higher plane, it would not necessarily help the magazine survive. He went into the living room sipping his coffee and looked out at the waters of Riddarfjärden. There was quite a storm blowing out there.

From an Indian summer,

which had kept the city's outdoor restaurants and cafés open well into October, the

weather had turned hellish with gusts of wind and

cloudbursts,

and

people

hurried through the streets bent double. Blomkvist had stayed in all weekend, but not only because of the weather.

He

had

been

planning

revenge on an ambitious

scale, but the scheme had come to nothing, and that was not like him, neither the former nor the latter.

He was not an underdog, and unlike so many other big

media figures in Sweden he did not suffer from an inflated ego which needed constant

boosting and soothing. On the other hand, he had been through a few tough years.

Barely a month ago the

financial journalist William Borg had written a piece in Serner's

Business

Life

magazine under the heading:

MIKAEL

BLOMKVIST'S

DAYS ARE OVER.

The fact that the article had been written in the first place and given such prominence

was of course a sign that Blomkvist's position was still strong. No-one would say that the column was well written or original, and it should have been easy to dismiss as yet another attack by a jealous colleague. But for some

reason, incomprehensible in retrospect, the whole thing blew up. At first it might have been interpreted as a spirited discussion

about journalism, but gradually the debate began to go off the rails.

Although the serious press stayed out of it, all kinds of invective was being spewed out on social media. The

offensive came not only from

financial

journalists

and

industry types, who had reason to set upon their

enemy now that he was
temporarily weakened, but
also from a number of
younger writers who took the
opportunity to make a name for themselves. They pointed out that
Blomkvist was not on Twitter or Facebook and
should rather be seen as a relic of a bygone age in which people
could afford to
work their way through whichever
strange

old

volumes happened to take

their fancy. And there were those

who

took

the

opportunity to join in the fun and create amusing hashtags like #inblomkvistsday. It was all a lot of nonsense and nobody could have cared less

than Blomkvist – or so he persuaded himself.

It certainly did not help his cause that he had not had a major story

since

the

Zalachenko affair and that *Millennium* really was in a crisis. The circulation was still

O.K.,

with

21,000

subscribers.

But

since

advertising

revenue

was

falling dramatically and there was now no longer additional

income from their successful books, and since one of the

shareholders, Harriet Vanger, was not willing to put up any more capital, the board of directors

had,

against

Blomkvist's wishes, allowed the

Norwegian

Serner

newspaper empire to buy 30

per cent of the shares. That was not as odd as it seemed, or not at first sight. Serner published weekly magazines

and evening papers and
owned a large online dating
site
and
two
pay-T.V.
channels as well as a football team
in
Norway's

top

division, and it ought not to be having anything to do with a publication like *Millennium*.

But

Serner's

representatives – especially the head of publications Ove Levin – had assured them that the group needed a prestige product and that “everybody”

in the management team

admired

Millennium

and

wanted only for the magazine

to go on exactly as before.

“We’re not here to make

money!” Levin said. “We

want

to

do

something

significant.” He immediately arranged for the magazine to receive a sizeable injection of funds.

At first Serner did not

interfere on the editorial side.

It was business as usual, but

with a slightly better budget.

A new feeling of hope spread

among the editorial team,

sometimes

even

to

Blomkvist, who felt that for once he would have time to devote himself to journalism instead of worrying about

finances. But then, around the time the campaign against

him got under way – he

would

never

lose

the

suspicion that the Serner

Group had taken advantage of the situation – the tone changed and they started to apply pressure.

Levin maintained that of

course the magazine should continue with its in-depth investigations,

its

literary

reporting, its social fervour, all of that stuff. But surely it was not necessary for all the articles to be about financial irregularities, injustices and

political scandals. Writing about high society – about celebrities and premieres –

could also produce brilliant journalism, so he said, and he spoke with passion about

Vanity Fair and *Esquire* in America, about Gay Talese

and his classic piece, “Frank Sinatra has a Cold”, and

about Norman Mailer and

Truman Capote and Tom

Wolfe and heaven knows who else.

Blomkvist did not actually have any objections to that, not at the time. Six months earlier he had himself written a long piece about the

paparazzi industry, and as long as he could find a

serious angle then he was content to profile just about any lightweight. In fact he always said it isn't the subject

that determines if it's good journalism, it's the reporter's attitude. No, what he objected to was what he sensed was there between the lines: that this was the beginning of a longer-term assault and

that, to the group, *Millennium* was just like any other magazine, a publication you can damn well shift around any which way you want until it

becomes profitable – and colourless.

So on Friday afternoon,

when he heard that Levin had

hired

a

consultant

and

commissioned

several

consumer surveys to present on Monday, Blomkvist had

simply gone home. For a long

time he had sat at his desk or lain in bed composing various impassioned speeches about

why *Millennium* had to

remain true to its vision: there is rioting in the suburbs; an openly racist party sits in Riksdagen, the parliament;

intolerance

is

growing;

fascism is on the rise and there are homeless people and beggars everywhere. In so

many ways Sweden has

become a shameful nation.

He came up with lots of fine and lofty words and in his daydreams he enjoyed a

whole series of fantastic triumphs in which what he said was so relevant and

compelling that all of the editorial team and even the entire Serner Group were

roused from their delusions and decided to follow him as one.

But when sobriety set in, he realized how little weight such words carry if nobody believes in them from a

financial

point

of

view.

Money talks, bullshit walks, and all that. First and

foremost the magazine had to

pay its way. Then they could go about changing the world.

He began to wonder whether he could rustle up a good story. The prospect of a major revelation might boost the confidence of the editorial team and get them all to

forget about Levin's surveys and forecasts.

Blomkvist's

big

scoop

about

the
Swedish
government conspiracy that
had protected Zalachenko
turned him into a news
magnet.

Every
day
he

received

tips

about

irregularities

and

shady

dealings. Most of it, to tell the truth, was rubbish. But just occasionally an amazing story

would emerge. A run-of-the-mill insurance matter or a trivial report of a missing person could be concealing something crucial. You

never

knew for sure. You had to be

methodical and look through it all with an open mind, and so on the Saturday morning he sat down with his laptop and his notebooks and picked

his way through what he had.

He kept going until 5.00 in the afternoon and he did

come across the odd item

which would probably have

got him going ten years ago, but which did not now stir any enthusiasm. It was a

classic problem; he of all people knew that. After a few decades in the profession

most

things

feel

pretty

familiar,

and

even

if

something looks like a good

story in intellectual terms it still might not turn you on. So when yet another squall of freezing rain whipped across the rooftops he stopped

working

and

turned

to

Elizabeth George.

It wasn't just escapism, he persuaded himself.

Sometimes the best ideas

occur to you while your mind

is occupied with something completely different. Pieces

of the puzzle can suddenly fall into place. But he failed to come up with anything

more constructive than the thought that he ought to

spend more time lying around

like this, reading good books.

When Monday morning came

and with it yet more foul weather he had ploughed

through one and a half

George novels plus three old copies of the *New Yorker*

which had been cluttering up his bedside table.

So there he was, sitting on the living-room sofa with his

cappuccino, looking out at the storm. He had been feeling tired and listless until he got to his feet with an abrupt start

– as if he had suddenly

decided

to

pull

himself

together and do something –

and put on his boots and his winter coat and went out. It was a parody of hell out there.

Icy, heavy, wet squalls bit into his bones as he hurried down
towards Hornsgatan,
which lay before him looking
unusually grey. The whole of
Södermalm district seemed to
have been drained of all
colour. Not even one tiny bright autumn leaf flew
through the air. With his head bent forward and his arms crossed
over his chest he continued
past

Maria

Magdalena kyrka to Slussen, all the way until he turned right on to Götgatsbacken and as usual he slipped in

between the Monki boutique and the Indigo pub, then went up to the magazine on the fourth floor, just above the offices of Greenpeace. He

could already hear the buzz when he was in the stairwell.

An unusual number of

people were up there. Apart from the editorial team and the key freelancers, there were

three

people

from

Serner, two consultants and Levin, Levin who had dressed

down for the occasion. He no

longer

looked

like

an

executive and had picked up

some

new

expressions,

among others a cheery “Hi”.

“Hi, Micke, how’s things?”

“That depends on you,”

Blomkvist said, not actually meaning to sound unfriendly.

But he could tell that it was taken as a declaration of war and he nodded stiffly, walked on in and sat down on one of

the chairs which had been set out so as to make a small auditorium in the office.

Levin cleared his throat and looked

nervously

in

Blomkvist's direction. The

star reporter, who had seemed so combative in the doorway,

now

looked

politely

interested and showed no sign of wanting to have a row. But this did nothing to set Levin's mind at ease. Once upon a time he and Blomkvist had both temped for *Expressen*.

They mostly wrote quick

news stories and a whole lot of rubbish. But afterwards in the pub they had dreamed

about the big scoops and

talked for hours of how they would never be satisfied with the

conventional

or

the

shallow, but instead would always dig deep. They were young and ambitious and

wanted it all, all at once.

There were times when Levin

missed that, not the salary, of

course, or the working hours, or even the easy life in the bars and the women, but the dreams – he missed the power

in

them.

He

sometimes

longed for that throbbing urge to

change

society

and

journalism and to write so that the world would come to

a standstill and the mighty powers bow down. Even a

hotshot

like

himself

wondered: *Where did the dreams go?*

Micke Blomkvist had of

course made every single one

of them come true, not just because

he

had

been

responsible for some of the big exposés of modern times,

but also because he really wrote with that passion and power

that

they

had

fantasized about. Never once had he bowed to pressure

from the establishment or compromised

his

ideals,

whereas Levin himself ...

Well, really *he* was the one with the big career, wasn't he? He was probably making ten

times

as

much

as

Blomkvist these days and that gave

him

an

enormous

amount of pleasure. What use

were

Blomkvist's

scoops

when he couldn't even buy himself a country place nicer

than that little shack on the island of Sandhamn? My

God, what was that hut

compared to a new house in Cannes? Nothing! No, it was he who had chosen the right path.

Instead of slogging it out in the daily press, Levin had taken a job as media analyst at Serner and developed a personal relationship with

Haakon Serner himself, and

that had changed his life and made him rich. Today he was

the most senior journalist responsible for a whole series of newspaper houses and

channels and he loved it. He loved the power, the money and all that went with it, yet he was not above admitting that even he sometimes

dreamed about that other

stuff, in small doses, of course, but still. He wanted to

be regarded as a fine writer, just like Blomkvist, and that was probably why he had

pushed so hard for the group to buy a stake in *Millennium*.

A little bird had told him that the magazine was up against it and that the editor-in-chief, Erika Berger, whom he had always

secretly

fancied,

wanted to keep on her two latest recruits, Sofie Melker and Emil Grandén, and she

would not be able to do so unless they got some fresh capital.

In short, Levin had seen an

unexpected opportunity to

buy into one of the most prestigious brands in Swedish media.

But

Serner's

management

was

not

enthusiastic, to put it mildly.

On the contrary, people were heard

to

mutter

that

Millennium

was

old-

fashioned and had a left-wing bias and a tendency to end up in fights with important

advertisers

and

business

partners. The plan would

have come to nothing if Levin had not argued his case so passionately. But he had

insisted. In a broader context, he
argued,
investing
in
Millennium
represented
a
negligible
amount,

which
might not yield vast profits
but which could give them something
much
greater,
namely
credibility.
Right
now, after the cutbacks and blood-letting,

Serner's

reputation

wasn't

exactly

their prime asset. Taking a stake in *Millennium* would be a sign that the group did after all care about journalism and freedom of expression, even if Serner's board was not conspicuously keen on either.

This much they were able to understand, and Levin got his acquisition through. For a long time it looked like a winning outcome for all

parties.

Serner got good publicity

and *Millennium* kept its staff and was able to concentrate on what it did best: carefully researched,

well-written

reportage, with Levin himself beaming like the sun and

even taking part in a debate at the Writers' Club, where he said in his usual modest way,

"I

believe

in
virtuous
enterprise. I have always
fought
for
investigative
journalism.”

But then ... he did not
want to think about it. At first he was not really bothered by the

campaign

against

Blomkvist. Ever since his

former colleague's meteoric

rise

in

the

reporting

firmament,

Levin

had

rejoiced secretly whenever

Blomkvist was sneered at in the media. This time, though, his joy did not last. Serner's young son Thorvald became

aware of the commotion –

social media made a big thing of it – even though he was not a man who took any interest in what journalists had to say.

But he did like power and he

loved to intrigue, and here he saw a chance to score some points or simply to give the older generation on the board a good drubbing. Before long

he had encouraged the C.E.O.

– who until quite recently had not concerned himself with such trivial matters – to declare that *Millennium* could not

be

given

special

treatment, but would have to adapt to the new times like all

of the other products in the group.

Levin, who had just given Berger a solemn promise that

he would not interfere in the editorial line, save perhaps as a “friend and adviser”, all of a sudden felt that his hands were tied and he was forced to play some intricate games behind the scenes. He did everything he could to get Berger, Malin Eriksson and

Christer

Malm

at

the

magazine to buy into the new

policy, which was never in fact clearly expressed –

something that flares up in a panic rarely is – but which somehow entailed making

Millennium

younger

and

more commercial.

Naturally

Levin

kept

repeating that there could be no question of compromising the magazine's soul and

provocative attitude, even if he was not sure what he

meant by that. He only knew that to keep the directors happy he needed to get more glamour into the magazine

and reduce the number of

lengthy investigations into industry, since they were

liable to irritate advertisers and make enemies for the

board. But of course he did not tell Berger this.

He

wanted

to

avoid

unnecessary

conflict

and,

standing there in front of the editorial team, he had taken the trouble to dress more casually than usual. He did not want to provoke anyone by wearing the shiny suits and ties which had become de

rigueur at head office. He had instead opted for jeans, a white shirt and a dark-blue V-necked pullover which was

not even cashmere. His long curly hair – which had always been his rebellious little gimmick – was tied in a

ponytail, just like the edgiest journalists on T.V. But most important of all he kicked off in the humble tone he had been taught to adopt on his management courses.

“Hello, everybody,” he

said. “What foul weather!

I’ve said it many times

before, but I’m happy to repeat it: we at Serner are incredibly

proud

to

be

accompanying you on this

journey,

and

for

me

personally it amounts to more even than that. It's the

commitment to magazines

like *Millennium* which makes my

job

meaningful;

it

reminds me why I went into this profession in the first place.

Micke,

do

you

remember how we used to sit in the Opera Bar and dream about everything we were

going to achieve together?

And we weren't exactly

holding back on the booze, ha ha!"

Blomkvist did not look as if he remembered. But Levin was not to be put off.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to get all nostalgic,” he said, “and there’s no reason to do so. In those days there was much more money in our industry. Just to cover some piddling little murder in the middle of nowhere we would hire a helicopter and book an entire floor at the poshest hotel, and order champagne for the after party. You know, when I was about to go off on my first overseas trip I asked Ulf Nilson, foreign

correspondent at the time,

what

the

deutschmark

exchange rate was. 'I have no idea,' he said, 'I set my own exchange rate.' Ha ha! So at the time we used to pad our expenses, do you remember, Micke? Maybe we were at

our most creative back then.

In any case, our job was just to knock out some quick copy

and we still managed to sell any number of issues. But a lot has changed since then –

we all know that. We now face cut-throat competition and it's not easy these days to make a profit in journalism, not

even

if

you

have

Sweden's best editorial team, as you do. So I thought we should talk a little bit today about the challenges of the future. Not that I

imagine for one moment that I can teach you anything. I'm just going to provide you with some

context for discussion. We at Serner have commissioned

some surveys about your

readership and the public

perception of *Millennium*.

Some of it may give you a bit of a fright. But instead of letting it get you down you should see it as a challenge, and remember, there are some

totally

crazy

changes

happening out there.”

Levin paused for a moment and wondered if the term

“totally crazy” had been a mistake, if he had tried too hard to appear relaxed and youthful, and whether he had started off in too chatty and jocular a vein. As Haakon Serner would say, “It is

impossible to overestimate

how humourless underpaid

journalists can be.” But no, he decided, I’ll fix this.

I'll get them on my side!

Blomkvist

had

stopped

listening more or less at the point when Levin explained that they all needed to reflect on their “digital maturity”, and so he didn't hear them being told that the younger generation were not really aware of *Millennium* or Mikael

Blomkvist.

Unfortunately that

was

precisely the moment at

which he decided he had had enough and went out to the coffee room. So he had no idea either that Aron Ullman, the Norwegian consultant,

quite openly said, “Pathetic.

Is he so scared that he’s going to be forgotten?”

But in fact nothing could have worried Blomkvist less at that moment. He was angry

that Levin seemed to think consumer surveys might be

their salvation. It was no bloody market analysis that had created the magazine. It was

passion

and

fire.

Millennium had got to where it was because they had all put their faith in it, and in what felt right and important without trying to guess which way the wind was blowing.

For a time he just stood there

in the pantry, wondering how long it would take before Berger came to join him.

The answer was about two minutes. He tried to calculate how angry she was by the sound of her heels. But when she was standing next to him she only gave him a dejected smile. “What’s going on?” she said. “I just couldn’t bear to listen.” “You do realize that people feel incredibly uncomfortable when you behave like that?”

“I do.”

“And I assume you also understand that Serner can do nothing without our agreement. We still have control.”

“Like hell we do. We’re their hostages, Ricky! Don’t

you get it? If we don't do as they say they'll withdraw
their support and then we'll be sitting there with our arses hanging
out," he said, loudly and angrily. When Berger
hushed him and shook her
head he added sotto voce,
"I'm sorry. I'm being a brat.
But I'm going home now. I need to think."
"You've begun to work
extremely short hours."

“Well, I reckon I’m owed a fair bit of overtime.”

“I suppose you are. Would you

like

company

this

evening?”

“I don’t know. I honestly don’t know, Erika,” he said, and then he left the magazine offices and went out onto Götgatsbacken.

The storm and the freezing rain lashed against him and he swore, and for a moment considered

dashing

into

Pocketshop

to

buy

yet

another

English

detective

novel to escape into. Instead he

turned

into

Sankt

Paulsgatan and as he was

passing the sushi restaurant on the right-hand side his mobile rang. He was sure that it would be Berger. But it was

Pernilla, his daughter, who had certainly chosen the

worst possible time to get in touch with a father who

already felt bad about how little he did for her.

“Hello, my darling,” he

said.

“What’s that noise?”

“It’s the storm, I expect.”

“O.K., O.K., I’ll be quick.

I’ve been accepted on the

writing course at Biskops Arnö school.”

“So, now you want to be a

writer,” he said, in a tone which was too harsh and almost sarcastic, and that was unfair in every way.

He should have simply

congratulated her and wished her luck, but Pernilla had had so

many

difficult

years

hopping

between

one

Christian sect and another,

and from one course to another

without

finishing

anything,

that

he

felt

exhausted by yet another
change of direction.

“I don’t think I detected a whoop of joy there.”

“Sorry, Pernilla. I’m not
myself today.”

“When are you ever?”

“I’m just not sure writing is such a good idea, given how the
profession is looking right
now. I only want you to find something that will really work for
you.”

“I’m not going to write boring journalism like you.”

“Well, what are you going to write then?”

“I’m going to write for real.”

“O.K.,” he said, without asking what she meant by that. “Do you have enough money?”

“I’m working part-time at Wayne’s Coffee.”

“Would you like to come
to dinner tonight, so we can talk about it?”

“Don’t have time, Pappa. It

was just to let you know,” she said, and hung up, and even if he
tried to see the positive side in her enthusiasm it just made his
mood worse. He

took a short cut across

Mariatorget and Hornsgatan

to reach his apartment on Bellmansgatan.

It felt as if he had only just left. He got a strange sense that he no longer had a job and that he was on the verge of entering a new existence where he had oceans of time instead of working his fingers to the bone. For a brief moment

he

considered

tidying the place up. There were magazines and books

and clothes everywhere. But instead he fetched two Pilsner Urquell from the fridge and sat down on the sofa in the living

room

to

think

everything

through

more

soberly, as soberly as one can with a bit of beer in one's body.

What was he to do?

He had no idea, and most worrying of all was that he was in no mood for a fight.

On the contrary, he was strangely resigned, as if

Millennium were slipping out of his sphere of interest. Isn't it time to do something new?

he asked himself, and he

thought of Kajsa Åkerstam, a

quite charming person whom he would occasionally meet for a few drinks. Åkerstam was

head

of

Swedish

Television's

“Investigative

Taskforce” programme and

she had been trying to recruit him for years. It had never mattered

what

she

had

offered, and how solemnly

she had guaranteed backing and

total

integrity.

Millennium had been his home and his soul. But now

... maybe he should take the chance. Perhaps a job on

“Investigative

Taskforce”

would fire him up again.

His mobile rang and for a moment

he

was

happy.

Whether it was Berger or

Pernilla, he promised himself he would be friendly and really listen. But no, it was a withheld number and he answered guardedly.

“Is

that

Mikael

Blomkvist?” said a young-

sounding voice.

“Yes,” he said.

“Do you have time to talk?”

“I might if you introduced yourself.”

“My

name

is

Linus

Brandell.”

“O.K., Linus, how can I
help?”

“I have a story for you.”

“Tell me.”

“I will if you can drag
yourself down to the Bishops

Arms across the street and meet me there.”

Blomkvist was irritated. It wasn't just the bossy tone. It was the intrusion on his home turf.

“The telephone will do just
fine.”

“It’s not something which
should be discussed on an open line.”

“Why do I feel so tired
when I talk to you, Linus?”

“Maybe you’ve had a bad day.”

“I *have* had a bad day.

You’re right about that.”

“There you go. Come
down to the Bishop and I’ll buy you a beer and tell you something
amazing.”

Blomkvist wanted only to

snap: “Stop telling me what to do!” Yet without knowing why, or
perhaps because he didn’t have anything better to

do than to sit in his attic apartment and brood over his

future he said, “I pay for my own beers. But O.K., I’m

coming.”

“A wise decision.”

“But, Linus ...”

“Yes?”

“If you get long-winded

and give me a load of wild conspiracy theories to the effect that Elvis is alive and you know who shot Olof

Palme, then I’m coming straight home.”

“Fair enough,” Brandell

said.

CHAPTER 3

20.xi

Edwin Needham – Ed the

Ned, as he was sometimes

called – was not the most highly

paid

security

technician in the U.S., but he may have been the best. He grew up in South Boston,

Dorchester, and his father had been a monumental good-for-nothing, a drunk who took on

casual work in the harbour but often disappeared on

binges which not infrequently landed him in jail or in hospital. Yet these benders

were the family's best time, a sort of breathing space. When Ed's father could be bothered to be around he would beat his mother black and blue.

Sometimes she would spend

hours or even whole days

locked

inside

the

toilet,

crying and shaking. Nobody was very surprised when she died from internal bleeding at only forty-six, or when Ed's older sister became a crack

addict, still less when the remains of the family stood teetering on the brink of homelessness

soon

afterwards.

Ed's childhood paved the

way for a life of trouble, and during his teenage years he belonged to a gang who

called

themselves

“The

Fuckers”. They were the

terror of Dorchester, and

engaged in gang warfare,

assault and robbing grocery stores. There was something brutal about Ed’s appearance from an early age and this was not

improved by the fact

that he never smiled and was missing two upper teeth. He was sturdy, tall and fearless, and his face usually bore the traces of brawls with his father or gang fights. Most of the teachers at his school were scared to death of him.

All were convinced that he would end up in jail or with a bullet in his head. But there were some adults who began to take an interest in him – no doubt

because

they

discovered that there was

more than aggression and
violence in his intense blue eyes.

Ed had an irrepressible

thirst for knowledge, an

energy which meant that he

could devour a book with the same vigour with which he could
trash the inside of a public bus. Often he was

reluctant to go home at the end of the school day. He liked to stay
on in what was known as the technology

room, where there were a

couple of computers. He

would sit there for hours. A physics teacher with the

Swedish-sounding name of

Larson noticed how good he was with machines, and after social services got involved he was awarded a scholarship

and transferred to a school with

more

motivated

students.

He began to excel at his studies and was given more scholarships and distinctions and eventually – something of a miracle in view of the odds against him – he went

on

to

study

Electrical

Engineering and Computer

Science at M.I.T. In his

doctoral thesis he explored some specific fears around new

asymmetric

cryptosystems like R.S.A.,

and he then went on to senior positions at Microsoft and Cisco before being recruited by the National Security

Agency at Fort Meade in

Maryland.

He did not have the ideal C.V. for the job, even leaving aside his criminal behaviour as a teenager. He had smoked

a lot of grass at college and flirted with socialist or even anarchist ideals, and had been arrested twice for assault –

nothing major, just bar fights.

He still had a volcanic temper and everyone who knew him thought better of crossing him.

But at the N.S.A. they recognized his other qualities.

Besides which it was the

autumn

of

2001.

The

American security services

were

so

desperate

for

computer technicians that

they

hired

pretty

much

anybody. During the ensuing years

nobody

questioned

Needham's loyalty – or

patriotism, for that matter –

and if anyone thought to do

so, his advantages always outweighed his shortcomings.

Needham was not just

amazingly gifted. There was an obsessive streak to his character, a manic precision and a furious efficiency

which boded well for a man in charge of building I.T.

security at America's most highly

classified

agency.

Nobody was damn well going

to crack his system. It was a

matter of personal pride for him. At Fort Meade he

quickly

made

himself

indispensable, to the point where people were constantly

lining up to consult him. Not a few were terrified of him and he was often verbally abusive. He had even told the head of the N.S.A. himself, the

legendary

Admiral

Charles O'Connor, to go to hell.

“Use
your
own
busy
fucking head for things you might
just
be
able
to

comprehend,” Needham had
roared when the admiral
attempted to comment on his work.

But

O’Connor

and

everyone else let it happen.

They knew that Needham

screamed and yelled for the right

reasons

—

because

colleagues had been careless

about security regulations, or because they were talking

about things beyond their

understanding. Not once did he interfere in the rest of the agency's work, even though his level of clearance gave him access to pretty much everything, and even though in recent years the agency had found itself at the centre of a heated storm of opinion with advocates of both the right

and the left seeing the N.S.A.

as the devil incarnate, as Orwell's Big Brother. As far as Needham was concerned,

the organization could do

whatever the hell it wanted, so long as his security

systems remained rigorous

and intact. And since he did not yet have a family he more or less lived at the office.

Apart from the occasional

drinking

session,

during

which he sometimes turned alarmingly sentimental about his past,
there was no

suggestion that he had ever told outsiders what he was working
on. In that other world he remained as silent as the grave and, if
ever

questioned

about

his

profession, he stuck to a well-rehearsed cover story.

It was not by chance, nor was it the result of intrigue or

manipulation, that he had risen through the ranks and become the N.S.A.'s most

senior

security

chief.

Needham and his team had

tightened

internal

surveillance “so that no new whistle-blowers can pop up and punch us on the nose”

and during countless sleepless nights created something he alternately

called

“an

unbreakable wall” or “a ferocious little bloodhound”.

“No fucker can get in, and no fucker can dig around in there without permission,” he said. And he was enormously

proud of that.

He had been proud, that is,

until that disastrous morning in November. The day had begun beautiful and clear.

Needham, who had put on

quite a belly over the years,

came waddling over from the coffee

machine

in

his

characteristic way. Because of his seniority he completely ignored dress codes. He was wearing jeans and a red-checked lumberjack shirt, not quite buttoned at the waist, and he sighed as he settled down at his computer. He

was not feeling great. His back and right knee hurt and he cursed the fact that his

long-time colleague, Alona Casales, had managed to persuade him to come out for

a run the night before. Sheer sadism on her part.

Luckily there was nothing

super-urgent to deal with. He only had to send an internal memo
with
some
new
procedures
for
those
in
charge

of

C.O.S.T.,

a

programme for cooperation

with the large I.T. companies

– he had even changed the codenames. But he did not get far. He was just beginning to write, in his usual turgid prose:

<So that no-one will be tempted to fall back into idiotic habits again, but

instead to keep you all on your toes as good paranoid cyber-agents, I would just like to point out...>

when he was interrupted by one of his alerts.

He was not particularly worried. His warning systems

were so sensitive that they reacted

to

the

slightest

divergence in the information flow. It was going to be an anomaly,

a

notification

perhaps that someone was

trying to exceed the limits of their authorization, or some minor interference.

As it turned out, he never had time to investigate. In the

next moment something so uncanny happened that for

several seconds he refused to believe it. He just sat there, staring at the screen. Yet he knew exactly what was going

on. A R.A.T. had got into the NSANet intranet. Anywhere

else he would have thought: *Those fuckers, I'll crush them.* But in here, the most tightly closed and controlled place of all, which he and his

team had gone over with a fine-toothed comb a million times just this last year to detect every minuscule little vulnerability, here, no, no, it was impossible – it could not be happening.

Without realizing it he had

closed his eyes, as if hoping that it would all vanish so long as he wasn't watching.

But when he looked at the screen again, the sentence he

had

begun

was

being

completed. His <I would just like to point out> was continuing on its own with the words <that you should stop with all the illegal activity.

Actually

it's

pretty

straightforward. Those who spy on the people end up themselves being spied on by the people. There's a fundamental democratic logic to it.>

“Jesus, Jesus,” he muttered

– which was at least a sign that he was beginning to

recover

some

of

his

composure.

But then the text went on:

<Chill out, Ed. Why don't you stick around for a ride? I've got Root> at which point he gave a loud cry. The word "Root" brought

down his whole world. For about a minute, as the

computer raced through the most confidential parts of the system at lightning speed, he genuinely believed that he

was going to have a heart attack. He was only vaguely aware

that

people

were

beginning to gather around his desk.

There was not much of a

crowd down at the Bishops Arms. The weather was not encouraging

people

to

venture out, not even to the local pub. Blomkvist was

nevertheless met by shouts and laughter, and by a hoarse voice bawling:

“Kalle Blomkvist!”

It came from a man with a puffy red face, a halo of frizzy hair and a fussy

moustache, whom Blomkvist

had seen many times in the area. He thought his name was Arne, and Arne would

turn up at the pub as regularly as clockwork at 2.00 every

afternoon. Today he had clearly come earlier than that and settled down at a table to the left of the bar with three drinking companions.

“Mikael

Blomkvist,”

Blomkvist corrected him with
a smile.

Arne

and

his

friends

laughed as if Blomkvist's

actual name was the biggest joke of all.

“Got any good scoops?”

Arne said.

“I’m

thinking

about

blowing wide open the whole

murky scene at the Bishops Arms.”

“You reckon Sweden’s

ready for a story like that?”

“No, probably not.”

In truth Blomkvist quite

liked this crowd, not that he ever talked to them more than in throw-away lines and

banter. But these men were a part of the local scene which made him feel at home in the

area, and he was not in the least bit offended when one of them shot out, "I've heard that you're washed up."

Far from upsetting him, it brought the whole campaign against him down to the low,

almost farcical level where it belonged.

“I’ve been washed up for the last fifteen years, hello to you brother bottle, all good things must pass,” he said, quoting the poet Fröding and looking around for someone who might have had the gall to order a tired journalist down to the pub. Since he saw no-one apart from Arne and his gang he went up to Amir at the bar.

Amir was big and fat and jolly, a hard-working father of four who had been running

the pub for some years. He and Blomkvist had become

good friends. Not because

Blomkvist was an especially regular customer, but because they had helped each other out in completely different ways; once or twice when

Blomkvist had not had the time to get to the state liquor store and was expecting female company, Amir had supplied him with a couple of bottles of red wine, and Blomkvist in turn had helped a friend of Amir's, who had no papers, to write letters to the authorities.

“To what do we owe this honour?” Amir said.

“I'm meeting someone.”

“Anyone exciting?”

“I don’t think so. How’s Sara?”

Sara was Amir’s wife and
had just had a hip operation.

“Complaining and taking
painkillers.”

“Sounds like hard work.

Give her my best.”

“Will do,” Amir said, and they chatted about this and that.

But Linus Brandell did not

show up and Blomkvist

thought it was probably a practical joke. On the other hand there were worse tricks than to have someone lure you down to your local pub, so he stayed for fifteen

minutes discussing a number of financial and health-related concerns before he turned and walked towards the door, and

that was when Brandell

appeared.

Nobody

understood

how

Gabriella Grane had ended up

at Säpo, Swedish Security

Police, least of all she herself.

She had been the sort of girl for whom everybody had

predicted a glittering future.

Her old girlfriends from the classy suburb of Djursholm worried that she was thirty-three and neither famous nor wealthy nor married, either to

a rich man or to any man at all for that matter.

“What’s happened to you,

Gabriella? Are you going to be a police officer all your life?”

Most of the time she could

not be bothered to argue

back, or point out that she was not a police officer but had been head-hunted for the position of analyst, and that these days she was writing far

more challenging texts than she ever had at the Foreign Ministry

or

during

her

summers as a leader writer for *Svenska Dagbladet*. Apart from which, she was not

allowed to talk about most of it in any case. So she might as well keep quiet and simply come to terms with the fact that working for the Swedish Security

Police

was

considered to be about as low

as you can go – both by her status-obsessed friends and even

more

so

by

her

intellectual pals.

In their eyes, Säpo were a bunch of clumsy right-leaning idiots who went after Kurds and Arabs for what were

fundamentally racist reasons, and who had no qualms about

committing serious crimes or infringements of civil rights in order to protect former

senior Soviet spies. And indeed sometimes she was on

their

side.

There

was

incompetence

in

the

organization, and values that were

unsound,

and

the

Zalachenko affair remained a major blot. But that was not the whole truth. Stimulating and important work was

being done as well, especially now after the shake-out, and sometimes

she

had

the

impression that it was at Säpo, not in any editorial or lecture hall, that people best understood the upheavals that were taking place across the world. But of course she

often asked herself: *How did I end up here, and why have I stayed?*

Presumably some of it was

down to flattery. No less a person than Helena Kraft, the newly appointed chief of

Säpo

at

the

time,

had

contacted her and said that after all the disasters and bad press they had to rethink their approach to recruitment. We need to “bring on board the real

talents

from

the

universities

and,

quite

honestly Gabriella, there's no better person than you," and that was all it had taken.

Grane was hired as an

analyst in counter-espionage

and later in the Industry Protection

Group.

Even

though as a young woman,

attractive in a slightly proper sort of way, she got called a
“daddy’s girl” and “snotty upper-class bitch”, she was a star
recruit,
quick
and
receptive and able to think outside the box. And she
could speak Russian. She had
learned it alongside her
studies at the Stockholm

School of Economics, where needless to say she had been a model student but never that keen.

She

dreamed

of

something bigger than a life in business, so after her graduation she applied for a job at the Foreign Ministry and of course was accepted.

But she did not find that especially stimulating either –

the diplomats were too stiff and neatly combed. It was

then that Helena Kraft had got in touch. Grane had been at Säpo for five years now and

had

gradually

been

accepted for the talent that she was, even if it was not always easy.

It had been a trying day, and not just because of the ghastly weather. The head of division, Ragnar Olofsson,

had appeared in her office looking surly and humourless

and told her that she should damn well not be flirting when she was out on an

assignment.

“Flirting?”

“Flowers

have

been

delivered.”

“And that’s my fault?”

“Yes, I do think you have a responsibility there. When we’re out in the field we have to show discipline and reserve at all times. We represent an absolutely key public agency.”

“Well, that’s great, Ragnar dear. One always learns

something from you. Now I finally understand that I'm responsible for the fact that the head of research at

Ericsson

can't

tell

the

difference between normal

polite behaviour and flirting.

Now I realize that I should blame myself when men

indulge

in

such

wildly

wishful thinking that they see a sexual invitation in a simple smile.”

“Don’t

be

stupid,”

Olofsson

said,
and
he
disappeared.

Later
she
regretted having answered
back.

That kind of outburst rarely

does any good. On the other hand, she had been taking shit for far too long. It was time to

stand up for herself. She quickly tidied her desk and got

out

a

report

from

G.C.H.Q. in Britain about

Russian industrial espionage against European software

companies, which she had not

yet had time to read. Then the telephone rang. It was Kraft, and that made Grane happy.

She had never yet called to complain or moan. On the contrary.

“I’ll get straight to the point,” Kraft said. “I’ve had a call from the U.S., it may be a bit of an emergency. Can you

take it on your Cisco? We’ve

arranged a secure line.”

“Of course.”

“Good. I’d like you to

interpret the information for me, see if there’s anything in it. It sounds serious, but I can’t get a handle on the person who’s passing on the

information – who, by the way, says that she knows you.”

“Put me through.”

It was Alona Casales at the

N.S.A. – although for a

moment Grane wondered if it

really *was* her. When they had last met, at a conference in Washington D.C., Casales had been a self-assured and charismatic lecturer in what she

somewhat

euphemistically described as active-signals surveillance –

hacking, in other words.

Afterwards she and Grane

had gone out for drinks, and almost against her will, Grane had been enchanted. Casales smoked cigarillos and had a dark and sensuous voice well-suited to her punchy one-

liners and frequent sexual allusions. But now on the telephone

she

sounded

confused

and

sometimes

unaccountably lost the thread of what she was saying.

Blomkvist did not really

know what to expect, a

fashionable

young

man,

presumably, some cool dude.

But the fellow who had

arrived looked like a tramp, short and with torn jeans and long, dark, unwashed hair and

something slightly sleepy and shifty in his eyes. He was maybe twenty-five, perhaps

younger, had bad skin and a fringe which concealed his eyes and a rather ugly mouth sore. Linus Brandell did not look like someone who was sitting on a major scoop.

“Linus

Brandell,

I

presume.”

“That’s right. Sorry I’m

late. Happened to bump into a

girl I knew. We were in the same class in ninth grade, and she—”

“Let’s get this over with,”

Blomkvist interrupted him,

and led the way to a table towards the back of the pub.

When

Amir

appeared,

smiling

discreetly,

they

ordered two pints of Guinness and then sat quietly for a few seconds. Blomkvist could not

understand why he felt so

irritated. It was not like him; perhaps the whole drama with

Serner was getting to him after all. He smiled towards Arne and his gang, all of whom were studying them

keenly.

“I’ll come straight to the point,” Brandell said.

“That sounds good.”

“Do

you

know

Supercraft?”

Blomkvist did not know much about computer games.

But even he had heard of Supercraft.

“By name, yes.”

“No more than that?”

“No.”

“In that case you won’t

know that what makes this game different, or at least so special, is that it has a particular A.I. function that allows you to communicate

with a player about war strategy without being really sure, at least to begin with, whether it's a real person or a digital creation that you're talking to."

"You

don't

say,"

Blomkvist said. He couldn't care less about the finer points of a damn computer game.

“It’s a minor revolution in the industry and I was actually involved in developing it,” Brandell said.

“Congratulations. In that case you must have made a killing.”

“That’s just it.”

“Meaning what?”

“The
technology
was
stolen from us and now
Truegames
are
making
billions while we don’t get a single öre.”
Blomkvist had heard this line before. He had even

spoken to an old lady who claimed that it was actually she who had written the

Harry Potter books and that J.K. Rowling had stolen everything by telepathy.

“So how did it happen?” he said.

“We were hacked.”

“How do you know that?”

“It’s been established by experts

at

the

National

Defence Radio Establishment

– I can give you a name there if you want – and also by a

...”

Brandell hesitated.

“Yes?”

“Nothing. But even the

Security Police were involved

– you can talk to Gabriella Grane there. She’s an analyst and I think she’ll back me up.

She has also mentioned the incident in a public report published last year. I have the reference number here ...”

“In other words, this isn’t news,” Blomkvist interrupted.

“No, not in that sense. *New Technology* and *Computer Sweden* wrote about it. But since Frans didn’t want to talk about it and on a couple of occasions even denied that there had been any breach at

all, the story never went very far.”

“But it’s still old news.”

“I suppose so.”

“So why should I be
listening to you, Linus?”

“Because now Frans seems
to have understood what
happened. I think he’s sitting on pure dynamite. He’s
become completely manic
about security. Only uses

hyper-encryption

for

his

phones and email and he's just got a new burglar alarm with cameras and sensors and

all that crap. I think you should talk to him – that's why I got in touch with you.

A guy like you can perhaps get him to open up. He

doesn't listen to me.”

“So you order me down

here because it seems as if someone called Frans may be sitting on some dynamite.”

“Not

someone

called

Frans, Blomkvist, it’s none other than Frans Balder;

didn’t I say that? I was one of his assistants.”

Blomkvist searched his

memory: the only Balder he could think of was Hanna

Balder, the actress, whatever might have become of her.

“Who’s he?” he said.

The look he got was so full
of contempt that he was taken
aback.

“Where’ve

you

been

living? Mars? Frans Balder is a legend. A household name.”

“Really?”

“Christ,

yes!”

Brandell

said. “Google him and you’ll see. He became a professor of computer sciences at just

twenty-seven and for two

decades he’s been a leading authority on research in

artificial intelligence. There’s

hardly anyone who's as far advanced in the development of quantum computing and neural networks. He has an amazingly cool, back-to-front brain.

Thinks

along

completely

unorthodox,

ground-breaking lines, and as you can probably imagine the

computer

industry's

been

chasing him for years. But for a long time Balder refused to let himself be recruited. He

wanted to work alone. Well, not altogether alone – he's always had assistants whom he's driven into the ground.

He wants results, and he's always saying: 'Nothing is impossible. Our job is to push back the frontiers, blah blah blah.' But people listen to him. They'll do anything for him. They'll just about die for him. To us nerds he is God Almighty."

"I can hear that."

“But don’t think that I’m some star-struck admirer, not at all. There’s a price to be paid, I know that better than anyone. You can do great

things with him. But you can

also go to pieces. Balder isn’t even allowed to look after his own son. He messed up in some

unforgivable

way.

There are a lot of different stories, assistants who’ve hit the wall and wrecked their lives and God knows what.

But although he's always
been obsessive he's never
behaved like this before. I just
know
he's
onto
something big."
"You just know that."
"You've got to understand,

he's not normally a paranoid person. Quite the opposite –

he's never been anywhere

near paranoid enough, given

the level of the things he's been dealing with. But now he's locked himself into his house and hardly goes out.

He seems afraid and normally

he really doesn't do scared.”

“And he was working on

computer games?” Blomkvist

said, without hiding his
scepticism.

“Well ... since he knew

that we were all gaming

freaks he probably thought

that we should get to work on something that we liked. But his A.I.
program was also right for that business. It was a perfect testing
environment and we got fantastic results.

We broke new ground. It was

just that—”

“Get to the point, Linus.”

“The thing is that Frans

and his lawyers wrote a

patent application for the most innovative parts of the

technology, and that’s when the first shock came. A

Russian

engineer

at

Truegames

had

thrown

together an application just before, which blocked our

patent, and that can hardly have been a coincidence. But that didn't really matter. The patent was only a paper tiger.

The interesting thing was

how the hell they had

managed to find out about

what we'd been doing. Since we were all devoted to Frans even to the point of death, there was actually only one possibility: we

must have

been hacked, in spite of all our security measures.”

“Is that when you got in touch with the Security Police and the National Defence

Radio Establishment?”

“Not at first. Balder is not too keen on people who wear

ties and work from nine to five. He prefers obsessive idiots who are glued to their computers all night long, so instead he got in touch with some weirdo hacker he had met somewhere and she said straight away that we’d had a breach. Not that she seemed particularly

credible.

I

wouldn't have hired her, if you see what I mean, and perhaps she was just talking

drivel.

But

her

main

conclusions

were

nevertheless

subsequently

borne out by people at the N.D.R.E.”

“But no-one knew who had

hacked you?”

“No, no, trying to trace

hacker breaches is often a complete waste of time. But they

must

have

been

professionals. We had done a

lot of work on our I.T.

security.”

“And now you suspect that

Balder may have found out something more about it?”

“Definitely. Otherwise he

wouldn't be behaving so

strangely. I'm convinced he got wind of something at Solifon."

"Is that where he worked?"

"Yes, oddly enough. As I

told you before, Balder had

previously refused to let himself be tied up by the big computer giants. No-one has ever banged on as much as he

did about being an outsider, about the importance of being independent and not being a slave to commercial forces.

But out of the blue, as we stood there with our trousers down and our technology

stolen, he suddenly took up an offer from Solifon, of all

companies, and nobody could understand it. O.K., they were offering a mega-salary, free rein and all of that crap: like, do whatever the hell you

want, but work for us, and that probably sounded cool. It would definitely have been cool for anyone who wasn't Frans Balder. But he'd had any number of offers like that from Google, Apple and all the others. Why was this

suddenly so interesting? He never explained. He just took his clobber and disappeared, and from what I've heard it went

swimmingly at first.

Balder continued to develop our technology and I think the owner, Nicolas Grant, was

beginning to fantasize about revenues in billions. There was great excitement. But

then something happened.”

“Something that you don’t actually

know

so

much

about.”

“No, we lost contact.

Balder lost contact with

pretty much everyone. But I understand enough to know

that it must have been

something serious. He had

always preached openness

and

enthused

about

the

Wisdom of Crowds, all that stuff: the importance of using the knowledge of many, the whole Linux way of thinking.

But at Solifon he apparently kept every comma secret,

even from those who were

closest to him, and then –

wham bam – he gave notice and went home, and now he's

sitting there in his house in Saltsjöbaden

and

doesn't

even go out into the garden or give a damn how he looks.”

“So what you've got, Linus, is a story about a professor who seems to be under pressure and who

doesn't care what he looks like – though it's not clear how the neighbours can see that,

if

he

never

goes

outside?”

“Yes, but I think—”

“Listen, this could be an interesting story, I get that.

But unfortunately it isn’t for

me. I’m no I.T. reporter – as someone so wisely wrote the other day, I’m a caveman. I’d recommend

you

contact

Raoul Sigvardsson at the

Svenska Morgon-Posten. He knows everything about that world.”

“No, no, Sigvardsson is a lightweight. This is way
above his head.”

“I think you underestimate him.”

“Come on now, don’t chicken out. This could be your comeback,
Blomkvist.”

Blomkvist made a tired

gesture towards Amir, who

was wiping a table not far from them.

“Can I give you some
advice?” Blomkvist said.

“What ...? Yes ... sure.”

“Next time you have a

story to sell, don't try to explain to the reporter what's

in it for him. Do you know how many times people have played
me that tune? ‘This is going to be the biggest thing in your career.
Bigger than Watergate!’ You'd do better with just some basic
matter-of-fact information, Linus.”

“I just meant ...”

“Yes, what actually *did* you mean?”

“That you should talk to
him. I think he would like
you.

You’re

the

same

uncompromising

kind

of

guy.”

It was as if Brandell had suddenly

lost

his

self-

confidence and Blomkvist

wondered if he had not been unnecessarily tough. As a

general principle, he tended to

be

friendly

and

encouraging towards people

who

gave

him

tip-offs,

however weird they sounded,

not just because there might be a good story even in

something

that

sounded

crazy, but also because he recognized that often he was their last straw. There were many who turned to him

when everyone else had

stopped listening. He was the last hope, and there was never any excuse to be scornful.

“Listen,” he said. “I’ve had a really bad day and I didn’t mean to sound sarcastic.”

“That’s O.K.”

“And

you

know,”

Blomkvist said, “there is actually one thing which

interests me about this story.

You said you had a visit from a female hacker.”

Alona Casales was not one to

become nervous easily and

she rarely had trouble staying

on topic. She was forty-eight, tall and outspoken, with a voluptuous figure and small intelligent eyes which could make anybody feel insecure.

She often seemed to see

straight through people and did not suffer from a surfeit of deference to superiors. She would give anyone a dressing

down, even the Attorney

General if he came calling.

That was one of the reasons

why Ed the Ned got on so well with her. Neither of them

attached

much

importance to status; all they cared about was ability.

Nevertheless,

she

had

completely lost it with the head of Sweden's Security

Police. This had absolutely nothing to do with Helena Kraft, it was because of the drama unfolding in the open-plan

office

behind

her.

Admittedly they were all used to Needham's explosions of rage. But something told her right away that what was

going on now was on an

altogether different scale.

The

man

seemed

paralysed. While Casales sat there blurting some confused words down the line, people gathered around him, and all of them, without exception, looked scared. But perhaps

because she was in a state of shock, Casales did not hang up or say that she would call back later. She let herself be put through to Gabriella

Grane, that charming young analyst whom she had met and tried to seduce in

Washington. Even though

Casales had not succeeded in taking her to bed, she had been left with a deep feeling of pleasure.

“Hello, my dear,” she said.

“How are you?”

“Not

so

bad,”

Grane

answered.

“We’re

having

some terrible storms, but

otherwise everything’s fine”

“I really enjoyed that last time we saw each other.”

“Absolutely, it was nice. I was hungover the whole of the next day. But I don’t suppose you’re calling to ask me out.”

“Unfortunately not. I’m calling because we’ve picked up signs of a serious threat to a Swedish scientist.”

“Who?”

“For a long time we had

trouble

understanding

the

information, or even working out

which

country

it

concerned.

The

communication

was

encrypted and used only

vague codenames, but still,

using a few small pieces of the puzzle we managed ...

what the *hell* ...?”

“What?”

“One second ...!”

Casales’ computer screen

blinked, then went blank, and as far as she could see the same thing was happening all

over the office floor. For a moment she wondered what

to do, but carried on the conversation; it might just be a power outage, after all, although the overhead lights seemed to be working.

“I’m still here,” Grane
said.

“Thanks, I appreciate it.

Sorry
about
this.

It's

complete chaos here. Where was I?"

"You were talking about

pieces of the puzzle."

"Right, yes, we put two

and two together, because

there's always one person who's

careless,

however

professional they try to be, or who ...”

“Yes?”

“Um ... talks, gives an

address or something, in this case it was more like ...”

Casales fell silent again.

None other than Commander

Jonny Ingram, one of the

most senior people in the N.S.A. with contacts high up

in the White House, had come onto the office floor.

Ingram was trying to appear as composed as usual. He even cracked some joke to a group sitting further away.

But he was not fooling

anyone. Beneath his polished and tanned exterior – ever since his time as head of the cryptological centre on Oahu he was suntanned all year round – you could sense

something nervous in his expression, and now he seemed to want everybody's attention.

“Hello, are you still there?”

Grane said on the other end of the line.

“I’m going to have to leave

you unfortunately. I’ll call you back,” Casales said, and hung up.
At that moment she

became very worried indeed.

There was a feeling in the air that something terrible had
happened,

maybe

another

major terrorist attack. But Ingram carried on with his soothing act
and, even though there was sweat on his upper lip and forehead,
he kept repeating that it was nothing serious. Most likely a virus,

he said, which had found its way into the intranet, despite all the security precautions.

“To be on the safe side, we’ve

shut

down

our

servers,” he said, and for a moment he really did manage

to calm things down. “What the hell,” people seemed to be saying. “A virus isn’t such a big deal.”

But then Ingram started

spouting

such

vague

statements that Casales could not

stop

herself

from

shouting:

“Tell us what’s actually happening!”

“We don’t know that much yet. But it’s possible that our systems have been hacked. We’ll get back to you as soon as we know more,” Ingram said, looking concerned, and a murmur ran through the room.

“Is it the Iranians again?”

somebody wondered.

“We think ...” Ingram said.

He got no further. Ed Needham,

the

one

who

should have been standing

there in the first place, explaining

what

was

happening, interrupted him

brusquely and got to his feet, a bear of a man, and at that moment there was no denying

that he was an imposing

sight. Gone was the deflated Ed from a minute before; he

now exuded a tremendous sense of determination.

“No,” he hissed. “It’s a

hacker, a fucking super-

hacker, and I’m going to cut his balls off.”

“The female hacker doesn’t really have anything to do with this story,” Brandell said, nursing his beer. “She

was probably more like Balder's social project.”

“But she seemed to know

her stuff.”

“Or she was just lucky. She

talked a lot of rubbish.”

“So you met her?”

“Yes, just after Balder took

off for Silicon Valley.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Almost a year. I’d moved our
computers
into
my
apartment on Brantingsgatan.

My life was not great, to put it mildly. I was single and broke and
hung over, my

place looked like hell. I had just spoken to Balder on the
telephone, and he’d been

going on like some boring old dad. There was a lot of: don't judge her by how she looks, appearances can be deceptive, blah blah and hey, he said that to *me*! I'm not exactly the ideal son-in-law myself.

I've never worn a jacket and tie in my entire life, and if anyone knows what people

look like in the hacker

community,

then

I

do.

Whatever, so I was sitting there waiting for this girl.

Thought that she would at least knock. But she just opened the door and walked in.”

“What did she look like?”

“Bloody awful ... but then, she was also sexy in a weird way. But dreadful!”

“Linus, I’m not asking you

to rate her looks. I just want to know what she was

wearing and if she maybe

mentioned what her name

was.”

“I have no idea who she

was,”

Brandell

said,

“although I did recognize her from somewhere – I had the

feeling that it was something bad. She was tattooed and pierced and all that crap and looked like a heavy rocker or goth or punk, plus she was as thin as hell.”

Hardly aware that he was

doing it, Blomkvist gestured to Amir to pull him another Guinness.

“What happened?” he said.

“Well, what can I say? I guess I thought that we didn’t

have to get going right away, so I sat down on my bed –

there wasn’t much else to sit on – and suggested that we might have a drink or

something first. But do you know what she did then? She

asked me to leave. She

ordered me out of my own home, as if that was the most natural thing in the world, and obviously I refused. I was like: ‘I do actually

live here.'

But she said, 'Piss off, get lost,' and I didn't see what choice I had so I was out for a while. When I got back she was lying there on my bed, smoking, how sick is that?

And reading a book about

string theory or something, and maybe I gave her some sort of dodgy look, what do I know. She just said that she wasn't planning on having

sex with me, not even a little.

'Not even a little,' she said, and I don't think she looked me in the eye even once. She

just announced that we'd had

a Trojan, a R.A.T., and that she recognized the pattern in the breach, the level of

originality

in

the

programming. 'You've been

blown,' she said. And then she walked out."

"Without

saying

goodbye?”

“Without a single damn word of goodbye.”

“Christ.”

“But to be honest I think she was just bullshitting. The guy at the N.D.R.E., who did

the same investigation a little while later, and who probably knew much more about these

kinds of attacks, was very clear that you couldn't draw any conclusions like that, and that

however

much

he

searched

through

our

computer he couldn't find

any old spyware. But still his guess was – Molde was his name,
by the way, Stefan

Molde – that we'd been
hacked.”

“This woman, did she ever
introduce herself in any
way?”

“I did actually press her, but all she would say, and pretty surly she
was too, was

that I could call her Pippi. It was obvious that that wasn't her real
name, but still ...”

“Still what?”

“I thought that it suited her somehow.”

“You know,” Blomkvist

said, “I was just about to head home again.”

“Yes, I noticed that.”

“But

now

everything’s

changed in a pretty major way. Didn’t you say that your

Professor Balder knew this woman?”

“Well, yes.”

“In that case I want to talk to him as soon as possible.”

“Because of the woman?”

“Something like that.”

“O.K., fine,” Brandell said thoughtfully. “But you won’t find any contact details for him. He’s become so bloody secretive, like I said. Do you have an iPhone?”

“I do.”

“In that case you can forget

it. Frans sees Apple as more or less in the pocket of the N.S.A. To talk to him you'll have to buy a Blackphone or at least borrow an Android and download a special

encryption program. But I'll see to it that he gets in touch with you, so you can arrange to meet in some secure

place.”

“Great, Linus. Thanks.”

CHAPTER 4

20.xi

Grane had just put on her coat to go home when Casales

called again, and at first she was

irritated,

not

only

because of the confusion last time. She wanted to get going before the storm got out of hand. The news on the radio had forecast winds of up to thirty metres per second and the temperature falling to

-10°C, and she was not

dressed for it.

“I’m sorry it took a while,”

Casales said. “We’ve had an insane morning. Total chaos.”

“Here too,” Grane said politely, but looking at her watch.

“But I do have something important to tell you, as I said, at least I think I do. It isn’t that easy to analyse. I just started checking out a group of Russians, did I mention that?” Casales said.

“No.”

“Well, there are probably Germans

and

Americans

involved as well and possibly one or more Swedes.”

“What sort of group are we

talking about?”

“Criminals,

sophisticated

criminals who don't rob
banks or sell drugs any more.
Instead they steal corporate secrets
and
confidential
business information.”
“Black hats.”
“They're not just hackers.
They also blackmail and

bribe people. Possibly they even carry out old-fashioned crimes, like murder. I don't have much on them yet, to be

honest, mostly codenames

and unconfirmed links, and then a couple of real names, some

young

computer

engineers in junior positions.

The group is active in

suspected

industrial

espionage and that's why the case has ended up on my
desk.

We're

afraid

that

cutting-edge

American

technology has fallen into Russian hands.”

“I understand.”

“But it isn’t easy to get at them.

They’re

good

at

encryption and, no matter

how hard I try, I haven’t been able to get any closer to whoever
leads them than to

catch that their boss goes by the name of Thanos.”

“Thanos?”

“Yes,

derived

from

Thanatos, the god of death in Greek mythology, the one

who’s the son of Nyx – night

– and twin brother to Hypnos

– sleep.”

“Real

cloak-and-dagger

stuff.”

“Actually,

it’s

pretty

childish.

Thanos

is

a

supervillain in
Marvel
Comics, you know that series
with heroes like the Hulk, Iron
Man
and
Captain
America. First of all it's not particularly
Russian,

but

more than that it's ... how shall I put it ... ?”

“Both

playful

and

arrogant?”

“Yes, like a bunch of

cocky college kids messing around, and that really annoys

me. In fact there's a whole lot that worries me about this story, and that's why I got so worked up when we learned through

our

signals

surveillance that someone in the

network

may

have

defected,

somebody

who

could maybe give us some

insight – if only we could get our hands on this guy before they do.
But now that we've looked more carefully at this,

we realize it wasn't at all what we thought.”

“Meaning what?”

“The guy who quit wasn't

some

criminal,

but

the

opposite, an honest guy who resigned from a company

where this organization has moles,

someone

who

presumably

happened

to

stumble

on

some

key

information ...”

“Keep going.”

“In our view this person is now seriously under threat.

He needs protection, but until recently we had no idea

where to look for him. We didn't even know which
company he'd worked at. But

now we think we've zeroed in," Casales said. "You see, in the last
few days one of these characters mentioned

something about this guy,

said that 'with him all the

bloody Ts went up in smoke'."

"The bloody Ts?"

"Yes, cryptic and strange, but it had the advantage of being
specific and highly

searchable. While 'bloody
Ts' didn't give us anything, Ts
generally,
words
beginning
with
T
in

conjunction with companies, high-tech firms of course, kept leading us to the same

place – to Nicolas Grant and his maxim: Tolerance, Talent and Teamwork.”

“We’re

talking

Solifon

here, right?” Grane said.

“We think so. At least it felt like everything had fallen into place, so we began to investigate who had left

Solifon

recently.

The

company always has such a high

staff

turnover,

it's

actually

part

of

their

philosophy – that talent should flow in and out. But then we started to think

specifically about those Ts.

Are you familiar with them?”

“Only what you’ve told

me.”

“They’re Grant’s recipe for

creativity. By tolerance he means that you need to be open to unconventional ideas and unconventional people.

Talent – it doesn't just

achieve results, it attracts other gifted people and helps create an environment that people want to be in. And all these talents have to form a team. As I'm sure you know,

Solifon's been a remarkable success

story,

producing

pioneering technology in a whole series of fields. But then this new genius popped up, a Swede, and with him

...”

“... all the bloody Ts went up in smoke.”

“Exactly.”

“And it was Frans Balder.”

“Exactly. I don’t think he’d

normally had any problem

with

tolerance,

or

with

teamwork for that matter. But from the beginning there was

apparently something toxic

about him. He refused to

share anything, and in no time at all he managed to

destroy the rapport among the elite

researchers

at

the

company, especially when he started accusing people of being thieves and copycats.

There was a scene with the owner too. But Grant has refused to tell us what it was about – just that it was something private. Soon after, Balder gave notice.”

“I know.”

“Most

people

were

probably relieved when he

took off. The air at work became easier to breathe, and people began to trust each other again, at least up to a point. But Grant wasn't

happy, and more importantly his lawyers weren't happy

either. Balder had taken with him whatever he had been

developing at Solifon, and there was a rumour – maybe

because no-one really knew what it was – that he was on to something sensational that could

revolutionize

the

quantum computer, which
Solifon was working on.”

“And from a purely legal
point of view, whatever he’d produced belonged to the
company and not to him
personally.”

“Correct. So even though
Balder had been going on

about theft, when all was said and done he himself was the thief. Any day now things are likely to blow up in court, as you know, unless Balder

manages to use whatever he has to frighten the lawyers.

That information is his life insurance, he says, and it may well be true. But in the worst-case scenario it could also be

...”

“... the death of him.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Casales said. “We’re picking

up

stronger

indications that something

serious is getting underway, and your boss tells me that you might be able to help us with the puzzle.”

Grane looked at the storm that was now raging outside, and longed desperately to go home and get away from all this. Yet she took off her coat

and sat down again, feeling deeply uneasy.

“How can I help?”

“What do you think he
found out?”

“Do I take that to mean
that you haven’t managed
either to bug him or hack him?”

“I’m not going to answer
that one, sweetheart. But
what do you think?”

Grane remembered how Frans Balder had stood in the doorway of her office not so long ago and muttered about dreaming of “a new kind of life” – whatever he may have

meant by that.

“Perhaps you know,” she

said, “that I met him before he joined Solifon, because he claimed that his research had been stolen from him. I didn’t take to him much. Then when

he came back there was talk in-house of getting him some

form of protection, so I met him a couple of times more.

His transformation over the last few weeks was actually incredible. Not only because he had shaved off his beard, tidied up his hair and lost some weight. He was also

mellower, even a little bit unsure of himself. I could tell that he was rattled, and at one

point he did say that he thought there were people

who wanted to harm him.”

“In what way?”

“Not actually physically,

he said. It was more his research and his reputation they were after. But I’m not so sure that, deep down, he believed it would

stop there, so I suggested that he get a guard dog. I thought a dog would be excellent company

for a man who lived out in the suburbs in far too big a house.

But he wouldn't hear of it. 'I can't have a dog now,' he said rather sharply."

"Why's

that,

do

you

think?"

“I really don’t know. But I

got the feeling that there was something weighing on him, and he didn’t protest too much when I arranged for a sophisticated alarm system in

his house. It’s just been installed.”

“By whom?”

“A company we often use,

Milton Security.”

“Good.

But

my

recommendation is to move

him to a safe house.”

“Is it that bad?”

“We think the risk is real.”

“O.K.,” Grane said. “If you

send

over

some

documentation I'll have a
word with my superior right away.”

“I'll see what I can do, but
I'm not sure what I can get my hands on. We've been
having ... some computer
issues.”

“Can an agency like yours really afford to have that sort of thing?”

“No, you're right. Let me get back to you, sweetheart,”
she said, and hung up. Grane

remained quite still and looked out at the storm
lashing against the window with increasing fury.

Then she picked up her

Blackphone and rang Balder.

She let it ring and ring. Not just to warn him and see to it that he
move to a safe place at once, but also because she suddenly
wanted to know

what he had meant when he said: "These past few days

I've been dreaming about a new kind of life."

No-one

would

have

believed that at that moment Balder was fully occupied
with his son.

Blomkvist remained sitting

for a while after Brandell had left, drinking his Guinness and
staring out at the storm.

Behind him, Arne and his

gang

were

laughing

at

something. But Blomkvist

was so engrossed in his

thoughts

that

he

heard

nothing, and hardly even

noticed that Amir had sat down next to him and was giving him the latest weather forecast.

The

temperature

was

already down to -10°C . The first snow of the year was expected to fall, and not in

any pleasant or picturesque way. The misery was going to

come blasting in sideways in the worst storm the country had seen for a long time.

“Could get hurricane-force winds,”

Amir

said,

and

Blomkvist, who still was not listening, just said, “That’s good.”

“Good?”

“Yes ... well ... better than
no weather at all.”

“I suppose. But are you alright? You look shaken up.
Wasn't it a useful meeting?”

“Sure, it was fine.”

“But what you got to hear rattled you, didn't it?”

“I'm not certain. Things
are just a mess right now. I'm thinking
of

quitting

Millennium.”

“I thought you basically
were that magazine.”

“I thought so too. But I guess there’s an end to
everything.”

“That’s probably true,”

Amir said. “My old man used
to say that there’s even an end to eternity.”

“What did he mean by
that?”

“I think he was talking
about love everlasting. It was shortly before he left my mother.”

Blomkvist chuckled. “I haven’t been so good at
everlasting love myself. On the other hand ...”

“Yes, Mikael?”

“There’s a woman I used to
know – she’s been out of my

life for some time now.”

“Tricky.”

“Well, yes, it is. But now I’ve had a sign of life from her, or at least I think I did,

and perhaps that’s what’s got me looking a bit funny.”

“Right.”

“I’d better get myself

home. What do I owe you?”

“We can settle up another time.”

“Great, take care, Amir,”

he said. He walked past the regulars, who threw a few random comments at him,

and stepped into the storm.

It

was

a

near-death

experience. Gusts of wind

blew straight through his

body, but in spite of them he stood still for a while, lost in old memories. He thought

about a dragon tattoo on a skinny pale back, a cold snap on Hedeby Island in the midst of a decades-old missing-person case and a dug-up

grave in Gosseberga that was

nearly the resting place of a

woman who refused to give up. Then he walked home

slowly. For some reason he had trouble getting the door open, had to jiggle the key around. He kicked off his shoes and sat at his

computer and searched for information on Frans Balder, Professor.

But he was alarmingly

unfocused and instead found himself wondering, as he had

so many times before: where

had she disappeared to? Apart from some news from her

one-time employer, Dragan

Armansky, he had not heard a

word about her. It was as if she had vanished off the face of the earth and, although they lived in more or less the same part of

town, he had never caught a glimpse of her.

Of course, the person who had turned up at Brandell's

apartment that day could have been someone else. It was possible, but not likely. Who other than Salander would

come stomping in like that? It must have been Salander, and

Pippi ... that was typical.

The name by her doorbell

on Fiskargatan was V. KULLA and he could well see why she did not use her real name.

It was all too searchable and associated with one of the

most high-profile trials the country

had

ever

seen.

Admittedly, it was not the first time that the woman had vanished in a puff of smoke.

But ever since that day when he had knocked on her door on Lundagatan and given her hell for having written a personal investigation report about him which was much

too thorough, they had never been apart for so long and it

felt a little strange, didn't it?

After all, Salander was his ...

well, what the hell was she, in point of fact?

Hardly his friend. One sees

one's friends. Friends don't disappear like that. Friends don't only get in touch by hacking into your computer.

Yet he still felt this bond with Salander and, above all, he worried about her. Her old guardian Holger Palmgren

used to say that Lisbeth Salander would always get

by. Despite her appalling

childhood, or maybe because of it, she was one hell of a survivor,

and

there

was

probably a lot of truth in that.

But one could never be sure, not with a woman of such a background, and with that

knack for making enemies.

Perhaps she really had lost it, as Armansky had hinted

when he and Blomkvist met over lunch at Gondolen about
six months ago. It was a spring day, a Saturday, and Armansky
had offered to buy
beer and snaps and all the rest of it. Even though they were
ostensibly meeting as two old friends, there was no doubt that
Armansky only wanted
to talk about Salander and, with the help of a few drinks,
indulge
in
a

spot

of

sentimentality.

Among

other

things,

Armansky told Blomkvist

that his company, Milton

Security, had supplied a

number of personal alarms to
a nursing home in Högdalen.

Good equipment, he said.

But not even the best

equipment in the world will help you if the electricity goes off and
nobody can be

bothered to fix it, and that is precisely

what

happened.

There was a power outage at the home late one evening, and in the course of that night one of the residents, a lady called Rut Åkerman, fell and broke her femur, and she lay there for hour after hour pressing the button on her alarm to no avail. By the morning she was in a critical condition and, since the

papers

were

just

then

focusing

heavily

on

negligence in care for the elderly, the whole thing

became a big deal.

Happily, the old lady

pulled through. But she also happened to be the mother of

a senior figure in the Swedish Democrats party. When it

emerged

on

the

party's

website, Unpixelated, that

Armansky was an Arab –

which incidentally he was not at all, although it was true that he was occasionally

called “the Arab” in jest –

there was an explosion in the posted comments. Hundreds

of anonymous writers said

that's what happens “when

you let coons supply your technology” and Armansky took it very badly, especially when the trolling affected his family. But then suddenly, as if by magic, all those posts were no longer anonymous.

You

could see the names and

addresses

of

those

responsible, their job titles and how old they were. It was beautifully neat – as if they had all filled in a form. You could say that the entire site had been unpixelated, and of course it became clear that the posts did not just come

from crackpots, but also from many established citizens,

even some of Armansky's

competitors in the security business, and for a long time the

hitherto-anonymous

perpetrators were completely powerless. They could not

understand

what

had

happened.

Eventually

someone managed to close

the site down. But nobody had any idea who lay behind

the attack – except for Dragan Armansky himself.

“It was classic Salander,”

he said. “You know, I hadn’t heard from her for ages and was

convinced

that

she

couldn't give a damn about me, or anybody else for that matter.

But

then

this

happened,

and

it

was

fantastic. She had stood up for me. I sent an effusive thanks by email, and to my

surprise an answer came back. Do you know what she wrote?”

“No.”

“Just one single sentence:

‘How the hell can you protect that creep Sandvall at the Östermalm clinic?’”

“And who’s Sandvall?”

“A plastic surgeon to

whom we gave personal

protection because he’d been threatened. He’d pawed a

young Estonian woman on whom he had performed

breast

surgery

and

she

happened to be the girlfriend of a known criminal.”

“Oops.”

“Precisely. Not such a

clever thing to do. I answered Salander to say that I didn’t think Sandvall was one of God’s little angels any more than she did. But I pointed out that we don’t have the

right to make that kind of judgement.

Even

male

chauvinist pigs are entitled to some degree of security.

Since Sandvall was under serious threat and asked for our help, we gave it to him – at double the usual rate.”

“But Salander didn’t buy your argument?”

“Well, she didn’t reply – at least not by email. But I suppose you could say she gave a different sort of answer.”

“What do you mean?”

“She marched up to our
guards at the clinic and
ordered them to keep calm. I think she even gave them my
regards. Then she walked
straight past all the patients and nurses and doctors, went into
Sandvall’s office and broke three of his fingers.

Then she made the most
terrifying
threats

against

him.”

“Jesus!”

“That’s putting it mildly.

Stark staring mad. I mean, to do something like that in front of so many witnesses, and in a doctor’s office to boot. And of course there was a huge fuss afterwards – a lot of brouhaha about lawsuits and prosecutions and the

whole damn thing. You can

just imagine: breaking the fingers of a surgeon who’s lined up to perform a string of lucrative nips and tucks ...

It's the kind of thing that gets top lawyers seeing dollar signs everywhere."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. It all came to

nothing, apparently because the surgeon himself didn't want to take things any

further. But still, Mikael, it

was insane. No person in their right mind steams into a top surgeon's office in broad daylight

and

breaks

his

fingers. Not even Salander.”

Blomkvist actually thought

that it sounded pretty logical, according to Salander logic, that is, a subject in which he was more or less expert. He did not doubt for one second that that doctor had done far worse than grope the wrong

girlfriend. But even so he could not help wondering if Salander hadn't screwed up in this case, if only on the score of risk analysis.

It occurred to him that she might have *wanted* to get into trouble again, maybe to put some spice back into her life.

But that was probably unfair.

He knew nothing of her

motives or her current life. As the

storm

rattled

the

windowpanes and he sat there in front of his computer

Googling Frans Balder, he
tried to see beauty in the fact that they had now bumped
into each other in this indirect way. It would seem that
Salander was the same as
ever and perhaps – who
knows? – she had given him a
story. Linus Brandell had
irritated him from the word go.
But

when

Salander

dropped into the story, he saw it all with new eyes. If she had taken the time to help Frans Balder then he could at least take a closer look at it, and with some luck find out a bit more about Salander at the same time.

Why had she got herself

involved in the first place?

She was not just some

itinerant I.T. consultant after all. Yes, she could fly into a

rage over life's injustices, but for a woman who had no qualms about hacking to get indignant about a computer breach, that was a little bit surprising.

Breaking

the

fingers of a plastic surgeon, fine! But hackers? That was very much like throwing

stones in glass houses.

There

must

be

some

backstory. Maybe she and

Balder knew each other. It

was not inconceivable and so he tried Googling their names together, but without getting any hits, at least none that had any relevance.

He

focused

on

Frans

Balder. The professor's name

generated two million hits but most of them were scientific articles and commentaries. It did not seem as if Balder gave interviews, and because of that, there was a sort of

mythological gloss over all of the details of his life – as if they had been romanticized by admiring students.

Apparently it had been

assumed that Balder was

more

or

less

mentally

disabled as a child until one day he walked into the

headmaster's office at his school on Ekerö island and pointed out
a mistake in the ninth-grade maths book to do

with

so-called

imaginary

numbers. The mistake was

corrected

in

subsequent

editions and the following spring Balder won a national mathematics competition. He was reported as being able to speak backwards and create his own long palindromes. In an early school essay which was later published on the net he took a critical view of H.G. Wells' novel *The War of*

the Worlds on the grounds that he could not understand how beings superior to us in every way could fail to grasp something

so basic as the differences
between
the
bacterial flora on Mars and on Earth.

After

graduating

from

secondary school he studied computer sciences at Imperial
College

in

London

and

defended

his

thesis

on

algorithms

in

neural

networks,

which

was

considered revolutionary. He became the youngest ever

professor

at

the

Royal

Institute of Technology in Stockholm and was elected to
the Royal Swedish Academy
of
Engineering
Sciences.

These days he was regarded as a world authority on the
hypothetical
concept
of

“technological
singularity”,
the state at which computer intelligence
will
have
overtaken our own.

In most photographs he
looked like a dishevelled troll with small eyes, his hair standing on
end. Yet he

married the glamorous actress Hanna Lind. The couple had a son who, according to

evening newspaper coverage, under

the

headline

HANNA'S

GREAT

SORROW, was mentally disabled, even though the boy did not – at least not in the picture accompanying the

article – look in the least bit impaired. The marriage fell apart and, amidst a heated custody battle in Nacka

district court, the *enfant terrible* of the theatre, Lasse Westman, stepped into the

fray to declare aggressively that Balder should not be

allowed to look after his son at all because he cared more about “the intelligence of computers

than

that

of

children”.

Blomkvist

concentrated his efforts on trying to understand Balder’s research,
and for a long time he

sat

engrossed

in

a

complicated

text

about

quantum

processors

in

computers.

Afterwards he went into Documents and opened a file he had created a year or so earlier. It was called LISBETH

STUFF.

He had no idea

whether she was still hacking into his computer, but he could not help hoping that she did and wondered if he

should not after all type out a little greeting. Long, personal letters were not her thing. He would do better to go for

something brisk and a little bit cryptic. He wrote:

<What should we make of Frans

Balder's

artificial

intelligence?>

CHAPTER 5

20.xi

The words blinked onto the computer screen:

<Mission accomplished!> Plague gave a hoarse,

almost deranged yell, and that may have been unwise. But even if the neighbours had happened to hear, they could not have dreamed what it was

about. Plague's home was not

an obvious setting for high-level international security coups.

It felt more like a place where a social welfare case

might hang out. Plague lived on

Högklintavägen

in

Sundbyberg,

a

markedly

unglamorous area with dull, four-storey,

faded

brick

houses, and the apartment

itself had nothing much going for it. It had a sour, stale smell, and his desk was

covered in all sorts of

rubbish,

McDonald's

containers and Coca-Cola

cans,

crumpled-up

pages

from notebooks, unwashed coffee cups and empty sweet packets.
Even though some

had actually made it into the wastepaper basket – which

had not been emptied for

weeks – you could hardly

take a step in the room

without getting crumbs or grit under your feet. But none of this
would have surprised

anyone who knew him.

Plague was not a man who normally

showered

or

changed his clothes much. He

spent his whole life in front of the computer, even when he was not working: a giant of a man and overweight,

bloated and unkempt, with an

attempt at an imperial beard that had long since turned into a shapeless thicket. His posture was dreadful and he had a habit of groaning when

he moved. But the man had other talents.

He was a wizard on the

computer, a hacker who flew unconstrained

through

cyberspace and was probably second only to one person in the field, a woman in this particular case. The mere

sight of his fingers dancing across the keyboard was a joy to behold. He was as light and nimble on the net as he was

heavy and clumsy in the other, more material world, and

as

a

neighbour

somewhere

upstairs,

presumably Herr Jansson,

now banged on the floor, he answered the message he had received:

<Wasp, you bloody genius.

They ought to put up a

statue to you!>

Then he leaned back with a

delighted smile and tried to run through in his mind the

sequence of events, savouring the triumph for a little while longer before going on to pump Wasp for every detail, and to ensure that she had covered her tracks. No-one must be able to trace them, no-one!

This was not the first time they had been messing with a

powerful organization. But

this was on a new level, and many in Hacker Republic, the

exclusive fellowship to which she belonged, had actually been against the idea, Wasp herself most of all. Wasp could take on just about any authority or person you could care to name, if it were necessary. But she did not like to pick a fight for its own sake.

She disliked that sort of childish hacker nonsense. She was not someone who hacked

into supercomputers merely to show off. Wasp wanted to have a clear objective, and she

always

damn

well

analyzed

the

potential

consequences. She weighed

long-term

risks

against

whatever need was being

satisfied in the short-term, and from that point of view it could not be said it made sense to hack into the N.S.A.

Still, she let herself be talked

into it. Nobody could quite understand why.

Maybe she was bored and

wanted to stir up a little chaos so as not to die of tedium. Or else, as some in the group claimed, she was already in conflict with the N.S.A. and therefore

the

breach

amounted to little more than her personal revenge. But

others

in

the

group

questioned even that and

maintained she was looking for information, that she had been

on

the

hunt

for

something ever since her

father,

Alexander

Zalachenko,

had

been

murdered

at

Sahlgrenska

hospital in Göteborg.

But nobody knew for sure.

Wasp had always had her

secrets and actually her

motives were unimportant, or

so they tried to persuade

themselves.

If

she

was

prepared to help then they should just accept gratefully and not worry about the fact that, to begin with, she had not shown much enthusiasm, or hardly any feelings at all in fact. At least she was no longer being awkward about it, and that seemed as much as anyone could hope for.

They knew better than

most that the N.S.A. had

outrageously overstepped its boundaries in recent years.

These days the organization did not confine itself to eavesdropping on terrorists and potential security risks, or even just foreign heads of state and other powerful

figures, but listened in on everything,

or

nearly

everything. Millions, billions, trillions of communications and activities on the net were

spied on and archived, and with each passing day the N.S.A. went further and

further and pried deeper and deeper into every private life, and

had

become

one

immeasurable, watchful, evil eye.

It was true that nobody in Hacker Republic could claim the moral high ground here.

Every single one of them had

made their way into parts of

the digital landscape where they had no business being.

Those were the rules of the game, so to speak. A hacker was someone who crossed the line, for better or for worse, someone who by virtue of their occupation broke rules and broadened the frontiers of their knowledge, without always being concerned about the distinction

between

private and public.

But they were not without ethics and above all they knew, also from their own experience,

how

power

corrupts, especially power

without control. None of

them liked the thought that the worst, most unscrupulous hacking was no longer carried out by solitary rebels or outlaws,

but

by

state

behemoths who wanted to

control

their

populations.

Plague and Trinity and Bob the Dog and Flipper and Zod and Cat
and the whole Hacker

Republic gang had therefore decided to strike back by hacking
the
N.S.A.
and
messing with them in one
way or another.

That was no simple task. It
was a little bit like stealing the gold from Fort Knox, and
like the arrogant idiots they were they did not content

themselves with breaking into the system. They also wanted superuser status, or “Root” in Linux language, and for that they needed to find unknown vulnerabilities in the system, for what was called a Zero-day attack – first on the N.S.A.’s server platform and then further into the organization’s intranet,

NSANet, from which the

authority's

signals

surveillance went out across the world.

They began as usual with a

little social engineering. They had to get hold of the names of systems administrators and infrastructure analysts who held the complex passwords for the intranet. It would not do any harm either if there was a chance that some

careless

oaf

was

being

negligent

about

security

routines. In fact through their own contacts they came up with four or five names,

among them a Richard Fuller.

Fuller
worked
in
the
N.I.S.I.R.T.,
the
N.S.A.
Information Systems Incident Response
Team,

which
supervised the intranet, and he was constantly on the
lookout
for
leaks
and
infiltrators. Fuller was a decent sort of fellow – a
Harvard
law

graduate,

Republican,

former

quarterback, a dream patriot if one were to believe his C.V. But through a former lover Bob the Dog managed to discover that he was also bipolar,

and

possibly

a

cocaine addict.

When he got excited he

would do all sorts of stupid things, such as opening files and documents without first

putting them in a so-called sandbox, a required security protocol. Furthermore he was

very handsome, though a

little smarmy, and someone, probably

Bob

the

Dog

himself, came up with the idea that Wasp should travel to

his

home

town

in

Baltimore, go to bed with him and catch him in a honey trap.

Wasp told them all to go to

hell.

She also rejected their next idea, that they would compile a

document

containing

information which looked

like dynamite, specifically about infiltrators and leaks at head office in Fort Meade.

This would then be infected with malware containing an advanced Trojan with a high level of originality which Plague and Wasp were to

develop. The plan was to put

out leads on the net which would lure Fuller to the file, and with a bit of luck get him so worked up that he would be careless with

security. Not a bad plan at all – it could take them into the N.S.A.'s computer system without an active breach that might be traceable.

Wasp said that she was not

going to sit around waiting for that blockhead Fuller to

put his foot in it. She did not want to have to rely on other people making mistakes and was being generally contrary and bloody-minded, so no-one was surprised when she suddenly wanted to take over

the whole operation herself.

Even though there was a

certain amount of protest, in the end they all gave in, but not without issuing a series of instructions.

Wasp

did

carefully write down the names and details of the

systems administrators which they had managed to obtain, and she did ask for help with the so-called fingerprinting: the mapping of the server platform

and

operating

system. But after that she closed the door on Hacker Republic and the world, and Plague had no reason to think that she paid any attention to

his advice, for example that she should not use her handle, her alias, and that she should not work from home but

rather from some remote

hotel under a false identity, in case

the

N.S.A.'s

bloodhounds

managed

to

track her down. Needless to say, she did everything her own way and all Plague could

do was sit at his desk in Sundbyberg and wait, his

nerves in tatters. Which is why he still had no idea how she had gone about it.

He knew one thing for

certain:

what

she

had

achieved was legendary, and while the storm howled

outside he pushed aside some

of the rubbish on his desk, leaned forward and typed on his computer:

<Tell me! How does it feel?

>

<Empty>, came

the

answer.

Empty.

That was how it felt.

Salander had hardly slept for a week and she had probably also had too little to drink and eat, and now her head ached and her eyes were bloodshot and her hands shook and what

she wanted above all was to sweep all of her equipment to

the floor. In one sense she was content, though hardly for the reason Plague or

anyone

else

in

Hacker

Republic

would

have

guessed. She was content

because she had been able to get some new information on

the criminal group she was mapping out; she had found evidence of a connection

which she had previously

only suspected. But she kept

that to herself, and she was surprised that the others could have imagined that she would

have hacked the system for the hell of it.

She was no hormone-

fuelled teenager, no idiot show-off looking for a kick.

She would only embark on

such a bold venture because she was after something very specific, although it was true that once upon a time hacking

had been more than just a tool for her. During the worst moments of her childhood it had

been

her

way

of

escaping, a way to make life feel a little less boxed in.

With the help of computers she could break through

barriers which had been put in her way and experience periods of freedom. There

was probably an element of

that in the current situation too.

First and foremost she was

on the hunt and had been ever since she woke up in the light of early dawn with her dream

of

that

fist

beating

rhythmically, relentlessly on a mattress on Lundagatan.

Her enemies were hiding

behind smokescreens and this

could be the reason why

Salander had been unusually

difficult and awkward of late.

It was as if a new darkness emanated from her. Apart

from a large, loudmouthed

boxing coach called Obinze and two or three lovers of both sexes,
she saw hardly anyone. More than ever she looked like trouble;
her hair was

straggly,

her

eyes

threatening, and even though she sometimes made an effort

she had not become any more fluent at small talk.

She spoke the truth or said

nothing at all, and as for her apartment

here

on

Fiskargatan ... that was a

story in itself. It was big enough for a family with

seven children, although in the years since she had

acquired the place nothing had been done to decorate it or make it homely. There

were only a few pieces of Ikea

furniture,

placed

seemingly at random, and she

did not even have a stereo system, perhaps because she did not understand music. She saw more melody in a

differential equation than in a piece by Beethoven. Yet she was as rich as Croesus. The money she had stolen from that

crook

Hans-Erik

Wennerström had grown to a

little more than five billion kronor, so she could afford whatever she wanted. But in some way – which was

typical of her – her fortune had not made any mark on her personality,

unless

perhaps it had made her yet more

fearless.

She

had

certainly

done

some

increasingly drastic things of late.

She may have crossed a line

by

wandering

into

N.S.A.'s intranet. But she had judged it necessary, and for several days and nights she had been totally absorbed.

Now it was over she peered out of tired, squinting eyes at her two work desks, set at right angles. Her equipment consisted of the regular

computer

and

the

test

machine she had bought, on

which she had installed a copy of N.S.A.'s server and operating system.

She had run her own

fuzzing

program,

which

searched for errors and tiny vulnerabilities in the platform against the test computer. She then followed that up with debugging

and

black-box

penetration

testing

and

various beta test attacks. The outcome of all that formed

the basis of her toolkit, including her R.A.T., so she could not afford to neglect a single

point.

She

was

scrutinizing the system from top to bottom and that was why she had installed a copy of the server here at home. If she had set to work on the real platform, the N.S.A.

technicians

would

have

noticed it immediately.

This way she was able to work on without distraction, day after day, and if she did happen to leave the computer

then it was only to doze off for a while on the sofa or to put a pizza in the microwave.

Apart from that she kept at it until her eyes hurt, especially with her Zero-day Exploit, the software which exploited the

unknown

security

vulnerabilities

and

which

would update her status once she had actually got in. It was completely

mind-boggling.

Salander

had

written

a

program which not only gave

her

ownership

over

the

system, but also the power to control remotely pretty much anything on an intranet of which she had only patchy knowledge. That was the

most extraordinary part.

She was not just going to break in. She was going

further, into NSANet, which was a self-contained universe barely connected

to

the

ordinary net. She might look like a teenager who had failed all of her subjects at school, but give her source codes in computer programs and a

logical context and her brain just went click, click. What she had created was nothing

less than wholly new and improved

malware,

an

advanced Trojan with a life of its own.

She found the pay-as-you-

go card she had bought from T-Mobile in Berlin and put it into her telephone. Then she used it to go onto the net.

Maybe she should have been far away in another part of the world, dressed up as her alter ego, Irene Nesser.

If the security people at the N.S.A. were diligent and on top of things, they just might be able to trace her to

Telenor's base station here in the block. They would not get all the way through, at least not with the technology now available, but it would still be close and that would be very bad news. Yet she reckoned the advantages of sitting here at home outweighed the risk,

and she did take all the security

precautions

she

could. Like so many other hackers, she used Tor, a

network by which her traffic bounced

about

among

thousands and thousands of users. But she also knew that not even Tor was watertight –

the N.S.A. used a program called EgotisticalGiraffe to crack the system – so she spent a long time further

improving her own personal security. Only then did she go on the attack.

She sliced into the platform

like a blade through paper, but she could not afford to become overconfident as a

result. Now, quickly, she had to

locate

the

systems

administrators whose names

she had been given and inject her Trojan into one of their files, thereby creating a

bridge between the server network and the intranet,

none of which was simple, not by any means. No

warning bells or anti-virus programs must be allowed to start ringing. In the end she used the identity of a man called Tom Breckinridge to penetrate NSANet and then

... every muscle in her body tensed. Before her eyes, her

overworked, sleepless eyes, the magic unfolded.

Her Trojan took her further

and further in, into this, the most secret of the secret, and she knew exactly where she was going. She was on her way to Active Directory – or its equivalent – to upgrade her status. She would go from unwelcome little visitor to superuser in this teeming

universe, and only once that

was done would she try to get some sort of overview of the system. It wasn't easy. It was more or less impossible, in fact, and she did not have much time either.

She worked fast to get a grip on the search system and to pick up all the passwords and

expressions

and

references, all the internal gibberish. She was on the point of giving up when

finally she found a document marked TOP SECRET, NOFORN –

no foreign distribution – not particularly remarkable in

itself. But together with a couple of communications

links

between

Zigmund

Eckerwald at Solifon and

cyber-agents

at

the

Department for the Protection of Strategic Technologies at the
N.S.A., it turned into dynamite. She smiled and

memorized every little detail.

Then she caught sight of yet another

document

that

seemed relevant. It was

encrypted and she saw no

alternative but to copy it, even if that would set alarm bells ringing at Fort Meade.

She swore ferociously.

The

situation

was

becoming critical. Besides, she had to get on with her official assignment, if official

was the right word. She had solemnly promised Plague

and the others at Hacker

Republic to pull down the N.S.A.'s trousers, so she tried to work out who she should be communicating with. Who

was to get her message?

She settled for Edwin

Needham, Ed the Ned. His

name invariably came up in connection with I.T. security, and as she quickly picked up

some information about him on the intranet, she felt a grudging respect. Needham

was a star. But she had

outwitted him and for a

moment she thought twice

about giving the game away.

Her attack would create an

uproar. But an uproar was exactly what she was looking

for, so she went ahead. She had no idea what time it was.

It could have been night or

day, autumn or spring, and only vaguely, deep in her consciousness, was she aware

that the storm over the city was building up, as if the weather was synchronized

with her coup. In distant Maryland, Needham began to write his email.

He didn't get far, because in the next second she took over his sentence and wrote:

<that you should stop with all the

illegal activity. Actually it's pretty straightforward. Those who spy on the people end up themselves being spied on by the people. There's a fundamental democratic logic to it>, and for a moment it felt as if those sentences hit the mark.

She savoured the hot sweet taste

of

revenge

and

afterwards she dragged Ed

the Ned along on a journey through the system. The two of them danced and tore past

a whole flickering world of things that were supposed to remain hidden at all costs.

It

was

a

thrilling

experience, no question, and yet ... when she disconnected

and all her log files were automatically deleted, then came the hangover. It was like the aftermath of an

orgasm

with

the

wrong

partner, and those sentences that had seemed so absolutely

right a few seconds ago began to sound increasingly childish and more and more like the usual

hacker

nonsense.

Suddenly she longed to drink

herself into oblivion. With tired, shuffling steps she went into the kitchen and fetched a bottle of Tullamore Dew and two or three beers to rinse her mouth with, and sat down at her computers and drank. Not

in celebration. There was no

sense of victory left in her body. Instead there was ...

well, what? Defiance perhaps.

She drank and drank while

the

storm

roared

and

congratulatory whoops came

streaming in from Hacker

Republic. But none of it

touched her now. She hardly had the strength to stay

upright and with a wide,

hasty movement she swept
her hand across the desktops
and
watched
with
indifference as bottles and ashtrays crashed to the floor.
Then she thought about
Mikael Blomkvist.
It must have been the

alcohol. Blomkvist had a way

of

popping

up

in

her

thoughts, as old flames do, when she was drunk, and

without quite realizing what she was doing she hacked

into his computer. She still

had a shortcut into his system

– it was not the N.S.A., after all – and at first she wondered what she was doing there.

Could she care less about him? He was history, just an attractive idiot she had once happened to fall in love with, and she was not going to make that mistake again.

She'd much rather get out of there and not look at another computer for weeks. Yet she

stayed on his server and in the next moment her face lit up. Kalle Bloody Blomkvist had created a file called LISBETH STUFF and in that document

there

was

a

question for her:

<What should we make of Frans

Balder's

artificial

intelligence?>

She gave a slight smile, in spite of it all, and that was partly

because

of

Frans

Balder. He was her kind of

computer nerd, passionate about

source

codes

and

quantum processors and the potential of logic. But mostly she was smiling at the fact that Blomkvist had stumbled into the very same situation she was in, and though she debated

for

some

time

whether to simply shut down and go to bed, she wrote back:

<Balder's intelligence isn't in the least bit artificial. How's your own these days?

And

what

happens,

Blomkvist, if we create a machine which is a little bit cleverer than we are?>

Then she went into one of her bedrooms and collapsed with her clothes on.

CHAPTER 6

20.xi

Despite his best intentions to be a full-time father, and in spite of the intense moment of hope and emotion on

Hornsgatan, Frans Balder had

sunk back into that deep

concentration which could be mistaken for anger. Now his hair was standing on end and

his upper lip was shiny with sweat. It was at least three days since he had shaved or taken a shower. He was even

grinding his teeth. For hours the world and the storm

outside had ceased to exist for him, and he even failed to notice what was going on at his feet. They were small, awkward movements, as if a cat or an animal had crept in under his legs; it

was a while before he realized that August was crawling around under

his desk. Balder gave him a dazed look, as if the stream of programming codes still lay like a film over his eyes.

“What are you after?”

August looked up at him

with a pleading, clear look in his eyes.

“What?”

Balder

said.

“What?” and then something happened.

The boy picked up a piece of paper covered in quantum algorithms which was lying on the floor and feverishly moved his hand back and

forth over it. For a moment

Balder thought the boy was about to have another attack.

But no, it was rather as if August were pretending to write. Balder felt his body go tense and again he was reminded

of

something

important and remote, the

same feeling as at the

crossing on Hornsgatan. But this time he understood what it was.

He thought back to his own childhood, when numbers and

equations had been more

important than life itself. His spirits rose and he burst out,

“You want to do sums, don’t you? Of course, you want to do sums!” and the next

moment he hurried off to

fetch some pens and ruled A4

paper which he put on the floor in front of August.

Then he wrote down the simplest series of numbers he could think of, Fibonacci's sequence, in which every

number is the sum of the preceding two, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, and left a space for the next number – 34. Then it occurred to him that this was likely too simple, so he also wrote down a geometric

sequence: 2, 6, 18, 54 ... in which

every

number

is

multiplied by three and the next number should therefore be 162. To solve a problem like that, he thought, a gifted child would not need a great deal of prior knowledge.

Balder

slipped

into

a

daydream that the boy was not disabled at all, rather an enhanced copy of himself; he, too, had been slow to speak and interact socially, but he had understood mathematical

relationships long before he uttered his first word.

He sat beside the boy for a

long time and waited. But nothing happened. August

just stared at the numbers with his glassy look. In the end Balder left him alone, went upstairs and drank some

fizzy water, and then settled down again at the kitchen table to continue to work. But now his concentration was

gone and he began absent-mindedly to flick through the latest issue of the *New Scientist*. After half an hour or so he went back downstairs to August, who was still

sitting on his heels in the same immobile posture in

which he had left him. Then Balder noticed something

intriguing.

A second later he had the sense of being confronted by

something

totally

inexplicable.

Hanna Balder was standing in

the kitchen on Torsgatan

smoking a filterless Prince.

She had on a blue dressing gown and worn grey slippers,

and although her hair was thick and beautiful and she was still attractive, she looked haggard. Her lip was swollen

and

the

heavy

make-up

around her eyes was not there purely for aesthetic reasons.

Hanna Balder had taken

another beating.

It would be wrong to say that she was used to it. No-one gets used to that sort of abuse. But it was part of her everyday existence and she could scarcely remember the happy person she once had been. Fear had become a

natural

element

of

her

personality and for some time now she had been smoking
sixty cigarettes a day and taking tranquillizers.

She had known for a while

that

Westman

regretted

having been so generous to Frans. In fact it had been a mystery

from

the

start.

Westman had been relying on

the money Balder sent them for August. For long periods

they had been living off it and often he would make Hanna write an email full of lies about unforeseen expenses

for some educational expert or remedial therapy, which obviously the funds had never gone anywhere near. That's what made it so odd. Why had he given up all of that and let Balder take the boy away?

Deep down Hanna knew the answer. It was hubris brought on by alcohol. It was the promise of a part in a new detective series on T.V.4

which

had

boosted

his

confidence still further. But most of all it was August.

Westman found the boy

creepy

and

weird,

even

though to Hanna that was

incomprehensible. How could

anyone detest August?

He sat on the floor with his puzzles and did not bother anyone. Yet he had that

strange look which was

turned inwards rather than outwards,

which

usually

made people smile and say that the boy must have a rich inner life, but which got under Westman's skin.

“Jesus,

Hanna!

He's

looking straight through me,”

he would burst out.

“But you say that he’s just an idiot.”

“He is an idiot, but there’s something funny about him
all the same. I think he hates me.”

That

was

nonsense,

nothing more. August did not

even look at Westman or at anyone else for that matter, and he surely did not have it in him to hate anybody. The world out there disturbed him

and he was happiest inside his own bubble. But Westman in his drunken ravings believed that the boy was plotting something, and that must

have been the reason he let August and the money slip out of their lives. Pathetic.

That at least was how Hanna had interpreted it. But now, as she stood there by the sink smoking her cigarette so

furiously and nervously that

she got tobacco on her tongue, she wondered if there had not been something in it after all. Maybe August *did* hate Westman. Maybe he *did* want to punish him for all the punches he had taken, and maybe ... Hanna closed her

eyes and bit her lip ... the boy hated her too.

She had started having

these feelings of self-loathing ever since, at night, she was

overcome

by

an

almost

unbearable sense of longing and wondered whether she

and Westman might not

actually

have

damaged

August.

It was not the fact that August had filled in the right answers to the numerical sequences.

That sort of thing did not particularly impress a man

like Balder. No, it was something he saw lying next to the numbers. At first sight it looked like a photograph or a painting, but it was in fact a drawing,

an

exact

representation of the traffic light on Hornsgatan which

they had passed the other evening. It was exquisitely captured, in the minutest

detail,

with

a

sort

of

mathematical precision.

There was a glow to it. No-one

had

taught

August

anything at all about three-dimensional drawing or how an artist works with shadow and light, yet he seemed to have a perfect mastery of the techniques. The red eye of the traffic light flashed towards them

and

Hornsgatan's

autumn

darkness

closed

around it, and in the middle of the street you could see the

man

whom

Balder

had

noticed

and

vaguely

recognized. The man's head was cut off above the
eyebrows.

He

looked

frightened

or

at

least

uncomfortable and troubled, as if August had disconcerted him,
and he was walking

unsteadily, though goodness knows how the boy had

managed to capture that.

“My God,” Balder said.

“Did you do this?”

August neither nodded nor

shook his head but looked over towards the window, and

Balder had the strangest

feeling that his life would never be the same again.

Hanna Balder needed to do some

shopping.

The

refrigerator was empty. Lasse

could come home at any moment and he would not be

happy if there was not even a beer for him. But the weather outside looked ghastly so she put it off, and instead she sat in the kitchen smoking, even though it was bad for her skin and bad in general.

She scrolled through her

contacts two, three times, in the hope that a new name would come up. But of course

there were only the same old people, and they were all tired of her. Against her better judgement she called Mia. Mia was her agent and once upon a time they had been

best

friends

and

dreamed of conquering the

world together. These days Hanna was Mia's guilty

conscience and she had lost count of all her excuses. "It's not easy for an actress to

grow older, blah, blah.” Why not just say it straight out?:

“You look worn out, Hanna.

The public doesn’t love you any more.”

But Mia did not answer

and that was probably just as well. The conversation would

not have done either of them any good. Hanna could not help looking into August’s room just to feel that stinging sense of loss which made her

realize that she had failed in her life’s most important

mission – motherhood. In

some perverse way she took comfort in her self-pity, and she
was
standing
there
wondering
whether
she
shouldn't go out and get some beer after all when the
telephone rang.

It was Frans. She made a face. All day she had been tempted – but did not dare –

to call him to say that she wanted August back, not just because she missed the boy, still less because she thought her son would be better off with her. It was simply in order to avoid a disaster.

Lasse wanted to get the

child support again. *God knows what would happen*, she thought, *if he were to turn up in Saltsjöbaden to claim his rights*. He might even

drag August out of the house, scare him out of his wits and beat Frans to a pulp. She would have to warn him. But

when she picked up and tried

to say that to Frans, it was impossible to get a word in edgeways. He just went on and on about some strange story which was apparently

“totally

fantastic

and

completely amazing” and all that sort of thing.

“I’m sorry, Frans, I don’t understand. What are you talking about?” she said.

“August is a savant. He’s a
genius.”

“Have you gone mad?”

“Quite the opposite, my
love, I’ve come to my senses

at last. You have to get over here, yes, really, right now! I think it’s
the only way. You won’t be able to understand otherwise. I’ll pay
for the

taxi. I promise, you’ll flip out.

He

must

have

a

photographic memory, you

see?

And

in

some

incomprehensible

way

he

must have picked up the

secrets

of

perspective

drawing all by himself. It's so beautiful, Hanna, so precise.

It shines with a light from another world.”

“What shines?”

“His traffic light. Weren’t you listening? The one we passed the other evening –

he’s been drawing a whole series of perfect pictures of it, actually more than perfect

...”

“More than ...”

“Well, how can I put it? He

hasn’t just copied it, Hanna, not just captured it exactly, he’s also added something, an artistic dimension. There’s

such a strange fervour in what he’s done, and paradoxically enough

also

something

mathematical, as if he even has some understanding of axonometry.”

“Axo ...?”

“Never mind! You have to

come here and see,” he said, and gradually she began to understand.

Out of the blue August had

started

to

draw

like

a

virtuoso, or so Frans claimed, and that would of course be fantastic if it were true. But the sad thing was that Hanna was still not happy, and at first she could not understand why. Then it dawned on her.

It

was

because

it

had

happened at Frans' house.

The fact was, the boy had been living with her and

Lasse

for

years

and

absolutely nothing like this

had happened. He had sat there with his puzzles and building blocks and not

uttered a word, just having those unpleasant fits when he screamed with that piercing voice and thrashed backwards

and forwards. Now, hey

presto, a few weeks with

Pappa and he was a genius.

It was too much. Not that she was not happy for

August. But still, it hurt, and

the worst thing was: she was not as surprised as she should have been. On the contrary, it felt as if she had almost seen it coming; not that the boy would

draw

accurate

reproductions of traffic lights, but that there was something more beneath the surface.

She had sensed it in his eyes, in that look which, when he was excited, seemed

to register every little detail

of his surroundings. She had sensed it in the way the boy listened to his teachers, and the nervous way he leafed through the maths books she had bought for him, and most

of all she had sensed it in his numbers. There was nothing so strange as those numbers.

Hour after hour he would

write

down

series

of

incomprehensibly large sums,

and Hanna really did try to

understand them, or at least to grasp the point of it all. But however hard she tried she had not been able to work it out, and now she supposed that

she

had

missed

something important. She had

been

too

unhappy

and

wrapped up in herself to

fathom what was going on in

her son's mind, wasn't that it?

"I don't know," she said.

"Don't know what," Frans said in irritation.

"I don't know if I can

come,” she said, and at the same time she heard a racket at the front door.

Lasse was coming in with

his old drinking buddy Roger

Winter, and that made her flinch in fear, mutter an apology to Frans and for the thousandth time dwell on the

fact that she was a bad mother.

Balder

stood

on

the

chequered

floor

in

the

bedroom, the telephone in his hand, and swore. He had had the floor laid because it appealed to his sense of

mathematical order, with the squares repeating themselves endlessly in the wardrobe

mirrors on either side of the bed. There were days when he saw the multiplication of the squares reflected there as a teeming riddle, something with a life of its own rising up out of the schematic in the same way that thoughts and dreams arise from neurons or

computer programs emerge

from binary codes. But just then he was lost in quite different thoughts.

“Dear boy. What has become of your mother?” he said aloud.

August, who was sitting on

the floor beside him eating a cheese and gherkin sandwich,

looked up with a concentrated expression, and Balder was seized
by
a
strange
premonition that he was
about to say something grown
up and wise. But that was obviously
idiotic.
August

remained as silent as ever and knew nothing about women

who were neglected and had faded away. The fact that the idea had even occurred to Balder was of course due to the drawings.

The drawings – by now

there had been three – seemed to him to be proof not only of artistic

and

mathematical

gifts, but also of some sort of wisdom. The works seemed

so mature and complex in their geometric precision that Balder could not reconcile them with August's mental

limitations. Or rather, he did not want to reconcile them, because he had long ago

worked out what this was

about.

As the father of an autistic son

Balder

had

long

suspected that many parents hoped the notion of a savant
would be their consolation prize to make up for a
diagnosis
of
cognitive
deficiencies. But the odds were against them.
According to a common
estimate, only one in ten children with autism has

some kind of savant gift, and for the most part these talents, though they often entail a fantastic

memory

and

observation of detail, are not

as startling as those depicted in films. There are, for

example, autistic people who can say on which day of the week a certain date falls, within a range of several hundred years – in extreme cases within a range of forty thousand years.

Others

possess

encyclopaedic

knowledge

within a narrow field, such as bus timetables or telephone

numbers. Some can calculate large sums in their heads, or remember what the weather

had been like every day of their lives, or are able to tell the time to the second without looking at a watch. There are all kinds of more or less remarkable talents and, from what Balder gathered, people with these skills are called talented savants and capable of

quite

outstanding

accomplishments given the fact that they are otherwise handicapped.

Another far less common

group is where Balder hoped that August belonged: the so-called prodigious savants,

individuals whose talents are sensational whichever way

one looks at them. Kim Peek,

for example, who was the

inspiration for “Rain Man”.

Kim was severely mentally disabled and could not even get dressed by himself. Yet he had memorized twelve thousand books and could give a lightning-quick answer to almost any factual question. He was known as Kimputer.

Or Stephen Wiltshire, an autistic English boy who was extremely withdrawn as a child and uttered his first word when he was six – it happened to be “paper”. By the age of seven Stephen was able to draw groups of buildings perfectly and in the minutest detail, having seen them for just one brief moment. He was flown above

London in a helicopter and when he landed he drew the entire city in a fantastic, dizzying panorama, and with a

wonderfully

individual

touch.

If Balder understood it all correctly, he and August must have looked at that traffic light in very different ways.

Not only because the boy was

plainly

so

much

more

focused, but also because

Balder's brain had instantly eliminated all non-essential elements

in

order

to

concentrate on the traffic light's key message: go or stop. In all probability his

perception was also clouded by his thinking about Farah Sharif, while for August the crossing must have appeared exactly as it was, in precise detail.

Afterwards he had taken

the image away with him like

a fine etching, and it was not until a few weeks later that he had felt the need to express it.

The strangest thing of all was, he had done more than simply

reproduce the traffic light and the man. He had charged

them with a disquieting light, and Balder could not rid

himself of the thought that August had wanted to say

something more to him than: Look what I can do! For the hundredth time he stared at the drawings and it was as if a needle had gone into his

heart.

It frightened him. He did not entirely understand it. But there was something about

that man. His eyes were

bright and hard. His jaw was tense and his lips strangely thin,

almost

non-existent,

although that could hardly be held against him. Still, the longer he stared at him, the more frightening he looked, and all of a sudden Balder was gripped by an icy fear.

“I love you, my boy,” he murmured, hardly aware of

what he was saying, and

possibly he repeated the

sentence

once

or

twice

because the words began to sound increasingly unfamiliar to his ears.

He realized with a new sort

of pain that he had never uttered them before, and once he had recovered from the first shock it occurred to him

that there was something contemptible in that. Did it take an exceptional talent to make him love his own child?

It would be only too typical, if so. All his life he had had an absolute obsession with achievement.

He had never bothered

with anything which was not innovative or highly skilled, and when he left Sweden for Silicon Valley he had hardly

given a thought to August.

Basically his son was no

more than an irritant in the scheme

of

brilliant

discoveries

which

Balder

himself was busy making.

But now, he promised

himself, things would be

different. He would set aside his research and everything that had tormented him these last few months, and devote

his whole attention to the boy.

He would become a new

person.

CHAPTER 7

20.xi

Something else had happened

at the magazine, something

bad. But Berger did not want to give any details over the telephone.

She

suggested

coming round to his place.

Blomkvist had tried to put her off:

“You’re going to freeze

that beautiful bum of yours!”

Berger

had

paid

no

attention and, but for the tone in her voice, he would have been happy that she was so stubborn. Ever since he left

the office he had been longing to speak to her, and maybe even pull her into the bedroom and tear all her

clothes off. But something told him this was not going to happen now.

She

had

sounded upset and mumbled,

“I’m sorry,” and this only made him more worried.

“I’ll get a taxi right away,”

she said.

It was a while before she appeared, and out of boredom

he went into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. He had certainly seen better days.

His hair was dishevelled and needed a cut and he had bags

under his eyes. That was

basically Elizabeth George's fault. He swore and left the bathroom

to

set

about

cleaning up.

That was one thing at least that Berger would not be able to complain about. However long they had known each

other,

and

however

interwoven their lives, he still suffered a complex when it came to tidiness. He was a labourer's son and a bachelor, she the upper-class married woman with the perfect home

in Saltsjöbaden. In any case it could do no harm for his

place

to

look

a

little

respectable. He filled the dishwasher, wiped the sink and put out the rubbish.

He even had time to

vacuum the living room,
water the flowers on the
windowsill and tidy up the bookshelf and magazine rack before
the doorbell rang.

There was both a ring and an
impatient knock. When he
opened up he was horrified.

Berger was frozen stiff.

She shook like a leaf, and not just because of the

weather. She was not even wearing a hat. The wind had ruined her neat hairstyle and there was something that

looked like a graze on her right cheek, which had not been there that morning.

“Ricky!” he said. “Are you

alright?”

“I’ve

frozen

off

that

beautiful

bum

of

mine.

“Couldn’t get a taxi.”

“What happened to your

face?”

“I slipped and fell. Three times, I think.”

He looked down at her

dark-red high-heeled Italian boots.

“You’ve got perfect snow

boots on too.”

“Yes. Ideal. Not to mention my decision to go without thermals

this

morning.

Brilliant!”

“Come on in and I’ll warm

you up.”

She fell into his arms and shook even more as he hugged her close.

“I’m sorry,” she said again.

“What for?”

“For

everything.

For

Serner. I’ve been a fool.”

“Don’t exaggerate now, Ricky.”

He brushed the snowflakes
from her hair and forehead and took a careful look at her cheek.

“No, no, I’ll tell you
everything,” she said.

“But first get your clothes off and climb into a hot bath.

Would you like a glass of red?”

She would, and she stayed in the bath for a long while with her
glass, which he

refilled two or three times. He sat on the lid of the toilet listening to
her story, and despite all the ominous news there was something

of a

reconciliation

about

their

conversation, as if they were steadily breaking through a wall they had lately been building up between them.

“I know you thought I was being a fool right from the start,” she said. “No, don’t argue, I know you too well.

But you have to understand that Christer, Malin and I could see no other solution.

We had recruited Emil and Sofie, and we were so proud of that. They were just about the hottest reporters around, weren't they?

It

was

incredibly prestigious for us.

It showed that *Millennium* was on the move and there was a great buzz, with really positive coverage in *Resumé* and *Dagens Media*. It was like the good old days, and personally I felt strongly about the fact that I had promised both Sofie and Emil

a

secure

future

at

the

magazine. ‘Our finances are stable,’ I said. ‘We have Harriet Vanger behind us.

We’re going to have the money for fantastic, in-depth reporting.’ You know, I really believed it too. But then ...”

“Then the sky fell in.”

“Exactly, and it wasn’t just

the newspaper crisis, or the collapse of the advertising market. There was also that whole situation at the Vanger Group. I'm not sure you

realize what a mess it was.

Sometimes I see it almost as a

political coup. All those reactionary old men in the family, and women too for that matter – well, you know them better than anyone. The old racists and regressives got together and stabbed Harriet in the back. I'll never forget that call from her. I've been rolled

over,

she

said.

Crushed. Of course it was her efforts

to

revive

and

modernize the group which

had annoyed them, and then her decision to appoint David Goldman to the board, the son

of

Rabbi

Viktor

Goldman. But we were also part of the picture, as you know; Andrei had just written his report on beggars in

Stockholm, which we all

thought was the best thing he'd ever done, and which was quoted everywhere, even

abroad. But which the Vanger people—”

“Thought

was

lefty

rubbish.”

“Worse than that, Mikael –

propaganda for ‘lazy buggers who can’t even be bothered to get themselves a job’.”

“Is that what they said?”

“Something along those

lines. My guess is that the story itself was irrelevant, it was just their excuse, a

pretext

for

further

undermining Harriet's role

within

the

group.

They

wanted to put a stop to

everything that Henrik and Harriet had stood for.”

“Idiots.”

“My God, yes, but that

didn't exactly help us. I remember those days. It was as if the rug had been pulled from under our feet, and I know, I know – I should have

involved you more. But I thought that we'd all benefit if we left you to concentrate on your stories.”

“And still I didn't deliver anything decent.”

“You tried, Mikael, you

really tried. But what I'm coming to is that it was then, when it seemed as if we'd hit rock bottom, that Levin

rang.”

“Someone had presumably tipped him off about what had happened.”

“Without a doubt, and I

don't even need to tell you that I was sceptical at first.

Serner felt like the trashiest sort of tabloid. But Levin gave it the works, with his usual torrent of words, and invited me down to his big new villa in Cannes.”

“What?”

“Yes, I’m sorry, I didn’t tell you that either. I suppose I felt ashamed. But I was going down to the film

festival in any case, to do a profile on the Iranian film director. You know, the one being persecuted because she made the documentary about nineteen-year-old Sara, who had been stoned, and I didn’t think it would do any harm if Serner helped us with the

travel costs. In any event, Levin and I sat up all night and talked and I remained sceptical. He was absurdly boastful and came on with all this sales talk. But eventually I began to listen to him, and do you know why?”

“He was a fantastic lay?”

“Ha,

no,

it

was

his

relationship to you.”

“Did he want to sleep with

me, then?”

“He

has

boundless

admiration for you.”

“Bullshit.”

“No, Mikael, that’s where

you’re wrong. He loves his power and his money and his

villa in Cannes. But more than that, it bugs him that he’s not as cool as you. If we’re talking cred, he’s poor and you’re stinking rich.

Deep down he wants to be like you, I felt that right

away, and, yes, I should have realized that that sort of envy can become dangerous. You

do know what the campaign against you is all about, don't you? Your uncompromising

attitude makes people feel pathetic. Your very existence reminds them just how much they've sold out, and the more you're acclaimed, the punier

they

themselves

appear. When it's like that,

the only way they can fight back is by dragging you

down. The bullshit gives them back a little bit of dignity – at least that’s what they imagine.”

“Thanks, Erika, but I really couldn’t care less about that campaign.”

“I know, at least I hope that’s right. But what I realized was that Levin really wanted to be in with us, and feel like one of us. He wanted some of our reputation to rub off on him and I thought that was a good incentive. If his ambition was to be cool like you, then it would be devastating for him to turn *Millennium* into a run-of-the-mill

commercial

Serner

product. If he became known as the man who destroyed one

of the most fabled magazines

in Sweden, any cred he might

still have would be scuppered for good. That's why I really
believed him when he said that both he and the group needed

a

prestigious

magazine, and that he only wanted to help us produce the kind

of

journalism

we

believed in. Admittedly he did want to be involved in the magazine, but I put that down to vanity, that he wanted to be able to show off and say to

his yuppie friends that he was our spin doctor or something.

I never thought he would dare to

have

a

go

at

the

magazine's soul.”

“And yet that's precisely

what he's doing now.”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“And where does that leave

your

fancy

psychological

theory?”

“I

underestimated

the

power of opportunism. As

you saw, Levin and Serner’s behaviour was exemplary

before this campaign against you got going, but since then

...”

“He’s

been

taking

advantage of it.”

“No, no, somebody else

has. Somebody who wanted

to get at him. I realized only later that Levin didn't have an easy time persuading the

others to support him in

buying

a

stake

in

the

magazine. As you might

imagine, not everybody at

Serner

suffers

from

a

journalistic

inferiority

complex. Most of them are just ordinary businessmen;

they despise all talk of

standing up for things that matter. They were irritated by what

they

described

as

Levin's 'fake idealism', and in the campaign against you

they saw an opportunity to put the squeeze on him."

"Dear, oh dear."

"You have no idea. At first

it looked O.K. We were to adapt

somewhat

to

the

market, and, as you know, I thought some of that sounded

pretty good. I have, after all, spent a fair amount of time wondering how we could

reach a younger readership. I really thought that Levin and

I were having a productive dialogue so I didn't worry too much about his presentation today.”

“I noticed that.”

“But that was before all
hell broke loose.”

“What are you talking
about?”

“The uproar when you
sabotaged his presentation.”

“I
didn't
sabotage

anything, Erika. I just left.”

Berger lay in the bath, took a sip of her wine and then she smiled a wistful smile.

“When will you learn that you’re Mikael Blomkvist?”

she said.

“I thought I was beginning

to get the hang of that.”

“Apparently not, because

otherwise you’d have realized that when Mikael Blomkvist walks out in the middle of a presentation about his own

magazine it's a big deal, whether Mikael Blomkvist
intends it to be or not.”

“In that case I apologize for my sabotage.”

“I'm not blaming you, not any more. Now I'm the one saying sorry,
as you can see.

I'm the one who's put us in this position. It probably would have
gone pear-shaped

anyway,

whether

you'd

walked out or not. They were
just waiting for an excuse to take a swing at us.”

“What actually happened?”

“After you disappeared we

all felt deflated, and Levin, whose self-esteem had taken yet
another knock, no longer gave a damn about his

presentation.

‘There’s

no

point,' he said. He rang his boss to report back, and he probably laid it on a bit thick.

I suspect that the envy on

which I had been pinning my hopes had changed into

something petty and spiteful.

He was back again after an hour or so and said that the group was prepared to give *Millennium* its full backing and use all its channels to market the magazine."

"You didn't like the sound of that."

"No, and I knew before

he'd even said one word

about it. You could tell by the look on his face. It radiated a mixture of fear and triumph and at first he couldn't find the right words. He was

mostly waffling and said that the group wanted to have

more

insight

into

the

business, plus content aimed at a younger readership, plus more celebrity news. But then

...”

Berger shut her eyes, drew her hand through her wet hair, then knocked back the last of her wine.

“Yes?”

“He said that he wanted you off the editorial team.”

“He *what?*”

“Of course neither he nor the group could say it straight out, still less could they afford to get headlines like

‘Serner sacks Blomkvist’, so

Ove put it neatly by saying that he wanted you to have a freer rein and be allowed to concentrate on what you’re best at: writing reportage. He suggested

a

strategic

relocation to London and a generous

stringer

arrangement.”

“London?”

“He said that Sweden’s too

small for a guy of your

calibre, but you get what this is about.”

“They think they can’t

push through their changes if I stay on the editorial team?”

“Something like that. Still, I don’t think any of them was surprised

when

Christer,

Malin and I just said no, that it wasn't even negotiable. Not to mention

Andrei's

reaction."

"What did he do?"

"I'm almost embarrassed to tell you. Andrei stood up and said that it was the most shameful thing he'd heard in his whole life. That you were one of the best things we had in this country, a source of pride for democracy and

journalism, and that the
whole Serner Group should
hang their heads in shame. He said that you were a great man.”

“He
does
tend
to
exaggerate.”

“But he’s a good kid.”

“He really is. What did the Serner people do then?”

“Levin was prepared for it, of course. ‘You’re always welcome to buy us out,’ he said. ‘It’s just—”

“That the price has gone up,” Blomkvist completed the sentence.

“Exactly. He claimed that whichever basis you use for valuing the business would show that any price for

Serner’s interest should be at least double what it was when the group went in, given the additional value and goodwill they’ve created.”

“Goodwill! Have they gone mad?”

“Not at all, apparently, but they’re bright, and they want to mess us about. And I wonder if they’re not trying to kill two birds with one stone: pull off a good deal and get rid of a competitor by breaking us financially, all in one go.”

“What the hell should we
do?”

“What
we’re
best
at,

Mikael: slug it out. I’ll take some of my own money and we’ll buy
them out and fight

to

make

this

northern

Europe's best magazine."

"Sure, Erika, but then

what? We'll end up with a lousy

financial

situation

which even you won't be able

to do anything about.”

“I know, but it’ll be O.K.

We’ve come through more
difficult situations than this.

You and I can waive our
salaries for a while. We can manage, can’t we?”

“Everything has to end some time, Erika.”

“Don’t say that! Ever!”

“Not even if it’s true?”

“Especially not then.”

“Right.”

“Don’t you have anything
in the pipeline?” she said.

“Something, anything that
will stun Sweden’s media?”

Blomkvist hid his face in his hands and for some reason he
thought of Pernilla, his

daughter. She had said that unlike him she was going to write “for
real”, whatever it was that was not “real” about his writing.

“I don’t think so,” he said.

Berger smacked her hand

hard on the bath water so that it splashed out onto his socks.

“Jesus, you must have

something. There’s no-one in this country who gets as

many tip-offs as you do.”

“Most of it’s junk,” he said. “But maybe ... I was just

in

the

process

of

checking something.”

Berger sat up in the tub.

“What?”

“No, it’s nothing,” he

backtracked. “It’s just wishful thinking.”

“In a situation like this we have to think wishfully.”

“Yes, but it’s just a load of smoke and nothing you can

prove.”

“Yet there’s something

inside you that believes in it, isn’t there?”

“Maybe, but that’s because

of one little detail which doesn’t have anything to do with the story itself.”

“What?”

“That my old comrade-in-

arms has also been at the story.”

“The one with a capital S?”

“The very one.”

“Well, that does sound

promising,” Berger said, and stepped out of the bath, naked and beautiful.

CHAPTER 8

20.xi, Evening

August was kneeling on the checked floor in the bedroom,
looking

at

a

still-life

arrangement with a lit candle on a blue plate, two green apples and an orange which his father had set out for him.

But nothing was happening.

August stared emptily at the storm outside and Balder

wondered: *Does it make sense to present the boy with a subject?*

His son only had to glance

at something for it to be

embedded in his mind, so why should his father of all people choose what he was supposed to draw? August

must have thousands of

images of his own in his head. Maybe a plate and

some pieces of fruit were as wrong as could be. Once

again Balder asked himself: *Was the boy trying to convey something in particular with his traffic light?* The drawing

was

no

casual

little

observation. On the contrary, the stop light shone like a baleful
glowering eye, and maybe – what did Balder

know? – August had felt

threatened by the man on that pedestrian crossing.

Balder looked at his son for

the umpteenth time that day.

It was shameful, wasn't it?

He used to think that August was

simply

weird

and

unfathomable.

Now

he

wondered if he and his son were not in actual fact alike.

When Balder was young, the doctors did not go in so much for diagnoses. In those days, there was a far greater

tendency to dismiss people as being odd. He himself had definitely been different from other children, much too

serious – his facial expression never changed – and no-one

in the school playground thought he was much fun.

Nor did he find the other children

particularly

entertaining

either

–

he

sought refuge in numbers and

equations and avoided talking more than he was required to.

He would probably not

have been considered autistic in the same sense as August.

But nowadays they probably would

have

stuck

an

Asperger's label on him. He and Hanna had believed that the early diagnosis of August would help them, yet so little had been done, and it was only now, now that his son was

eight,

that

Balder

discovered the boy had a

special

mathematical

and

spatial talent. How come

Hanna and Westman had not noticed?

Even if Westman was a bastard,

Hanna

was

fundamentally a sensitive and good person. Balder would

never

forget

their

first

meeting. It was an evening function of the I.V.A., the Royal Swedish Academy of

Engineering

Sciences,

at

Stockholm's Rådhuset, where

he was being given some

prize that he cared nothing about. He had spent a boring evening longing to get home to his computer when a beautiful woman whom he vaguely recognized

—

Balder's knowledge of the world of celebrity was limited

– came up to him and started to talk. Balder still thought of himself as the nerd from

Tappström school who got

nothing but contemptuous

looks from the girls. He could not understand what a woman

like Hanna saw in him. At the time – as he was soon to find out – she was at the height of her career. But she seduced him and made love to him that night like no woman had

done before. Then followed maybe the happiest time in his life and yet ... the binary codes won out over love.

He

worked

until

the

marriage fell apart. Lasse Westman arrived on the scene

and Hanna went downhill and probably August did as well, which should of course have made Balder wild with fury.

But he knew that he too was to blame. He had bought his freedom and not bothered

about his son and perhaps what was said during the

custody hearing was true, that he had chosen the dream of artificial life over that of his own

child.

What

a

monumental idiot he had been.

He got out his laptop and went on Google to learn more

about savant skills. He had already ordered a number of books, and in his usual way meant

to

teach

himself

everything there was to know.

No damn psychologist or

educationalist would be able to catch him out and tell him what August needed at this

point. He would know that better than any of them and so he continued searching

until his attention was caught by the story of an autistic girl called Nadia.

What happened to her was

described in Lorna Selfe's book *Nadia: A Case of Extraordinary*

Drawing

Ability in an Autistic Child and in Oliver Sacks' *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a*

Hat.

Balder

read

in

fascination. It was a gripping story and in many ways there were parallels. Like August, Nadia had seemed perfectly healthy when she was born, and only gradually did her parents realize that something was amiss.

The girl did not start speaking. She did not look people in the eye. She disliked physical contact and did not respond to her mother's smiles or attempts at communication. She was for the most part quiet and withdrawn and compulsively

tore paper into narrow strips.

By the time she was six she had still not spoken a word.

Yet she could draw like

Leonardo da Vinci. Already at the age of three, and out of the blue, she had begun to draw horses. Unlike other

children she did not start with the entire animal, but instead with some little detail – a hoof, a rider's boot, a tail –

and the strangest thing of all was that she drew fast. In a terrific hurry she put together the parts, one here, one there, until she had a perfect whole, a horse which galloped or walked. From his own efforts

when he was a teenager

Balder

knew

how

exceptionally difficult it is to draw an animal in motion.

However hard you try, the result is unnatural or stiff. It takes a master to tease out the lightness in the movements.

Nadia was a master already at the age of three.

Her

horses

were

like

perfect stills, drawn with a light touch, and obviously not the result of any long

training. Her virtuosity burst

out like a breaking dam, and that

fascinated

her

contemporaries. How was it possible for her to leapfrog centuries of development in the history of art with just a few quick hand movements?

The Australian specialists

Allan

Snyder

and

John

Mitchell studied the drawings and in 1999 presented a theory, which has gradually won general acceptance, to

the effect that we all have an inherited capacity to reach that level of virtuosity, but that in most of us it is blocked.

If we see a football, for example,

we

do

not

immediately understand that it is a three-dimensional

object. Instead, the brain processes a series of details at lightning speed: the way in which shadows fall and the

differences in depth and nuance, from which it then draws certain conclusions

about shape. We are not

conscious of this. But it requires an examination of the separate parts before we can register something as

simple as the fact that what we see is a ball and not a circle.

It is the brain which then produces the final form and,

when it does, we no longer see all the detail we first registered. We cannot see the trees for the wood, so to speak.

But

what

struck

Mitchell and Snyder was that, if only we could reproduce the original image in our minds, we would be able to see the world in an entirely new way, and perhaps even recreate it, as Nadia had done

without

any

training

whatsoever.

Nadia saw the myriad

details before they had been processed, which is why she began each time with an

individual part, such as a hoof or a nose, because the totality as we perceive it did not yet exist in her mind. Balder found the idea appealing,

even if he saw a number of problems with the theory, or

at least had a number of questions.

In many ways this was the sort of original thinking he always looked for in his

research: an approach which took nothing for granted but looked beyond the obvious, down to the small details. He grew more obsessed with the subject and read on with

increasing fascination until, quite suddenly, he shuddered

and even cried out loud, staring at his son with a stab of anxiety. It had nothing to do with the research findings, rather with the description of Nadia's first year at school.

Nadia had been put in a

school for autistic children, where the teaching was

focused on getting her to talk for the first time. The girl made some progress – the

words came, one by one. But

there was a high price to pay.

As she started to talk, her brilliance

with

crayons

disappeared and, according to the author Lorna Selfe, it was likely that one language was being replaced by another.

From having been an artistic genius, Nadia became a

severely handicapped autistic girl who was able to speak a little but who had entirely lost the gift that had astounded the

world. Was it worth it, just to be able to say a few words?

No, Balder wanted to shout

out, possibly because he had always been prepared to do whatever it took to become a genius in his field. Anything but the ordinary! That had been his guiding principle all his life, and yet ... he was clever enough to understand that his own elitist principles were not necessarily a good

pointer to the right way forward now. Maybe a few

fabulous

drawings

were

nothing as compared to being

able to ask for a glass of milk, or exchange a few words with

a friend, or a father. What did he know?

Yet he refused to be faced with such a choice. He could not bear to give up the most wonderful thing that had

happened in August's life. No

... that was simply not an option. No parent should have to decide. After all, no-one could anticipate what was

best for the child.

The more he thought about

it, the more unreasonable it seemed, and it occurred to him that he did not believe it, or perhaps that he simply did not *want* to believe it. Nadia's was after all only one case.

He had to find out more.

But just then his mobile rang.

It had been ringing a lot over the last few hours. One call had been from a withheld

number and another from

Linus, his former assistant.

He had less and less time for Linus; he was not even sure he trusted him – certainly he did not feel like talking to him now.

Yet he answered, maybe out of sheer nervousness. It was Gabriella Grane, the

lovely analyst at the Security Police, and that put a little smile on his face. After Farah Sharif, Gabriella came a close second. She had sparkingly beautiful eyes and she was sharp-witted.

He

had

a

weakness for smart women.

“Gabriella,” he said, “I’d love to talk, but I don’t have

the time. I'm right in the middle of something.”

“You’ve definitely got time

for what I have to tell you,”

she said with uncharacteristic severity. “You’re in danger.”

“Oh, nonsense, Gabriella! I

told you, they may try to sue the shirt off my back – but that’s all.”

“Frans, I’m sorry, but some

new information has come

through,

and

from

an

extremely

well-informed

source at that. There does appear to be a genuine risk.”

“What do you mean?” he

said, distracted. With the telephone clamped between

his shoulder and ear, he was skimming another article on Nadia's lost gift.

“I'm finding it hard to assess the information, I admit that, but it's worrying me, Frans. It does have to be taken seriously.”

“In that case, yes. I do promise I'll be extra careful.

I'll stay indoors as usual. But I'm a bit busy just now, as I was saying. Besides, I'm all but convinced that you're

wrong. At Solifon—”

“Sure, sure, I could be wrong,” she cut in. “That’s possible. But what if I’m right, what if there’s even a tiny, tiny risk that I am?”

“Well—”

“Frans, listen to me. I think you’re right. Nobody at Solifon wants to do you

physical harm. It’s a civilized company, after all. But it seems as if someone or even more than one person in the company is in touch with a criminal

organization

operating out of Russia and

Sweden. That's where the threat is coming from.”

Balder took his eyes off the

computer screen for the first time. He knew that Zigmund Eckerwald at Solifon was

cooperating with a group of criminals.

He

had

even

picked up some codenames

for the leader of that group, but he could not understand why they would go after him.

Or could he?

“A criminal organization?”

he muttered.

“Yes,” Grane said. “And

isn’t it logical, in a way?

That’s more or less what

you've been saying, isn't it?

That once you've started

stealing someone else's ideas, and made money from them, then you've already crossed the line. It's downhill from there on."

"I think what I actually said was that all you needed was a gang of lawyers. With a gang of sharp lawyers you can safely steal whatever you like. Lawyers are the hit men of our times."

"O.K., maybe so. But listen

to me: I haven't yet got approval for your personal protection, so I want to move you to a secret location. I'm coming to collect you."

"What are you saying?"

“I think we have to act
immediately.”

“Not a chance. I and ...”

He hesitated.

“Do you have someone
else there?”

“No, no, but I can’t go
anywhere right now.”

“Aren’t you listening to

what I'm saying?"

"I hear you loud and clear.

But with all due respect it

sounds to me as if it's mostly speculation."

"Speculation is an essential

tool in assessing risk, Frans.

And the person who got in touch with me ... I suppose I

shouldn't really be saying this

... is an agent from the

N.S.A. who has this particular organization
under
surveillance.”

“The N.S.A.!” he snorted.

“I know you’re sceptical of them.”

“Sceptical doesn’t even
begin to describe it.”

“O.K., O.K. But this time they’re on your side, at least this agent
is. She’s a good person. By eavesdropping

she's picked up something

which could very well be a plan to eliminate you.”

“Me?”

“There's a lot to suggest that.”

“‘Could very well’ and

‘suggest’ ... it all sounds very vague.”

August reached for his

pencils,

and

Balder

concentrated on that for a moment.

“I’m staying where I am,”

he said.

“You’ve got to be joking.”

“No, I’m not. I’d be happy to move if you get more information, but not right now. Besides, the alarm Milton installed is excellent.

I’ve got cameras and sensors everywhere. And you do

know that I'm a stubborn

bastard, don't you."

"Do you have a weapon of
any kind?"

"What's got into you,

Gabriella? A weapon! The

most dangerous thing I own is my new cheese slicer."

"You know ..." she said,

letting the words hang.

“Yes?”

“I’m going to arrange

protection for you, whether you want it or not. I doubt you’ll even notice it. But since you’re going to be so damned obstinate, I have another piece of advice for you.”

“Tell me.”

“Go public. Tell the media what you know – then, if you’re lucky, there’ll be no point in someone getting rid of you.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Balder had detected a note of distraction in Grane’s

voice.

“O.K.?” he said.

“Wait a moment,” she said.

“I’ve got someone else on the
line. I have to ...”

She was gone, and Balder, who should have had much
else to mull over, found

himself thinking of only one thing: will August lose his ability to
draw if I teach him to talk?

“Are you still there?”

Grane asked after a short while.

“Of course.”

“I’m afraid I have to go.

But I promise to see to it that you

get

some

sort

of

protection

as

rapidly

as

possible. I'll be in touch.

Take care!"

He hung up with a sigh and

thought again of Hanna, and of August and the checked floor

reflected

in

the

wardrobe doors, and of all kinds of things which seemed

irrelevant just then. Almost

absent-mindedly he said to himself, "They're after me."

He could see that it was not

unreasonable, even though he

had always refused to believe that it would actually come to violence. But what, in fact, did

he

know?

Nothing.

Besides, he could not be

bothered to address it now.

He continued his search for information on Nadia, and

what implications this might

have for his son, but that was insane. He was burying his head in the sand. Despite Grane's warning he kept

surfing and soon came upon the name of a professor of
neurology, an expert on

savant

syndrome

called

Charles Edelman. Instead of reading on as he normally would

—

Balder

always

preferred the written to the spoken word – he called the switchboard at the Karolinska Institute.

Then it struck him how late

it was. This Edelman was

unlikely to be at work still, and his home number was not

on the website. But wait a moment ... he was also the head of Ekliden, an institution for autistic children with special abilities. Balder tried calling there. The telephone rang a number of times before

a woman answered and introduced herself as Nurse Lindros.

“I’m sorry to disturb you so late in the evening,”

Balder said. “I’m looking for Professor Edelman. Might he possibly still be there?”

“Yes, in fact, he is. No-one

is setting off for home in this dreadful weather. Who may I

say is calling?”

“Frans Balder,” he said, and in case it might help he added:

“Professor

Frans

Balder.”

“Just a moment,” Nurse

Lindros said, “I’ll see if he’s available.”

Balder stared down at

August, who was once again gripping his pencil hesitantly, and

that

worried

him

somehow, as if it were an ominous sign. “A criminal

organization,” he muttered again.

“Charles

Edelman,”

a

voice said. “Am I really

talking to Professor Balder?”

“The very same. I have a little—”

“You can’t know what an

honour this is,” Edelman said.

“I’m just back from a

conference at Stanford where we actually discussed your work on neural networks; in

fact we were even asking ourselves if we neurologists don’t have a great deal to learn about the brain through the back door, as it were, through A.I. research. We

were wondering—”

“I’m

flattered,”

Balder

interrupted. “But right now I have a quick question for you.”

“Oh, really? Is it something

to do with your research?”

“Not at all. I have an autistic son. He’s eight years old and hasn’t yet said a single word, but the other day we passed a traffic light on Hornsgatan

and

afterwards...”

“Yes?”

“He just sat down and drew

it

at

lightning

speed,

completely perfectly. It was astonishing!”

“And you want me to come and take a look at what he’s done?”

“I’d like that. But that’s not why I called. The fact is that I’m worried. I’ve read that perhaps drawing is the way in which he interacts with the world around him, and that he might lose this ability if he learns to talk.”

“I can tell that you’ve been
reading about Nadia.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because

she’s

always

mentioned in this context. But

... may I call you Frans?”

“Of course.”

“Excellent, Frans, and I’m so glad you called. I can tell you straight away that you have nothing to worry about.

On the contrary – Nadia is the exception that proves the rule, no more than that. All

research shows that speech

development

actually

enhances savant abilities. It can happen, of course, that children lose those skills, but that is mostly due to other factors. They get bored, or there’s a significant event in their lives. You probably read that Nadia lost her mother.”

“I did.”

“Maybe

that

was

the

reason, even though neither I nor anyone else can know for

sure. But there’s virtually no other documented case of a similar evolution, and I’m not just saying this off the top of my head, or because it

happens to be my own

hypothesis. There is broad consensus today to the effect that savants have everything to gain from developing their intellectual

skills

on

all

levels.”

“And you’re sure of that?”

“Yes, definitely.”

“He’s

also

good

at

numbers.”

“Really?” Edelman said

thoughtfully.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because it is extremely

rare in a savant for artistic ability to be combined with mathematical talent. These

two different skills have

nothing in common, and

sometimes they seem even to block each other.”

“But that’s how it is with my son. There’s a kind of geometric precision about his drawings, as if he had worked out the exact proportions.”

“How fascinating. When

can I see him?”

“I don’t really know. For the time being I only wanted some advice.”

“In that case my advice is clear: make an effort with the boy. Stimulate him. Let him develop his skills in every way.”

“I ...” Balder felt a strange

pressure in his chest and found it hard to get the words out. “I want to thank you,” he said. “Really thank you. Now

I have to ...”

“It’s been such an honour to talk to you; it would be wonderful to be able to meet you and your son. I’ve

developed

quite

a

sophisticated test for savants, if I may boast a little. I could help you get to know the boy

better.”

“Yes, of course, that would

be terrific. But now I must

...” Balder mumbled, without

knowing what he wanted to say. “Goodbye, and thank
you.”

“Oh, my pleasure, really. I hope to hear from you again soon.”

Balder hung up and sat still

for a moment, his hands

crossed over his chest, and looked at his son. August was still
gazing at the burning candle, the yellow pencil in his hand. A
shudder went

across Balder’s shoulders,

and the tears came. Whatever

else you might say about

Professor Balder, he was not one to cry easily.

In fact he could not

remember when it had last happened. Not when his

mother died, and definitely not when watching or reading

anything. He thought of

himself as a block of stone.

But now, in front of his son with his rows of pencils and crayons, the professor cried like a child and he just let it

happen, and of course it had been

Charles

Edelman's

words.

August would be able to

learn to speak and could keep drawing,

and

that

was

overwhelming

news.

But

Balder was not crying just because of that of course.

There was also the drama at Solifon. The death threat. The secrets he was privy to and the longing for Hanna or

Farah or anyone who could fill the gap in his heart.

“My little boy!” he said, so

emotional he failed to notice his laptop switch itself on and show pictures from one of the surveillance cameras outside the house.

Out in the garden, in the blustering storm, there was a tall, thin man in a padded leather jacket, with a grey cap pulled down to conceal his

face. Whoever it was knew that he was being filmed, and even if he seemed lean and agile there was something in his swaying walk which was reminiscent of a heavyweight boxer on his way into the ring.

Grane was sitting in her

office at Säpo searching the web and the agency's records.

She did not really know what she was looking for. But

something unfamiliar and

worrying was gnawing away

at her, something vague.

Her

conversation

with

Balder had been interrupted by Helena Kraft, chief of Säpo, who was looking for her again to discuss the same matter as before.

Alona

Casales at the N.S.A. wanted to

continue

their

conversation; this time she sounded calmer, and again a little flirtatious.

“Have you managed to sort out your computers?” Grane said.

“Ha ... yes, that was a circus, but I don't think it's anything serious. I'm sorry if I was a little cryptic last time.

I don't have much of a choice. I just want to stress again that the level of threat

against Professor Balder is both real and serious, even though we know nothing for certain. Did you have time to deal with it?”

“I’ve spoken to him. He

refuses to leave his house, told me he was in the middle of something. I’m going to arrange protection.”

“Fine. As you might have

guessed I’ve done more than just quickly check you out.

I’m very impressed, Miss Grane. Shouldn’t someone

like you be working for

Goldman Sachs and earning

millions?”

“Not my style.”

“Mine neither. I wouldn’t

say no to the money, but this underpaid snooping is more my thing. Now, honey, here’s

the situation. As far as my colleagues are concerned this isn’t a big deal – which I

happen to disagree with. And not

just

because

I'm

convinced that this group

represents a threat to our national economic interests. I also think there are political implications. One of those Russian computer engineers I

mentioned, a guy called

Anatoli Chabarov, is also

linked to Ivan Gribanov, a member

of

the

Russian

Duma. He's notorious, and a

major

shareholder

in

Gazprom.”

“I understand.”

“But most of it so far is just dead ends. I've spent a lot of time trying to crack the

identity of the person at the top.”

“The

man

they

call

Thanos.”

“Or woman.”

“Woman?”

“I could be wrong. I know this type of group tends to *exploit* women, not promote them to leadership positions, and this figure has mostly been referred to as a he ...”

“Then what makes you think it might be a woman?”

“A sort of reverence, you could say. They talk about ‘Thanos’ in the same way men through the ages have spoken about women they desire and revere.”

“A beauty, in other words.”

“Right. But maybe I’m just

picking

up

some

homoeroticism.

Nothing

would make me happier than if Russian gangsters and

bigwigs in general were to indulge

more

in

that

department.”

“Ha, true!”

“In fact I mention it only so that you’ll keep an open mind if this mess ends up on your desk. You understand

there are also quite a few lawyers mixed up in it. What

else is new, right? Hackers steal and lawyers legitimize the theft.”

“True. Balder’s said to me

that we're all equal before the law – if we pay the same amount.”

“Yes, if you can afford a strong defence you can get away with whatever you want

these days. You do know who

Balder's legal opponents are, don't you? The Washington firm Dackstone & Partner.”

“Sure.”

“In that case you know that

the firm is also used by large tech companies to sue the shit out

of
inventors
and
innovators hoping to get
some modest reward for their creations.”
“I discovered that when we
were
dealing
with

the

lawsuits of that inventor

Håkan Lans.”

“Grim, wasn’t it? But the interesting

thing

is

that

Dackstone crops up in one of

the few conversations we've managed to track down and decrypt from this criminal network, although there the firm is simply referred to as D.P., or even D."

"So Solifon and these

crooks

have

the

same

lawyers?"

“It looks like it, and that’s not all. Dackstone is about to open an office in Stockholm –

do you know how we found that out?”

“No,” Grane said. She was

beginning to feel stressed.

She wanted to finish the

conversation and ensure that Balder

got

his

police

protection.

“Through our surveillance

of this group,” Casales went on. “We know Chabarov

mentions it once in passing, which suggests that there are ties to the firm. The group knew

about

the

office

opening

even

before

it

became

public,

and

Dackstone

&

Partner

is

setting up in Stockholm together with a Swedish

lawyer called Brodin. He

used to be a criminal lawyer, and if you remember he was known for getting a little too cosy with his clients.”

“I do remember that classic

picture in the evening papers

– Kenny Brodin out on the town with some gangsters,

with his hands all over a call girl,” Grane said.

“I saw that. I’d bet that Mr Brodin is a good place to start if you want to check out this story. Who knows? Maybe

he’s the link between big business and this group.”

“I’ll take a look at it,”

Grane said. “But right now I’ve got a number of other things to deal with. I’m sure we’ll be in touch again soon.”

She called the duty officer for

Säpo’s

Personal

Protection Unit, who that evening was none other than Stig Yttergren. Her heart

sank. Yttergren was sixty, overweight, known to be a heavy drinker, and most of all he liked to play cards online.

He was sometimes called

“Officer No-Can-Do”. She

proceeded to explain the

situation

in

her

most

authoritative

tone

and

demanded

that

Professor

Frans Balder in Saltsjö-baden be given a bodyguard as

rapidly as possible. As usual Yttergren

responded

by

saying that it would be

extremely difficult, perhaps not possible at all. When she countered by saying that this was an order from the chief of Säpo herself, he muttered something which might even have been “that strop

cunt”.

“I didn’t hear that,” Grane said. “Just make sure this is put in place immediately.”

Which of course it was not.

While she was waiting and drumming her fingers on her desk,

she

searched

for

information on Dackstone & Partner and anything else she could find linked to what Casales had been telling her –

and that is when she was

overcome by a sense of something horribly familiar.

But she could not put her finger on it. Before she could find what she was looking for Yttergren called back to say that no-one from

Personal
Protection
was
available.

There was an unusual amount
of activity for the royal family that evening, he said, some
sort
of
public

engagement

with

the

Norwegian crown prince and princess, and the leader of the Swedish Democrats had had

an ice cream thrown at his head before his guards could intervene, which meant that they had had to provide

reinforcements for his late speech in Södertälje.

So Yttergren had sent out

“two great guys from the

regular police”, Peter Blom and Dan Flinck, and Grane

had to make do with that, even if their names reminded her of Kling and Klang in *Pippi Longstocking*. For a moment she had serious

misgivings. Then she got

angry with herself.

It was so typical of her snobbish background to judge

people by their names. She might have had more cause for concern if they had a posh name like Gyllentofs or

something. Then they could have

been

irresponsible

layabouts. *I'm sure this'll be fine*, she thought.

Then she got back to work.

It was going to be a long night.

CHAPTER 9

20.xi – 21.xi, Night

Salander woke up lying

straight across the kingsize

double bed and realized that she had been dreaming about her father. A feeling of

menace swept over her like a

cloak.

But

then

she

remembered

the

evening

before and concluded that it could as easily be a chemical reaction in her body. She had a terrible hangover. She got up on wobbly legs and went into the large bathroom –

with the jacuzzi and the

marble and all the idiotic luxuries – to be sick. But nothing happened and she

just sank to the floor,

breathing heavily.

Then she stood up and

looked at herself in the
mirror,
which
was
not
especially reassuring either.

Her eyes were red. On the other hand it was not long after midnight. She must have slept for a few hours only.

She took a glass from the bathroom cupboard and filled

it with water. But at the same moment the details of her dream came flooding back

and she crushed the glass in her hand. Blood dripped to the floor, and she swore and realized that she was unlikely to be going back to sleep.

Should she try to crack the

encrypted N.S.A. file she had downloaded? No, that would

be pointless, at least for now.

Instead she wound a towel around her hand and took

from her bookshelves a new study by Princeton physicist Julie

Tammet,

which

described how a big star

collapses into a black hole.

She lay down on the sofa by the

windows

overlooking

Slussen and Riddarfjärden.

As she began to read she felt a little better. Blood from

the towel did seep onto the pages and her head would not
stop hurting, but she became more and more engrossed in the
book, every now and then

making a note in the margin.

None of it was new to her.

She knew better than most that a star stays alive as a result

of

two

opposing

actions, the fusion reactions at its core forcing it outwards and the gravitational pull

keeping it together. She saw it as a balancing act, a tug of war from which a victor

eventually emerges, once the fuel for the reactions runs out and the explosions weaken.

Once gravity gains the

upper hand, the celestial body shrinks like a punctured

balloon and becomes smaller and smaller. In this way, a star can vanish into nothing.

Salander liked black holes.

She felt an affinity with them.

Yet, like Julie Tammet, she

was not interested in black holes *per se*, but rather in the process which creates them.

Salander was convinced that if only she could describe that process she would be able to draw

together

the

two

irreconcilable languages of the

universe,

quantum

physics and the theory of

relativity. But it was no doubt beyond her capabilities, just like the bloody encryption, and involuntarily she began again to think about her

father.

When she was a child, that

revolting specimen had raped her mother over and over

again, right up until the time her mother received injuries from which she would never recover.

Salander

herself,

then twelve, hit back with a horrific force. At the time she could have no idea that her father was an important spy who had defected from the G.R.U., the Soviet military intelligence service, nor could she know that a special

department

within

the

Swedish

Security

Police,

referred to as the Section, was protecting him at any cost.

Yet even then she understood

that there was some mystery surrounding

the

man,

a

darkness no-one was allowed to approach in any way. That even applied to so simple a thing as his name.

Zala,

or

Alexander

Zalachenko

to

be

more

precise. Other fathers could be reported to the social services and the police. But Zala had forces behind him which were above all that.

It was this and one other thing which for her were true black holes.

The alarm went off at 1.18

and Balder woke with a start.

Was there someone in the

house?

He

felt

an

inexplicable fear and reached across the bed. August was lying beside him. The boy must have crept in as usual,

and now he whimpered with worry, as if the wailing of the siren had made its way into his dreams. *My little boy*, Balder thought. Then he

stiffened.

Were

those

footsteps?

No, he must be imagining

things. All you could hear was the alarm. He cast a worried look towards the

storm beyond the windows. It

seemed to have grown worse.

The sea was beating against the jetty and the shore. The windowpanes

shook

and

bowed. Could the alarm have
been set off by a gust of wind? Perhaps it was as
simple as that.

He still had to check to see
if that protection Gabriella Grane was organizing had
arrived at last. Two men from the
regular
police
were

supposed to have been there

hours ago. It was a farce.

They had been delayed by the

storm and by a series of conflicting orders. It was either one thing or another, and he agreed with Grane, it seemed

hopelessly

incompetent.

He would have to deal with

that in due course. Now he had to make a call. But

August was beginning to
wake up, and a hysterical
child
banging
his
body
against the headboard was the last thing Balder needed right now.
The
earplugs,

it

occurred to him, those old green earplugs he had bought at Frankfurt airport.

He took them from the

bedside table and gently

pushed them into his son's ears. Then he tucked him in and kissed him on the cheek and stroked his curly, tousled

hair, straightened the collar on the boy's pyjamas and

made sure that his head was resting comfortably on the pillow. Balder was frightened and should have been in a hurry, or had

every reason to be. Yet he took his time and fussed over his son. Perhaps it was a sentimental moment in the midst of a crisis. Or he wanted to put off confronting whatever awaited him out

there. For a moment he wished he did have a weapon.

Not that he would have

known how to use it.

He was a programmer, for

heaven's sake, who had

developed

some

paternal

instinct in his old age, that was all. He should never have got into this mess. To hell with Solifon and the N.S.A.

and all criminal gangs! But now he had to get a grip.

With stealthy, uncertain steps he went into the hallway, and before doing anything else, before even looking out at the road, he turned off the alarm.

The racket had set his nerves on edge and in the sudden silence which followed he

stood stock still. Then his mobile rang and even though it startled him he was grateful for the distraction.

“Yes,” he said.

“Hello,

this

is

Jonas

Anderberg, I’m on duty

tonight at Milton Security. Is everything alright?”

“What, well ... I think so.

My alarm went off.”

“I

know

that

and,

according to our instructions, when this happens you’re

supposed to go down to a special room in the cellar and lock the door. Are you down there?”

“Yes,” he lied.

“Good, very good. Do you

know what's happened?"

"No idea. The alarm woke

me up. I have no clue what set it off. Could it have been the storm?"

"Unlikely ... One moment please!"

Anderberg's voice sounded

a bit unfocused.

"What is it?" Balder said nervously.

“It seems ...”

“For God’s sake, tell me

what’s going on.”

“Sorry, just take it easy, take it easy ... I’m going through the picture sequence from your cameras, and it does look as if ...”

“As if what?”

“As if you’ve got a visitor.

A man, well, you can see for yourself later, a lanky man with dark glasses and a cap

has been prowling around your property. He’s been

there twice, as far as I can see, but as I said ... I've only just noticed it now. I'd have to look at it more closely to be able to say more."

"What sort of person is it?"

"Well, it's hard to say."

Anderberg seemed to be

studying

the

picture

sequences again.

“But maybe ... I don’t know ... no, it’s too soon to be speculating,” he said.

“Go on, please go on. I

need something specific. It would make me feel better.”

“O.K., in that case there’s at least one reassuring thing I can tell you.”

“And what’s that?”

“His walk. The man walks

like a junkie – like a guy who’s just taken a load of speed.

There's

something

cocky and stilted about the way he moves, and of course

that could be a sign that he's just an ordinary druggie and petty thief. On the other hand

...”

“Yes?”

“He's done a very good job

of hiding his face and then

...”

Anderberg fell silent again.

“Keep going!”

“One moment.”

“You’re

making

me

nervous, you know that?”

“Don’t mean to. But you

know ...”

Balder froze. The sound of

a car engine could be heard from his garage drive.

“ ...

you’re

getting

a

visitor.”

“What should I do?”

“Stay where you are.”

“O.K.,” Balder said, more or less paralysed. But he was not where Anderberg thought he was.

When the telephone rang at 1.58, Blomkvist was still

awake. But his mobile was in

the pocket of his jeans on the floor and he did not manage to answer it in time. In any case the call was from a

withheld number, so he swore and crawled back into bed and closed his eyes.

He could really do without

another sleepless night. Ever since Berger had fallen asleep a little before midnight, he had been tossing and turning and thinking about his life.

Not much of it felt right, not even

his

relationship

to

Berger. He had loved her for many years, and there was every reason to think that she felt the same way about him.

But it was no longer as

simple as once it had been.

Perhaps

Blomkvist

had

started to feel some sympathy for Greger. Greger Beckman was Erika's husband, an

artist, and he could not

reasonably be accused of

being grudging or small-

minded. On the contrary,

when Greger had realized that

Erika would never get over Blomkvist or even be able to stop herself from tearing his clothes off every now and then, he had not lost his temper. He had made a deal:

“You can be with him –

just so long as you always come back to me.” And that’s

how it became.

They

set

up

an

unconventional arrangement,

with Berger mostly sleeping

at home with her husband in Saltsjöbaden, but sometimes here

with

Blomkvist

at

Bellmansgatan.

Over

the

years Blomkvist had thought that it really was an ideal solution, one which many

couples who lived under the dictatorship of monogamy

ought to have adopted. Every

time Berger said, "I love my husband more when I can

also be with you," or when at

some cocktail party Beckman put his arm around him in a brotherly embrace, Blomkvist

had thanked his lucky stars for the arrangement.

Yet he had lately begun to have doubts, perhaps because

he had had more time to think and it had occurred to him that something that is called an

agreement

is

not

necessarily always that.

On the contrary, one party might advance their self-interest under the guise of a common decision, and in the long run it often

becomes clear

that

someone

is

suffering, despite assurances to the contrary. Berger's call to her husband that evening had evidently not been well received.

Who

knows?

Maybe Beckman was also

lying awake right now.

Blomkvist tried to put it out of his mind. For a little while

he

even

tried

daydreaming. But that did not help much, and in the end he got up, determined to do

something more useful. Why not do some reading on

industrial espionage or, better still, sketch out an alternative funding plan for *Millennium*?

He got dressed, sat down at
his computer and checked his inbox.

Most of it was rubbish as usual, even if some of the emails did
give him a bit of a boost. There were shouts of encouragement
from Malm

and Eriksson, also from

Andrei Zander and Harriet

Vanger in the light of the coming battle with Serner, and he
answered them with more of a fighting spirit than

he actually felt. After that he checked

Salander's

document, without expecting to find anything there. But then he lit up. She had

answered. For the first time in ages she had given a sign of life:

<Balder's intelligence isn't in the least bit artificial. How's your own these days?

And

what

happens,

Blomkvist, if we create a machine which is a little bit cleverer than we are?>

Blomkvist

smiled

and

thought of the last time they had met, at Kaffebar on St Paulsgatan. It took a while before he noticed that her message

contained

two

questions, the first one a friendly little jibe which perhaps regrettably contained a grain of truth. What he had written in the magazine lately had lacked intelligence and genuine

newsworthiness.

Like so many journalists, he had just been plugging away, occasionally

trotting

out

clichés. But that's how it was for the moment and he was much

keener

to

ponder

Salander's second question, her riddle, not so much

because in itself it interested him especially, but because he wanted to think of some clever response.

If we create a machine that is cleverer than we ourselves are,

he

thought,

what

happens then? He went to the kitchen, opened a bottle of Ramlösa mineral water and

sat at the kitchen table.

Downstairs Fru Gerner was

coughing rather painfully and in the distance, amid the hubbub of the city, an

ambulance wailed away in

the storm. Well, he mused,

then we get a machine that can do all the clever things which we ourselves can do, plus a little bit more, for example ... He laughed out

loud and understood the point of the question. A machine like that could go on to produce

something

more

intelligent than itself in turn, and then what happens?

The same would be true of

the next machine and the next

one and the next one, and soon the very source of it all, man himself, would be no

more interesting to the latest computer than a lab rat. There would be an explosion of

intelligence

beyond

all

control, as in the Matrix films. Blomkvist smiled and went back to his computer and wrote:

<If we create such a

machine then we'll get a

world

where

not

even

Lisbeth is so cocksure.>

After that he sat looking out through the window, in so far as one could see anything beyond the swirling snow.

Every now and then he

looked through the open door

at Berger, who was sleeping soundly

and
who
knew
nothing about machines more
intelligent
than
human
beings, or was not the least
bit concerned about that right now.

He thought he heard his
mobile give a ping, and sure enough
he
had
a
new
voicemail. That worried him, he was not really sure why.
Apart
from

ex-girlfriends

who call when they're drunk and want to have sex, you generally only get bad news at night. The voice on the message sounded harried:

My name is Frans Balder. I know it's rude to call this late.

I apologize for that. But my situation

has

become

somewhat critical, at least that's how I see it. I've just discovered that you were looking for me, which is really a strange coincidence. There are a few things I've been wanting to tell you

about for some time now, I think they might interest you. I'd be grateful if you could get in touch as soon as possible. I have a feeling that this might be a bit urgent.

Balder

left

a

telephone

number and an email address and Blomkvist jotted them

down and sat still for a while, drumming his fingers on the kitchen table. Then he dialled the number.

Balder was lying in bed,

agitated and scared. Yet he was feeling a little calmer now. The car coming up his

drive had been the police guard arriving at long last.

Two men in their forties, one tall and one quite short, both looking cocky and with the same short, trendy haircut.

But they were perfectly polite and apologized for the delay in taking up their post.

“Milton

Security

and

Gabriella

Grane

at

the

Security Police briefed us on the situation,” one said.

They were aware that a man wearing a cap and dark glasses had been snooping

around the property and that they had to be on their guard.

Therefore they turned down the offer of a cup of hot tea in the kitchen. They wanted to check out the house and

Balder thought that sounded perfectly professional and

sensible. In other respects they did not make a very

positive impression, but then he

did

not

get

an

overwhelmingly

negative

impression either. He had put their numbers into his mobile and gone back to bed to be with

August,

who

was

sleeping, curled up, his green earplugs still in place.

But of course Balder had

not been able to fall asleep again. He was listening for noises out there in the storm

and eventually he sat up in bed. He had to do something,

or he would go mad. He

checked his mobile. He had two messages from Linus

Brandell, who sounded bad-

tempered and defensive all at the same time. At first Balder felt like hanging up. But then he caught a couple of things which were interesting after all. Linus had spoken to

Mikael

Blomkvist

at

Millennium magazine and now Blomkvist wanted to get

in touch, and at that Balder began

to

think.

Mikael

Blomkvist, he muttered.

Is he to be my link with the

outside world?

Balder knew very little

about Swedish journalists.

But he did know who

Blomkvist was, and was

aware of his reputation as someone who always went

right to the heart of his stories, never yielding to pressure. That in itself did not necessarily make him the

right man for the job – plus, somehow Balder seemed to

recall hearing other less

flattering things – so he called Gabriella Grane again. She knew just about everything there was to know about the media scene and had said that she would be staying up late.

“Hello,”

she

answered

right away. “I was about to get in touch. I’m just looking at that man on the C.C.T.V.

We really ought to move you

now, you know.”

“But my God, Gabriella,

the police are here – finally.

They’re sitting right outside the front door.”

“There’s no reason to

suppose that the man will come through the front door.”

“Why would he come at all? The man at Milton said he looked like an old junkie.”

“I’m not so sure about that.

He's carrying some sort of box, something technical. We should play this safe."

Balder glanced at August lying next to him.

"I'm quite happy to move tomorrow. That might help my nerves. But I'm not going anywhere tonight – your policemen seem professional, professional enough at any rate."

“If you’re going to be stubborn about this I’ll see to it that Flinck and Blom make themselves conspicuous and cover the entire property.”

“Fine, but that’s not why I’m calling. You said I ought to go public, remember?”

“Well ... yes ... That’s not the kind of advice you would

expect from the Security Police, is it? I still think it would be a good idea, but first I’d like you to tell *us* what you know. I’m feeling

a

little apprehensive about this story.”

“In that case let’s talk

tomorrow

morning,

when

we’ve had a good sleep. But one thing, what do you think of

Mikael

Blomkvist

at

Millennium? Could he be the
right sort of person to talk to?”

Grane gave a laugh. “If
you want my colleagues to have an apoplectic fit, then definitely
talk to him.”

“Is it as bad as that?”

“At Säpo people avoid him
like the plague. If you find Blomkvist on your doorstep, then you
know your whole

year is shot, they say.

Everybody here, including

Helena Kraft, would advise against it in the strongest terms.”

“But it’s you I’m asking.”

“Well, my answer is that

your reasoning is sound. He’s a damn fine journalist.”

“Hasn’t he also come in for

some criticism?”

“For sure, people have

been saying that he's past his prime and that his writing isn't

positive

or

upbeat

enough, or whatever. But he's an old-fashioned investigative reporter of the highest calibre.

Do you have his contact

details?"

"My

ex-assistant

gave

them to me.”

“Good, great. But before

you get in touch with him, you must first tell us what you have. Do you promise?”

“I promise, Gabriella. Now

I’m going to sleep for a few

hours.”

“Do that, and I’ll keep in touch with Flinck and Blom and arrange a safe house for you

first

thing

in

the

morning.”

After he had hung up he

tried again to get some rest.

But it proved as impossible this time as before. The storm made
him
increasingly
restless and worried. It felt as if
something
evil
was
travelling across the sea towards him, and he could not help
listening anxiously for any unusual sounds.

It was true that he had

promised Grane he would

talk to her first. But he could not wait – everything he had kept bottled up for so long was throbbing to get out. He knew

it

was

irrational;

nothing could be that urgent.

It was the middle of the night

and, regardless of what Grane had said, he was by any reckoning safer than he had been for a long time. He had police protection and a first-rate security system. But that did not help. He was agitated, and so he got out the number

Linus had given him and

dialled it. But of course Blomkvist did not answer.

Why would he? It was far too late, and Balder left a voice message instead in a slightly forced, whispered voice so as not to wake

August. Then he got up and put on his bedside light. On the bookshelf by the bed there was some literature which

had nothing to do with his work,

and

both

absent-

minded

and

worried

he

flicked through an old novel by

Stephen

King,

Pet

Semetary. But that made him

think even more about evil figures travelling through the night. For a long time he just stood there with the book in his hand – then he felt a stab of apprehension, which he

might have dismissed as

nonsense in broad daylight but which now seemed totally plausible. He had a sudden urge to speak to Farah or better still Steven Warburton in Los Angeles, who would be certain to be awake, and while imagining all sorts of unpleasant scenarios, he looked out to sea and the night and the restless clouds scudding across the sky. At that moment his mobile rang, as if it had heard his prayer.

But it was neither Farah nor Warburton.

“My

name

is

Mikael

Blomkvist,” the voice said.

“You’ve been looking for me.”

“That’s right. I’m sorry to have called so late.”

“No problem. I was awake

anyway.”

“Can you talk now?”

“Absolutely, I was in fact just answering a message

from a person whom I think we

both

know.

Lisbeth

Salander.”

“Who?”

“Sorry, maybe I’ve got hold of the wrong end of the stick. I thought you had hired her to go through your

computers

and

trace

a

suspected data breach.”

Balder laughed. “Yes, my

God, she’s a strange girl, that one,” he said. “But she never told me her surname, even though we had a lot of

contact for a while. I assumed she had her reasons, and I never pushed her. I met her at one of my lectures at the Royal Institute of

Technology. I'd be happy to tell you about it; it was pretty astonishing. But what I meant to ask was ... well, you'll probably think it's a crazy idea."

"Sometimes I like crazy ideas."

"You wouldn't feel like

coming over right now? It

would mean a lot to me. I'm sitting on a story which I think is pretty explosive. I can pay for your taxi here and back."

"Thanks, but I always pick

up my own tab. Tell me, why

do we have to talk now, in the middle of the night?"

"Because

..."

Balder

hesitated. “Because I have a feeling this is urgent, or actually it’s more than a

feeling. I’ve just been told that I’m under threat, and an hour or so ago someone was snooping

around

my

property. I’m frightened, to be completely honest, and I want to get this information off my chest. I no longer want to be the only one in the know.”

“O.K.”

“O.K. what?”

“I’ll come – if I can manage to get hold of a taxi.”

Balder

gave

him

the

address and hung up, then called Professor Warburton in Los Angeles, and had an

intense conversation with him on an encrypted line for about thirty minutes. Then he put on a pair of jeans and a black cashmere polo neck and went

in search of a bottle of Amarone, in case that was the
kind of thing Blomkvist might enjoy. But he got no further than the
doorway
before he started in fright.
He thought he had seen a movement,
something
flashing past, and looked
anxiously towards the jetty and the sea. But it was the same
desolate, storm-lashed scene as before, and he
dismissed whatever it was as a figment of his imagination,

a product of his nervous frame of mind, or at least he tried to. He left the bedroom and walked past the large window on his way towards the upper floor. Suddenly

gripped by a new fear, he spun around again and this time he really did glimpse something over by the house next door.

A figure was racing along in the shelter of the trees, and

even if Balder did not see the person for more than a matter of seconds, he could make out that it was a powerfully built man with a rucksack and dark clothes. The man ran in a crouch and something about

the way he moved had a

trained look to it, as if he had run like that many times

before, perhaps in a distant war. It took a few moments for Balder to fumble for his

mobile, and he tried to work out which of the numbers on his call list belonged to the policemen out there.

He had not put their names

into his contacts, and now was uncertain. With a shaking hand he tried one which he thought was right. No-one

answered, not at first. The ring tone sounded three, four, five times before a voice

panted out, "Blom here, what's up?"

“I saw a man running along

the line of trees by my

neighbour’s house. I don’t know where he is now. But he could very well be up by the road near you.”

“O.K., we’ll check it out.”

“He seemed ...” Balder

said.

“What?”

“I don’t know, quick.”

Dan Flinck and Peter Blom were sitting in the police car chatting about their young colleague, Anna Berzelius, and the size of her bum.

Both had recently got divorced. Their divorces had been pretty painful at first.

They

both

had

young

children, wives who felt let down and parents-in-law who

to varying degrees called

them irresponsible shits. But

once the dust had settled and they had got shared custody of the children and new if modest homes, they had both been struck by the same

realization: that they missed their bachelor days. Lately, during the weeks when they were not looking after the kids, they had lived it up as never before. Afterwards, just like when they were in their teens, they had discussed all

the

parties

in

detail,

especially the women they

had met, reviewing their

physiques from top to bottom, and their prowess in bed. But on this occasion they had not had time to discuss Anna

Berzelius in as much depth as they would have liked.

Blom's mobile rang and

they both jumped, partly

because he had changed his ringtone

to

an

extreme

version of “Satisfaction”, but mainly of course because the night
and the storm and the emptiness out here had made them edgy.
Besides, Blom

had his telephone in his

pocket, and since his trousers were tight – his waistline had expanded as a result of all the partying – it took a while before he could get it out.

When he hung up he looked worried.

“What’s

that

about?”

Flinck said.

“Balder saw a man, a quick

bastard, apparently.”

“Where?”

“Down by the trees next to

the neighbour’s house. The guy’s probably on his way up
towards us.”

Blom and Flinck stepped

out of the car. They had been outside many times over the course
of this long night, but

this was the first time they shivered right down to the bone. For an
instant they just stood looking awkwardly to the right and the left,
shocked by the cold. Then Blom – the

taller of the two – took command and told Flinck to stay up by the road while he himself went down towards

the water.

It was a short slope which extended along a wooden

fence and a small avenue of newly planted trees. A lot of snow had fallen, it was

slippery and at the bottom lay the

sea.

Baggensfjärden,

Blom thought, and in fact he was surprised that the water had not frozen over, but that may have been because of the waves. Blom cursed at the storm and at this night duty which wore him out and ruined his beauty sleep. He tried to do his job all the same, not with his whole heart perhaps, but still. He listened out for sounds and looked about him, and at first he could not pick out anything from

the

surroundings. It was dark.

Only the light from a single lamp post shone into the

property,

immediately

in

front of the jetty, and he went down, past a garden chair

which had been flung about in the storm, and in the next moment he could see Balder through

the

large

windowpane.

Balder was standing some

way inside the house, bent over a large bed, his body in a tensed position. Perhaps he was straightening the covers, it was hard to tell. He seemed busy with some small detail in the bed. Blom should not

be bothering about it – he was meant to be keeping watch over the property – yet there was something in Balder's

body

language

which

fascinated him and for a

second or two he lost his concentration before he was brought back to reality again.

He had a chilling feeling that someone was watching

him, and he spun around, his eyes searching wildly. He

saw nothing, not at first, and had just begun to calm down when he became aware of

two things – a sudden

movement by the shiny steel bins next to the fence, and the sound of a car up by the road.

The engine stopped and a car door was opened.

Neither occurrence was

noteworthy in itself. There could be an animal by the rubbish bins and cars could

come or go here even late at night. Yet Blom's body

stiffened completely and for a moment he just stood there, not knowing how to react.

Then Flinck's voice could be heard.

“Someone's coming!”

Blom did not move. He felt

that he was being watched and almost unconsciously he fingered the service weapon at his hip and thought of his

mother and his ex-wife and his children, as if something serious really was about to happen. Flinck was shouting again, now with a desperate tone in his voice, “Police!

You! Stop right there!” and then Blom ran up towards the

road, although it did not seem the obvious option even then.

He could not rid himself of the apprehension that he was leaving something

threatening and unpleasant down there by the steel bins.

But if his partner shouted like that, he did not have a choice, did he? And he felt secretly relieved. He had been more frightened than he cared to admit and so he hurried off and came stumbling up onto the road.

Up ahead, Flinck was

chasing after an unsteady

man with a broad back and

clothes that were far too thin and, even though he hardly fitted the description of a

“quick bastard”, Blom ran

after him. Soon afterwards they brought him down by the

side of the ditch, right next to a couple of letterboxes and a small lantern which cast a pale light over the whole scene.

“Who the hell are you?”

Flinck

bellowed

with

surprising aggression – he had been scared too – and the man looked at them in

confusion and terror.

He was not wearing a hat, he had hoarfrost in his hair and in the stubble on his chin and you could tell that he was cold and in pretty bad shape.

But above all there was

something

extraordinarily

familiar about his face.

For a few seconds Blom thought that they had arrested a known and wanted criminal

and he swelled with pride.

Balder had gone back to the bedroom and tucked August

in again, perhaps to hide him under the blanket if anything should happen. Then he had a

completely crazy thought,

prompted by the sense of

foreboding he had just felt, which was accentuated by his

conversation with Warburton.

Probably his mind was just clouded by panic and fear.

He realized it was not a new idea but something

which had been developing in

his subconscious during many

sleepless nights in California.

So he got out his laptop, his own

little

supercomputer

connected to a series of other

machines

for

sufficient

capacity, and opened the A.I.

program to which he had

dedicated his life, and then ...

He deleted the file and all of the back-up. He barely thought it through. He was like an evil God snuffing out a life, and perhaps that was exactly what he was doing.

Nobody knew, not even he

himself, and he sat there for a little while, wondering if he would be floored by remorse and regret.

It

was

incomprehensible, wasn't it?

His life's work was gone, with just a few taps of a key.

But oddly enough it made

him calmer, as if at least one aspect of his life was now protected.
He got to his feet and once more looked out

into the night and the storm.

Then the telephone rang. It

was

Flinck,

the

second

policeman.

“I just wanted to say that we apprehended the man you saw,” the policeman said. “In other words, you can relax. We have the situation under control.”

“Who is it?” Balder said.

“I couldn’t say. He’s very drunk and we have to get him to quieten down. I just wanted to let you know.

We’ll get back to you.”

Balder put the mobile

down on the bedside table, next to his laptop, and tried to congratulate himself. Now

the man was under arrest, and his research would not fall into the wrong hands. Yet he was not reassured. At first he did not understand why. Then

it hit him: the man who had

run along the trees had been anything but drunk.

It took a full minute or more before Blom realized that

they had not in fact arrested a notorious criminal but rather the actor Lasse Westman,

who did often enough play bandits and hit men on

screen, but who was not

himself wanted for any crime.

The realization did not make Blom feel any calmer. Not just because he suspected it had been a mistake to leave the area of the trees and the bins down there, but because this whole episode could lead to scandal and headlines in the press.

He knew enough about

Westman to be aware that

whatever that man did all too often ended up in the evening

papers, and you could not say that the actor was looking particularly happy. He puffed and swore as he scrambled to

get to his feet and Blom tried to work out what on earth the man was doing out here in the middle of the night.

“Do you live in the area?”

he said.

“I don’t have to tell you a fucking thing,”

Westman

hissed, and Blom turned to

Flinck in an attempt to understand how the whole

drama had begun.

But Flinck was already

standing a little way off talking

into

his

mobile,

apparently with Balder. He probably wanted to show how

efficient he was by passing on the news that they had seized the suspect, if indeed he was the suspect.

“Have you been snooping around Professor Balder’s property?” Blom said.

“Didn’t you hear what I

said? I’m not telling you a fucking thing. What the hell, here I am strolling around perfectly

peacefully

and

along comes that maniac

waving

his

pistol.

It's

scandalous. Don't you know who I am?"

"I know who you are, and if we have overreacted then I apologize. I'm sure we'll

have a chance to talk about it again. But right now we're in the middle of a tense situation and I demand that you tell me at once what brought you

here to Professor Balder – oh no, don't you try to run away now!"

Westman was probably not

trying to escape at all. He was

only having trouble keeping his balance. Then he cleared his throat rather dramatically and spat right out into the air.

The phlegm did not get far but flew back like a projectile and froze to ice on his cheek.

“Do

you

know

something?” he said, wiping his face.

“No?”

“I’m not the bad guy in this
story.”

Blom looked nervously down towards the water and the avenue of
trees and

wondered yet again what he had seen there. And still he
remained standing where he was,

paralysed

by

the

absurdity of the situation.

“Well then, who is?”

“Balder.”

“How so?”

“He’s taken my girlfriend’s

son.”

“Why would he have done that?”

“You

shouldn’t

bloody

well be asking me! Ask the computer genius in there!

That bastard has absolutely no right to him,” Westman said, and fumbled in the

inside pocket of his coat.

“He doesn’t have a child in

the house, if that’s what you think,” Blom said.

“He sure as hell does.”

“Really?”

“Really!”

“So you thought you’d

come along here in the

middle of the night, pissed as a newt, and fetch the child,”

Blom said, and he was about to make another crushing

comment

when

he

was

interrupted by a sound, a soft clinking sound coming up from the water's edge.

“What was that?” he said.

“What

was

what?”

answered Flinck, who was

standing next to him and did not seem to have heard

anything at all. It was true that the sound had not been all that loud, at least not up here.

Yet it still made Blom

shudder. He was just about to go down to investigate when he hesitated again. As he looked around anxiously he

could

hear

another

car

approaching.

It was a taxi which drove past and stopped at Balder's front door, and that gave Blom an excuse to stay up on

the road. While the driver and the passenger settled up he cast yet another worried look down to the water and

thought that he could hear something more, and this

sound

was

no

more

reassuring.

He did not know for sure, and now the car door opened and a man climbed out whom

Blom, after a moment's

confusion, recognized as the journalist Mikael Blomkvist, though God only knew why

the hell all these celebrities had to congregate out here in the middle of the night.

CHAPTER 10

21.xi, Early Morning

Balder was standing in the bedroom next to his computer

and his mobile, looking at August, who was whimpering
uneasily in the bed. He
wondered what the boy was dreaming. Was it about a
world which he could even understand? Balder wanted to
know. He felt that he wanted to start living, no longer bury himself
in
quantum
algorithms and source codes and paranoia.

He wanted to be happy, not tormented by that constant weight in his body; he wanted instead to launch himself into something

wild

and

magnificent, a romance even.

For a few intense seconds he thought about the women

who had fascinated him:

Gabriella, Farah, others too.

He also thought about the woman who it turned out was

called Salander. He had been

spellbound by her, and as he now remembered her he saw something

new

in

her,

something both familiar and strange: she reminded him of August. That was absurd, of course. August was a small autistic

boy,

and

while

Salander was not that old either, and there may have been something boyish about her, otherwise she was his polar opposite. Dressed in

black, a bit of a punk, totally uncompromising.

Still

it

occurred to him now that her eyes had that same strange shine as August's when he had been staring at the traffic light on Hornsgatan.

Balder had encountered

Salander during a lecture at the

Royal

Institute

of

Technology in the course of a talk he was giving on

technical

singularity,

the

hypothetical state

when

computers

become

more

intelligent than the human being. He had just begun by explaining
the concept of

singularity

in

terms

of

mathematics

and

physics

when the door opened and a skinny girl in black strode into the lecture hall. His first thought was that it was a shame there was no other

place for junkies to go. Then

he wondered if the girl really was an addict. She did not seem strung out, but on the other hand she did look tired and surly, and

did not appear to be paying any attention to his lecture. She just sat there slouched

over

a

desk.

Eventually, in the middle of a discussion of the moment of singularity

in

complex

mathematical calculation, the point where the solution hits

infinity, he asked her straight out what she thought of it all.

That was mean. Why should he pick on her? But what had happened?

The girl looked up and said

that, instead of bandying

fuzzy concepts about, he

should

become

sceptical

when the basis for his
calculations fell apart. It was not some sort of real-world physical
collapse, more a sign
that his own mathematics were not up to scratch, and therefore
it
was
sheer
populism on his part to
mystify singularities in black holes when it was so obvious

that the main problem was the absence
of
a
quantum
mechanical
method
for
calculating gravity.

With icy clarity – which set

off a buzz in the hall – she then presented a sweeping critique of the singularity theorists he had quoted, and he was incapable of coming up with any answer other than a dismayed: “Who the hell are you?”

That was their first contact.

The girl was to surprise him a few times more after that.

With lightning speed or just one

bright

glance

she

immediately grasped what he was working on and, when he realized that his technology had been stolen, he had asked for her help. That had created a bond between them – they shared a secret.

Now he was standing there

in the bedroom thinking of her. But his thoughts were interrupted. He was overcome

by a new chilling sense of unease and he looked through

the doorway towards the

large window overlooking the water.

In front of it stood a tall figure in dark clothes and a tight black cap with a small lamp on his forehead. He was

doing

something

to

the

window. He pulled across it with a swift and powerful movement, like an artist

starting work on a fresh

canvas, and before Balder had time to cry out, the entire

window fell in and the figure moved towards him.

Jan Holtser usually told

people that he worked on

industrial security issues. In actual fact he was a former Russian special forces soldier who spent his time breaking into security systems. He had a small skilled staff and, for operations like this one, the

preparations were as a rule so painstaking that the risks were not as great as one might imagine.

It's true that he was no longer a young man, but for fifty-one he kept himself in good shape with hard training and was known for

his

efficiency and ability to

improvise.

If

fresh

circumstances cropped up, he

thought about them and took

them into consideration in his planning.

His experience tended to

make up for his lack of

youthful

vigour,

and

occasionally, in the limited circle within which he could talk openly, he would speak of a sort of sixth sense, an acquired instinct. He had

learned over the years when to wait and when to strike, and although he had been

through a bad patch a couple of years earlier and betrayed signs

of

weakness

—

humanity, his daughter would

say — he now felt that he was more accomplished than ever before.

He was once more able to take pleasure in his work, that old sense of excitement. Yes, he did still dose himself with ten milligrams of Stesolid before an operation, but that

was only because it enhanced his accuracy with weapons.

He remained crystal clear and alert at critical moments, and most important: he always

carried out the tasks he was assigned. Holtser was not

someone who let people

down or bailed out. That was

how he thought of himself.

And yet tonight, even

though his client had stressed that the job was urgent, he

had considered calling it off.

The bad weather was a factor.

But the storm in itself would never have been enough to get

him

to

consider

cancelling. He was Russian and a soldier, and had fought in far worse conditions than these, and he hated people who moaned about trivial

things.

What bothered him was the

police guard, which had

appeared out of nowhere. He did not think much of the policemen on the property.

From his hiding place he had

seen them snooping around

with the vague reluctance of small boys told to go outside in bad weather. They would rather have stayed sitting in their car talking rubbish, and they were easily frightened, especially the taller of the two, who seemed to dislike

the dark and the storm and the black water. As he stood there staring in among the trees a little while ago, he had looked

to
be
terrified,
presumably because he had
sensed Holtser's presence,
but that was not something that worried Holtser. He
could have slit the man's throat
swiftly
and

soundlessly.

Still, the fact of policemen was not good news.

Their

presence

considerably raised the level of risk; above all it was an indication that some part of the plan had leaked out, that there

was

a

heightened

readiness.

Maybe

the

professor had started to talk, in which case the operation would be meaningless, it

might

even

make

their

situation worse. Holtser was determined not to expose his client to any unnecessary

risks. He regarded that as one of his strengths. He always saw the bigger picture and, despite his profession, he was often the one who counselled

caution.

He had lost count of the number of criminal gangs in his home country which had gone under because they had

resorted too often to violence.

Violence

can

command

respect. Violence can silence and intimidate, and ward off risks and threats. But violence can also cause chaos and a whole chain of unwanted

consequences.

All those thoughts had

gone through his mind as he sat hidden behind the trees and the line of bins. For a few seconds he was resolved to

abort the operation and go back to his hotel room. Yet that did not happen.

A car arrived, occupying

the policemen's attention, and he spotted an opportunity, an opening. Without stopping to evaluate his motivations he fitted the elastic of the lamp over his head. He got out the diamond saw from his left-hand jacket pocket and drew his weapon, a 1911 R1 Carry

with a custom-made silencer, and weighed them, one in each hand. Then, as ever, he said:

“Thy will be done, amen.”

Yet he could not shake off the uncertainty. Was this

right? He would have to act with lightning speed. True, he knew the house inside out and Jurij had been here twice and hacked

the alarm system. Plus the policemen were hopeless amateurs. Even if he were delayed in there – say the professor did not have his computer next to his bed, as everyone had said, and they had time to come to his aid –

Holtser would be able to

dispose of them too without any problem. He even looked forward to it. He therefore muttered a second time:

“Thy will be done, amen.”

Then he disengaged the safety on his weapon and moved rapidly to the large window

overlooking

the

water. It may have been due to the uncertainty of the situation, but he felt an unusually

strong

reaction

when he saw Balder standing

there

in

the

bedroom,

engrossed in something, and he tried to persuade himself that everything was fine. The

target was clearly visible. Yet he still felt apprehensive: Should he call the job off?

He did not. Instead he

tensed the muscles in his right arm and with all his strength drew the diamond cutter

across

the
window
and
pushed.

The
window

collapsed with a disturbing crash and he rushed in and raised his
weapon at Balder, who was staring hard at him,
waving his hand as though in a desperate greeting. The

professor

began

to

say

something

confused

and

ceremonious which sounded

like a prayer, a litany. But instead of “God” or “Jesus”

Holtser

heard

the

word

“disabled”. That was all he managed to catch, and in any case it did not matter. People had said all sorts of things to him.

He showed no mercy.

Quickly

and

almost

soundlessly the figure moved through the hallway into the bedroom. In that time Balder registered with surprise that the alarm had not gone off and noticed a motif of a grey spider on the man's jersey, also a narrow, oblong scar on

his pale forehead below the cap and the lamp.

Then he saw the weapon.

The man was pointing a pistol at him. Balder raised his hand in a vain attempt to protect himself. But even though his life was on the line and fear had set its claws into him he thought only of August.

Whatever
else
happened,
even if he himself had to die,
let his son be spared. He burst out:
“Don’t kill my child! He’s disabled,
he
doesn’t
understand anything.”

Balder did not know how

far he got. The whole world froze and the night and the storm seemed to bear down on him and then everything went black.

Holtser fired and as he had expected there was nothing wrong with his aim. He hit Balder twice in the head and the professor collapsed to the floor

like

a

flapping

scarecrow. There was no

doubt that he was dead. Yet something did not feel right.

A blustery wind swept in off the sea and brushed across Holtser's neck as if it were a cold, living being, and for a

second or two he had no idea what was happening.

Everything

had

gone

according to plan and over there was Balder's computer, just as he had been told. He should just take it and go. He needed to be efficient. Yet he stood there as if frozen to the spot and it was only after a strangely long delay that he realized why.

In the large double bed, almost completely hidden by a duvet, lay a small boy with unruly, tousled hair watching him with a glassy look. Those eyes

made

him

uncomfortable, and that was not just because they seemed to be looking straight through him. There was more to it than that. But then again it made no difference.

He had to carry out his assignment. Nothing must be allowed to jeopardize the

operation and expose them all to risk. Here was someone who was clearly a witness, especially now that he had exposed his face, and there must be no witnesses, so he pointed his weapon at the boy and looked into his glowing eyes and for the third time muttered:

“Thy will be done, amen.”

Blomkvist climbed out of the

taxi in a pair of black boots and a white fur coat with a broad sheepskin collar, which he had dug out of the

cupboard, as well as an old fur hat that had belonged to his father.

It was then 2.40 in the

morning. The Ekot news

bulletin

had

reported

a

serious accident involving an articulated lorry which was now

blocking

the

main

Värmdö road. But Blomkvist and the taxi driver had seen nothing of that and had

travelled together through the dark, storm-battered suburbs.

Blomkvist was sick with exhaustion.

All

he

had

wanted was to stay at home

and creep into bed with Erika again and go back to sleep.

But he had not felt able to say no to Balder. He could not understand why. It might have been out of some sense of duty, a feeling that he could not allow himself any easy options now that the magazine was facing a crisis, or it might have been that Balder had sounded lonely

and frightened, and that

Blomkvist

was

both

sympathetic and curious. Not that he thought he was going to hear anything sensational.

He was coldly expecting to be disappointed.

Maybe

he

would find himself acting as a therapist, a night watchman in the storm. On the other hand, one never knew, and once

again he thought of Salander.

Salander rarely did anything without good reason. Besides,

Balder was a fascinating figure, and he had never

before given an interview. It could well turn out to be interesting,

Blomkvist

thought, as he looked about him in the darkness.

A lamp post cast a bluish light over the house, and a nice house it was too,

architect-designed with large glass windows, and built to look a little like a train.

Standing by the letterbox was a tall policeman in his forties, with

a

fading

tan

and

somewhat strained, nervous

features. Further down the road was a shorter colleague of his, arguing with a drunk who was waving his arms

about. More was happening

out here than Blomkvist had expected.

“What’s going on?” he said

to the taller policeman.

He never got an answer.

The policeman's mobile rang and Blomkvist overheard that the alarm system did not seem to be working properly.

There was a noise coming from the lower part of the property, a crackling, unnerving

sound,

which

instinctively he associated with the telephone call. He took a couple of steps to the right and looked down a hill

which stretched all the way to a jetty and the sea and

another lamp post with the same bluish light. Just then a figure came charging out of nowhere

and

Blomkvist

realized that something was badly wrong.

Holtser squeezed the first pressure on the trigger and was just about to shoot the

boy when the sound of a car could be heard up by the road, and he checked himself.

But it was not really the car.

It was because of the word

“disabled” which cropped up again in his thoughts. He realized that the professor would have had every reason to lie in that last moment of his life, but as Holtser now stared

at

the

child

he

wondered if it might not in fact be true.

The boy's body was too

immobile,

and

his

face

radiated wonder rather than fear, as if he had no

understanding of what was

happening. His look was too blank and glassy to register anything properly.

Holtser recalled something

he had read during his

research. Balder did have a

severely retarded son. Both the press and the court papers had said that the professor did not have custody of the boy.

But this must surely be the boy and Holtser neither could nor needed to shoot him. It would be pointless and a

breach

of

his

own

professional ethics, and this recognition came to him as a huge relief, which should

have made him suspicious

had he been more aware of himself at that moment.

Now he just lowered the

pistol,
picked
up
the
computer and the mobile
from the bedside table and stuffed
them
into
his

rucksack. Then he ran into the night along the escape route he had staked out for himself. But he did not get far. He heard a voice behind him and turned around. Up by

the road stood a man who was neither of the policemen but a new figure in a fur coat and fur hat and with quite a different aura of authority.

Perhaps this was why Holtser

raised his pistol again. He sensed danger.

The man who charged past

was athletic and dressed in black, with a headlamp on his

cap, and in some way Blomkvist could not quite

explain he had the feeling that the figure was part of a coordinated operation. He

half expected more figures to appear out of the darkness, and that made him very

uncomfortable. He called out,

“Hey, you, stop!”

That

was

a

mistake.

Blomkvist understood it the instant

the

man's

body

stiffened, like that of a soldier in combat, and that was

doubtless why he reacted so quickly. By the time the man

drew a weapon and fired a shot as if it were the most natural thing
in the world, Blomkvist

had

already

ducked down by the corner of

the house. The shot could hardly be heard, but when something

smacked

into

Balder's letterbox there was

no doubt what had happened.

The taller of the policemen abruptly ended his call, but did not move a muscle. The only

person

who

said

anything was the drunk.

“What the fuck’s going on here? What’s happening?” he roared in a voice which

sounded oddly familiar, and only then did the policemen start talking to each other in nervous, low tones:

“Is someone shooting?”

“I think so.”

“What should we do?”

“Call for reinforcements.”

“But he’s getting away.”

“Then we’d better take a
look,” the taller one said, and with
slow,

hesitant

movements, they drew their weapons and went down to
the water.

A dog could be heard

barking

in

the

winter

darkness,

a

small,

bad-

tempered dog, and the wind was blowing hard from the sea. The snow was whirling about and the ground was

slippery. The shorter of the two policemen nearly fell

over, and started flailing his arms like a clown. With a bit of luck they might avoid

running into the man with the weapon. Blomkvist sensed

that the figure would have no

trouble at all in getting rid of those two. The quick and

efficient way in which he had turned and raised his weapon suggested that he was trained for situations like this, and Blomkvist wondered what he himself should do.

He had nothing with which
to defend himself. Yet he got to his feet, brushed the snow from
his coat and looked
down the slope again. The
policemen were working their way along the water's edge towards
the
neighbour's
house. There was no sign of the black-clad man with the gun.
Blomkvist made his way

down too, and as he came around to the front of the house he saw that a window had been smashed in.

There was a large gaping

hole in the house and he wondered

if

he

should

summon the policemen. He never got that far. He heard something, a strange, low

whimpering sound, and so he

stepped through the shattered window into a corridor with a fine oak floor whose pale glow could be seen in the darkness. He walked slowly towards a doorway where the

sound was coming from.

“Balder,” he called out,

“it’s me, Mikael Blomkvist.

Is everything alright?”

There was no answer. But

the whimpering grew louder.

He took a deep breath,

walked into the room – and froze, paralysed with shock.

Afterwards he could not say what he had noticed first, or even what had frightened him

most. It was not necessarily the body on the floor, despite the blood and the empty, rigid expression on its face.

It could have been the scene on the large double bed next to Balder, though it was difficult to make sense of it.

There was a small child,

perhaps seven, eight years old, a boy with fine features and dishevelled, dark-blond hair, wearing blue-checked

pyjamas, who was banging

his

body

against

the

headboard and the wall,

methodically and with force.

The boy's wailing did not sound like that of a crying child, more like someone

trying to hurt himself as much as

he

could.

Before

Blomkvist had time to think straight he hurried over to him, but the boy was kicking

wildly.

“There,” Blomkvist said.

“There, there,” and wrapped his arms around him.

The boy twisted and turned with astonishing strength and managed – possibly because Blomkvist did not want to hold him

too tightly – to tear himself from his embrace and
rush through the door out into the corridor, barefoot over the glass
shards towards the
shattered
window,
with
Blomkvist racing after him shouting “No, no.”
That was when he ran into the two policemen. They
were standing out in the snow with expressions of total

bewilderment.

CHAPTER 11

21.xi

Afterwards it was said that the police had a problem with

their procedures, and that nothing had been done to

cordon off the area until it was too late. The man who shot Professor Balder must have had all the time in the world to make good his

escape,

and

the

first

policemen on the scene,

Detectives Blom and Flinck, known rather scornfully at the station as “the Casanovas”, had taken their time before

raising the alarm, or at least had not done so with the necessary

urgency

or

authority.

The forensic technicians
and investigators from the Violent
Crimes
Division

arrived only at 3.40, at the same time as a young woman
who introduced herself as
Gabriella Grane and who was
assumed to be a relative
because she was so upset.

Later

they

came

to

understand that she was an analyst from Säpo, sent by the chief
of that agency

herself. That did not help Grane;

thanks

to

the

collective misogyny within

the force, or possibly to underline the fact that she was regarded as an outsider, she was given the task of taking care of the child.

“You look as if you know how to handle this sort of thing,” Erik Zetterlund said.

He was the leader of the duty investigating team that night.

He

had

watched

Grane

bending to examine the cuts in the boy's feet, and even though she snapped at him and declared that she had other priorities, she gave in when she looked into the

boy's eyes.

August – as he was called

– was paralysed by fear and for a long time he sat on the floor at the top of the house, wrapped

in

a

duvet,

mechanically

moving

his

hand across a red Persian carpet. Blom, who in other respects had not proved to be very enterprising, managed to find a pair of socks and put sticking plasters on the boy's feet. They noticed too that he

had bruises all over his body and a split lip. According to the
journalist

Mikael

Blomkvist – whose presence created

a

palpable

nervousness in the house –

the boy had been throwing himself against the bed and the wall downstairs and had run in bare feet across the broken glass on the ground floor.

Grane, who for some reason

was

reluctant

to

introduce

herself

to

Blomkvist, realized at once that August was a witness, but she was not able to

establish any sort of rapport with him, nor was she able to give him comfort. Hugs and tenderness of the usual kind were clearly not the right approach. August was at his calmest when Grane simply

sat beside him, a little way away, doing her own thing, and only once did he appear to be paying attention. This was when she was speaking on her mobile to Kraft and referred to the house number, 79. She did not give it much thought at the time, and soon after that she reached an agitated Hanna Balder.

Hanna wanted to have her

son back at once and told

Grane, to her surprise, that she should get out some

jigsaw puzzles, particularly the one of the warship *Vasa*, which she said the boy's

father would have had lying around somewhere. She did

not describe her ex-husband as having taken the boy unlawfully, but she had no answer when asked why Westman had been out at the house demanding to have the boy back. It certainly did not seem to be concern for the child that had brought him here.

The fact of the boy's presence did, however, shed light on some of Grane's earlier questions. She now understood why Balder had been evasive about certain things, and why he had not wanted to have a guard dog.

In the early morning Grane

arranged for a psychologist and a doctor to take August to his mother in Vasastan,

unless it turned out that he needed more urgent medical attention. Then she was

struck by a different thought.

It occurred to her that the motive for murder might not have been to silence Balder.

The killer could as easily have been wanting to rob him

– not of something as obvious

as money, but of his research.

Grane had no idea what

Balder had been working on during the last year of his life.

Perhaps no-one knew. But it was not difficult to imagine what it might have been: most probably a development of

his A.I. program, which was already

regarded

as

revolutionary when it was

stolen the first time.

His colleagues at Solifon had done everything they could to get a look at it and according to what Balder had once let slip he guarded it as a mother guards her baby, which must mean, Grane

thought, that he kept it next to him while he was asleep. So she told Blom to keep an eye

on August and went down to the bedroom on the ground floor where, in freezing

conditions, the forensic team were working.

“Was there a computer in here?” she said.

The technicians shook their heads and Grane got out her mobile and called Kraft again.

It was soon established that Westman had disappeared.

He must have left the scene

amid the general turmoil, and that made Zetterlund swear and shout, the more so when it transpired that Westman was not to be found at his home either.

Zetterlund

considered

putting out a search bulletin, which prompted his young
colleague Axel Andersson to enquire whether Westman
should

be

treated

as

dangerous. Maybe Andersson

was unable to tell Westman himself

apart

from

the

characters he played on

screen. But to give the man his due, the situation was looking increasingly messy.

The murder was evidently

no ordinary settling of scores within the family, no booze-up gone wrong, no crime

committed in a fit of passion.

It was a cold-blooded, well-planned assault. Matters did

not improve when the chief of provincial police, Jan-Henrik Rolf, weighed in with his assessment that the killing must be treated as an attack on

Swedish

industrial

interests.

Zetterlund

was

finding himself at the heart of an incident of major domestic political importance and even if he were not the brightest mind in the force he realized that what he did now would

have a significant long-term impact.

Zetterlund, who had turned

forty-one two days earlier and was still suffering some of the after-effects of his birthday party, had never been close to taking

charge

of

an

investigation

of

this

importance. The reason he

had now been detailed to do it, if only for a matter of hours, was that there had not

been so many competent people on duty during the night and his superior had chosen not to wake the

National Murder Squad or

any of the more experienced investigators

in

the

Stockholm police.

Accordingly

Zetterlund

found himself in the midst of this confusion, feeling less and less sure of himself, and was soon shouting out his

orders. To begin with he was trying to set in train an effective

door-to-door

enquiry. He wanted rapidly to gather as much testimony as possible, even if he was not expecting to get very much out of it. It was night-time, and dark, and there was a storm blowing. The people

living nearby had most likely not seen anything at all. But you never knew. So he had

himself

questioned

Blomkvist, though God only knew what he was doing

there.

The presence of one of

Sweden's

best-known

journalists did not make

matters any easier and for a while Zetterlund imagined

that

Blomkvist

was

examining him critically with a view to writing a tell-all.

Probably that was just his

insecurity. Blomkvist himself was shaken and throughout

the

interview

he

was

unfailingly polite and keen to help. But he was not able to provide much in the way of information.

It

had

all

happened so quickly and that in itself was significant, the journalist told him.

There had been something

brutal and efficient about the way in which the suspect

moved, and Blomkvist said that it would not be too far-fetched to speculate that the man either was or had been a

soldier, possibly even special forces. His way of spinning around to aim and fire his weapon

had

seemed

practised. He had a lamp

strapped to his tight-fitting black cap, and Blomkvist had

not been able to make out any of his features.

He had been too far away, he said, and had thrown

himself to the ground in the instant the figure had turned around. He should thank his lucky stars that he was still alive. He could only describe the body and the clothes, and that he did very well.

According to the journalist, the man did not seem all that young, he could have been over forty. He was fit and

taller than average, between 185 and 195 centimetres,
powerfully built with a slim waist and broad shoulders, wearing
boots and black,
military-style clothes. He was carrying a rucksack and
looked to have a knife
strapped to his right leg.

Blomkvist thought that the man had vanished down to
and along the water's edge, past the neighbouring houses,
and that also matched Blom's and Flinck's accounts. The
policemen had admittedly not

seen the man at all. But they had

heard

his

footsteps

disappearing down along the sea and set off in vain pursuit, or so they claimed. Zetterlund had his doubts about that.

He presumed Blom and

Flinck had chickened out, and had stood there in the

darkness, fearful and doing

nothing. In any event, that was the moment when the big

mistake was made. Instead of

identifying

escape

routes

from the area and trying to cordon it off, nothing much seems to have happened. At that point Flinck and Blom were not yet aware that

someone had been killed and as soon as they knew they had had their hands full

copied with a barefoot boy

running hysterically out of the house. Certainly it cannot have been easy to keep a cool head. Yet they had lost

precious time and, though

Blomkvist exercised restraint when describing the events, it was plain to see that even he was critical. He had twice asked the policemen if they had sounded the alarm and got a nod for an answer.

Later on, when Blomkvist overheard

a

conversation

between

Flinck

and

the

operations centre, he realized that the nod was most likely a no, or at best some sort of bewildered failure to grasp the enormity of what had

happened. It had taken a long time for the alarm to be raised and even then things had not proceeded as they should

have,

probably

because

Flinck's

account

of

the

situation had not been clear.

The paralysis had spread to

other levels. Zetterlund was infinitely glad he could not be blamed for that – at that point he had not yet become involved in the investigation.

On the other hand he was here, and he should at least try to avoid making a mess of things. His personal record had not been so impressive

recently and this was an opportunity to put his best foot forward.

He was at the door to the living room and had just

finished a call to Milton Security about the character who had been seen on the security camera earlier that night. He did not at all fit the description Mikael Blomkvist

had given of the presumed murderer. He looked like a skinny old junkie, albeit one who must have possessed a high level of technical skill.

Milton Security believed that the man had hacked the alarm system and put all the cameras and sensors out of action.

That certainly did not make matters any easier. It was not only the

professional

planning. It was the idea of committing a murder in spite of police protection and a sophisticated alarm system.

How

arrogant

is

that?

Zetterlund had been about to go down to the forensic team on the ground floor, but he stayed

upstairs,

deeply

troubled, staring into space until his gaze fastened on Balder's son. He was their key witness but incapable of speech, nor did he understand a word they said. In other

words pretty much what one might

expect

in

this

shambles.

The boy was holding a

small, single piece of an extremely complex puzzle.

Zetterlund started towards the curved staircase leading to the ground floor – then he stopped dead. He thought

back to his initial impression of the child. When he arrived on the scene, not knowing

very much about what had happened,

the

boy

had

seemed the same as any other

child. Zetterlund would have described him as an unusually pretty but normal-looking boy with curly hair and a shocked look in his eyes. Only later did he learn that the boy was autistic

and

severely

handicapped.

That,

he

thought,

meant

that

the

murderer either knew him

from before or else was aware of his condition. Otherwise he would hardly have let him live and risk being identified in a witness parade, would he? Although Zetterlund did not give himself time to think this through in full, the hunch excited him and he took a few hurried paces towards the

boy.

“We must question him at

once,” he said, in a voice that
came out louder and more urgent than he had intended.

“For heaven’s sake, take it easy with him,” Blomkvist
said.

“Don’t

you

interfere,”

Zetterlund snapped. “He may have known the killer. We have to
get out some pictures and show them to him.

Somehow we must ...”

The boy interrupted him by
slamming the puzzle with his
hand in a sudden sweeping movement.

Zetterlund

muttered an apology and
went downstairs to join his forensic team.

Blomkvist remained there,

looking at the boy. It felt as if something else was about to happen with him, perhaps a new outburst, and the last thing he wanted was for the

child to hurt himself again.

The boy stiffened and began to make furiously rapid circular movements over the rug with his right hand.

Then

he

stopped

and

looked up pleadingly. Though
Blomkvist
asked
himself
what that might mean, he
dropped the thought when the
policeman whose name he
now knew to be Blom sat
down with the boy and tried

to get him to do the puzzle again. Blomkvist went into the kitchen to get some peace and quiet. He was exhausted and wanted to go home. But apparently he first had to look at some pictures from a

surveillance camera. He had no idea when that was going to happen. It was all taking a long

time

and

seemed

disorganized, and Blomkvist was longing for his bed.

He had spoken to Berger twice by then and told her what had happened. They

agreed that Blomkvist should write a longer piece about the murder for the next issue. Not just because the crime itself was obviously a major drama

and Professor Balder's life was worth describing, but

Blomkvist had a personal

connection to the story and that would raise its quality

and give him an advantage over the competition. The

dramatic telephone call alone, in the middle of the night, which had got him here in the first place, would give his article an edge.

The Serner situation and
the crisis at the magazine were
implicit
in
their
conversation.

Berger
had
already planned for their

temp Andrei Zander to do the preliminary research while Blomkvist got some sleep.

She had said rather firmly –

like

someone

halfway

between a loving mother and an authoritative editor-in-chief – that she refused to have her star reporter dead from exhaustion before the work had even begun.

Blomkvist

accepted

without protest. Zander was ambitious and amicable and it

would be nice to wake up and find all the spadework done, ideally also with lists of people close to Balder whom he should be interviewing.

For a little while Blomkvist welcomed the distraction of reflecting

on

Zander's

persistent

problems

with

women, which had been

confided

to

him

during

evening

sessions

at

the

Kvarnen beer hall. Zander

was young, intelligent and handsome. He ought to be a catch. But because there was something soft and needy in his character, he was time and again being dumped, and that

was painful for him. Zander was an incorrigible romantic, forever dreaming about the big scoop and love with a capital L.

Blomkvist sat down at

Balder's kitchen table and

looked out at the darkness. In front of him, next to a

matchbox, a copy of the *New Scientist* and a pad of paper with some incomprehensible

equations

on

it,

lay

a

beautiful but slightly ominous drawing of a street crossing.

A man with watery, squinting

eyes and thin lips was

standing next to a traffic light. He was caught in a fleeting moment and yet you

could see every wrinkle in his face and the folds in his quilted jacket and trousers.

He did not look pleasant. He had a heart-shaped mole on his chin.

Yet the striking thing about

the drawing was the traffic light. It shone with an

eloquent, troubling glow, and was

skilfully

executed

according to some sort of mathematical technique. You

could

almost

see

the

underlying geometrical lines.

Balder must have enjoyed

doing drawings on the side.

Blomkvist wondered, though, about

the

unconventional

choice of subject. On the other hand, why would a

person like Balder draw

sunsets and ships? A traffic light was probably just as interesting to him as anything else. Blomkvist was intrigued

by the fact that the drawing looked like a snapshot. Even if Balder had sat and studied the traffic light, he could hardly have asked the man to

cross the street over and over again.

Maybe

he

was

imagined, or Balder had a photographic memory, just

like ... Blomkvist grew

thoughtful. He picked up his mobile and for the third time called Berger.

“Are you on your way home?” she asked.

“Not yet, unfortunately.

There are a couple of things I still need to look at. But I’d like you to do me a favour.”

“What else am I here for?”

“Could you go to my
computer and log in? You
know my password, don’t
you?”

“I know everything about

you.”

“Then go into Documents and open a file called LISBETH
STUFF.”

“I think I have an idea
where this is going.”

“Oh? Here’s what I’d like you to write ...”

“Wait a second, I have to open it first. O.K., now ...
Hold on, there are already a few things here.”

“Ignore them. This is what I want, right at the top. Are

you with me?”

“Yes, I’m with you.”

“Write: ‘Lisbeth, maybe

you already know, but Frans Balder is dead, shot in the head. Can you find out why someone

wanted

to

kill

him?’”

“Is that all?”

“Well, it’s rather a lot

considering that we haven’t been in touch for ages. She’ll probably think it’s cheeky of

me to ask. But I don’t think it would hurt to have her help.”

“A little illegal hacking

wouldn’t go amiss, you

mean?”

“I didn’t hear that. I’ll see you soon, I hope.”

“I hope so.”

Salander had managed to go back to sleep, and woke again at 7.30. She was not on top

form; she had a headache and she felt nauseous. Yet she felt better than she had in the night. She bandaged her

hand, dressed, had a breakfast of two microwaved meat

piroshki and a large glass of Coca-Cola, then she stuffed some work-out clothes into a sports bag and left the

apartment. The storm had

subsided, leaving rubbish and newspapers lying all over the

city. She walked down from Mosebacke torg and along

Götgatan,

muttering

to

herself.

She looked angry and at

least

two

people

were

alarmed enough to get out of her way. But Salander was merely determined. She was not

looking

forward

to

working out, she just wanted to stick to her routine and drive the toxins out of her

body. So she continued down to Hornsgatan, and just before Hornsgatspuckeln she turned into the Zero boxing club, which was down one flight of

stairs in the basement. It seemed more run-down than
ever that morning.

The place could have used a coat of paint and some general
freshening up. It

seemed

as

if

no

improvements had been made

since the '70s. Posters of Ali and Foreman were still on the walls. It looked just like the day after that legendary bout in Kinshasa, possibly due to the fact that Obinze, the man in charge of the premises, had seen the fight live as a small boy and had afterwards run around in the liberating

monsoon rain shouting “Ali Bomaye!” That double-time

canter was not just his

happiest memory, it also marked what he called the last moment of “the days of innocence”.

Not long after he and his family had been forced to flee Mobutu’s terror and nothing had ever been the same again.

Maybe it was not so strange that he wanted to preserve that moment in history, carry it

with

him

to

this

godforsaken boxing hall in

the Södermalm district of Stockholm. Obinze was still constantly talking about the fight. But then he was always constantly

talking

about

something or other.

He was tall and mighty and

bald-headed, a chatterbox of epic proportions and one of many in the gym who quite fancied Salander, even if like many others he thought she was more or less crazy.

Periodically she would train harder than anyone else in there and go at the punch-balls, punchbags and her

sparring

partners

like

a

madwoman. She possessed a

kind of primitive, furious energy which Obinze had

seldom come across.

Once, before he got to

know her, he had suggested that she take up competitive boxing.

The derisive snort he

got in response stopped him from asking again, though he had never understood why

she trained so hard. Not that he really needed to know –

one could train hard for no reason at all. It was better than drinking hard. It was better than lots of things.

Maybe it was true, as she said to him late one evening about a year ago, that she wanted to be physically

prepared in case she ever ended up in difficulties again.

He knew that there had been trouble before. He had read every single word about her on the net and understood what it meant to be prepared in case some evil shadow

from the past turned up. Both his

parents

had

been

murdered by Mobutu's thugs.

What he did not understand

was why, at regular intervals,

Salander gave up training altogether, not exercising at all, eating nothing but junk food. When she came into the

gym that morning – as

demonstratively dressed in

black and pierced as ever – he had not seen her for two weeks.

“Hello, gorgeous. Where

have you been?”

“Doing something highly

illegal.”

“I

can

just

imagine.

Beating the crap out of some motorbike

gang

or

something.”

But she did not even rise to

the jest. She just marched angrily

in

towards

the

changing room and he did

something he knew she

would hate: he stepped in front of her and looked her straight in the face.

“Your eyes are bright red.”

“I’ve got the mother of all hangovers. Out of my way!”

“In that case I don’t want to see you in here, you know that.”

“Skip the crap. I want you to drive the shit out of me,”

she spat, and ducked past him to get changed. When she

emerged wearing her outsized

boxing shorts and white vest with the black skull on the chest, he saw nothing for it

but to go ahead and let her have it.

He pushed her until she

threw up three times in his waste-paper bin. He gave her as much grief as he could.

She gave him plenty of lip back. Then she went off and changed and left the gym

without even a goodbye. As so often at such moments

Obinze was overcome by a
feeling of emptiness. Maybe
he was even a little in love.

He was certainly stirred –

how could one not be by a girl who boxed like that?

The last he saw of her was

her calves disappearing up the stairs so he could not know that
the ground swayed

beneath her feet as she came out

onto

Hornsgatan.

Salander

braced

herself

against the wall of the

building

and

breathed

heavily. Then she set off in the direction of her apartment on Fiskargatan. Once home

she drank another large glass of Coca-Cola and half a litre of juice, then she crashed onto her bed and looked at the ceiling for ten, fifteen minutes, thinking about this and that, about singularities and

event

horizons

and

certain special aspects of

Schrödinger's equation, and Ed Needham.

She waited for the world to

regain its usual colours before she got up and went to her computer. However reluctant she might be, she was drawn to it by a force which had not grown weaker since her

childhood. But this morning she was not in the mood for any wild escapades. She

hacked

into

Mikael

Blomkvist's computer. In the next moment she froze. They had been joking about Balder

and now Blomkvist wrote
that he had been murdered, shot in the head.

“Jesus,” she muttered and
had a look at the online evening papers.

There was no explicit
mention of Balder, but it was not difficult to work out that the
“Swedish academic shot
at his home in Saltsjöbaden”
was indeed him. For the time

being, the police were being tight-lipped and journalists had not managed to turn up a

great deal, no doubt because they had not yet cottoned on to how big the story was.

Other events from the night took precedence: the storm and the power outage right across the country and the scandalous delays on the

railways. There was also the odd celebrity news item

which Salander could not be bothered to try to understand.

The only facts reported on the murder were that it had taken place around 3.00 in the morning and that the police were seeking

witnesses in the neighbourhood, for reports of anything untoward.
So far

there were no suspects, but apparently

witnesses

had

spotted

unknown

and

suspicious persons on the

property. The police were

looking for more information on them. At the end of the articles it said that a press conference was going to be held later that day, led by Chief

Inspector

Jan

Bublanski. Salander gave a wistful smile. She had had a fair bit of history with

Bublanski

—

or

Officer

Bubble, as he was sometimes called – and she thought that so long as they didn't put any idiots onto his team the

investigation would turn out to be reasonably effective.

Then she read Blomkvist's

message again. He needed

help and without thinking

twice she wrote "O.K.", not only because it was he who was asking. It was personal.

She did not do grief, at least

not in the conventional way.

Anger, on the other hand, yes, a cold ticking rage. And

though she had a certain

respect for Jan Bublanski she was not usually inclined to trust the forces of law and order.

She was used to taking

matters into her own hands and she had all sorts of reasons to want to find out why Frans Balder had been

murdered. Because it was no coincidence that she had

sought him out and taken an interest in his situation. His enemies were most likely her

enemies too.

It had begun with the old question of whether in some sense her father lived on.

Alexander Zalachenko – Zala

– had not only killed her mother and destroyed her

childhood,

he

had

also

established and controlled a criminal network, sold drugs and arms and made a living exploiting and humiliating

women. She was convinced

that that sort of evil never goes away. It merely migrates into other forms. Ever since that day just over a year ago when she had woken up at dawn at Hotel Schloss Elmau

in

the

Bavarian

Alps,

Salander had been pursuing

her own investigation into what had become of his
legacy.

For the most part his old comrades seemed to have

turned into losers, depraved bandits, revolting pimps or small-time
crooks. Not one of them was a villain on her father's level, and for
a long time

Salander

remained

convinced

that

the

organization had changed and

dissolved after Zalachenko's death. Yet she did not give up,

and

eventually

she

stumbled on something which

pointed

in

a

wholly

unexpected direction. It was a reference to one of Zala's young acolytes, a man called Sigfrid Gruber.

Already

during

Zala's

lifetime, Gruber was one of the more intelligent people in the network, and unlike his

colleagues he had earned himself degrees in both

computer

science

and

business

administration,

which had apparently given him access to more exclusive

circles.

These

days

he

cropped up in a couple of alleged crimes against high-tech companies: thefts of new technology, extortion, insider trading, hacker attacks.

Normally, Salander would have followed the lead no further. Not just because it seemed to have little to do with

her

father's

old

activities. Also, nothing could worry her less than a couple of rich business groups being fleeced of some of their

innovations.

But

then

everything had changed.

In a classified report from Government Communications

Headquarters in Cheltenham, England, which she had got her hands on, she had come across

some

codenames

associated

with

a

gang

Gruber seemed now to belong

to. The names had set some bells ringing, and after that she had not been able to let go of the story. She put together all the information she could find about the

group and kept coming across

a

rumour

that

the

organization

had

stolen

Balder's A.I. technology, and then sold it to the Russian–

American games company,

Truegames. Her source was

unreliable – a half-open

hacker site – but it was for this reason that she had

turned up at the professor's lecture at the Royal Institute of
Technology and given him

a

hard

time

about

singularities deep

within

black holes. Or that was part of the reason.

PART II

THE LABYRINTHS

OF MEMORY

21 – 23.xi

People with a photographic memory are also said to have an eidetic memory.*

Research shows that people with eidetic memories are more likely to be nervous and stressed than others.

Most, though not all, people with eidetic memories are autistic. There is also a connection between

photographic

memory

and

synaesthesia – the condition where two or more senses are connected, for example when numbers are seen in colour and every series of numbers forms an image in the mind.

CHAPTER 12

21.xi

Jan Bublanski had been

looking forward to a day off

and a long conversation with Rabbi Goldman of the Söder
congregation about certain

questions which had been

troubling

him

recently,

chiefly

concerning

the

existence of God.

It would be going too far to

say that he was becoming an atheist. But the very notion of a

God

had

become

increasingly problematic for him and he wanted to discuss

his persistent feelings of the meaninglessness of it all, which

were

often

accompanied by dreams of

handing in his notice.

Bublanski

certainly

considered himself to be a good investigator. His record of clearing up cases was on the whole outstanding and

occasionally he was still

stimulated by the job. But he was not sure he wanted to go

on investigating murders. He could learn some new skill while there was still time. He dreamed

about

teaching,

helping young people to find their path and believe in themselves, maybe because

he himself suffered from

bouts of the deepest self-doubt – but he did not know which subject he would

choose.

He

had

never

specialized in one particular

field, aside from that which had become his lot in life: sudden evil death and morbid

human perversions. That was definitely not something he wanted to teach.

It was 8.10 in the morning and he was at his bathroom mirror. He felt puffy, worn out

and

bald.

Absent-

mindedly he picked up I.B.

Singer's novel, *The Magician of Lublin*, which he had loved

with such a passion that for many years he had kept it next to the lavatory in case he felt like reading it at times when

his

stomach

was

playing up. But now he only managed a few lines. The telephone rang and his mood did not improve when he recognized the number: Chief

Prosecutor Richard Ekström.

A call from Ekström meant not just work, but probably work with a political and media element to it. Ekström would otherwise

have

wriggled out of it like a snake.

“Hi, Richard, nice to hear from you,” Bublanski lied.

“But I’m afraid I’m busy.”

“What ...? No, no, not too busy for this, Jan. You can’t miss out on this one. I heard that you’d taken the day off.”

“That’s right, and I’m just off to ...” He did not want to

say to his synagogue. His Jewishness was not popular in the force “... see my

doctor,” he went on.

“Are you sick?”

“Not really.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? Nearly sick?”

“Something like that.”

“Well, in that case there’s no problem. We’re all nearly sick, aren’t we? This is an important case, Jan. The

Minister of Enterprise has been in touch, and she agrees that you should handle the investigation.”

“I find it very hard to

believe the minister knows who I am.”

“Well, maybe not by name,

and she’s not supposed to be interfering anyway. But we’re

all agreed that we need a big player.”

“Flattery no longer works

with me, Richard. What’s it about?”

he

said,

and

immediately regretted it. Just asking was halfway to saying yes and he could tell that Ekström accepted it as such.

“Last night Professor Frans

Balder was murdered at his home in Saltsjöbaden.”

“And who is he?”

“One of our best-known scientists, of international renown.

He’s

a

world

authority on A.I. technology.”

“On *what?*”

“He was working on neural networks and digital quantum processes, that sort of thing.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“He was trying to get computers

to

think,

to

replicate the human brain.”

Replicate the

human

brain? Bublanski wondered what Rabbi Goldman would

make of that.

“They say he’s been a

victim of industrial espionage in the past,” Ekström said.

“And that’s why the murder is attracting the attention of the Ministry of Enterprise. No doubt you’re aware of the solemn

declarations

the

minister has made about the

absolute

requirement

to

protect Swedish research and new technology.”

“Maybe.”

“It would seem that this

Balder was under some sort of threat. He had police protection.”

“Are you saying he was

killed while under police protection?”

“Well, it wasn’t the most effective protection in the

world. It was Flinck and Blom from the regular force.”

“The Casanovas?”

“Yes. They were assigned

the duty late last night at the height of the storm and the general confusion. But in

their defence it has to be said that the whole situation was a total shambles. Balder was shot while our men were

dealing with a drunk who had

turned up at the house, out of

nowhere. Unsurprisingly, the killer took advantage of that moment of inattention.”

“Doesn’t sound good.”

“No,

it

looks

very

professional, and on top of it all the burglar alarm seems to have been hacked.”

“So there were several of them?”

“We

believe

so.

Furthermore, there are some tricky details.”

“Which the media are going to like?”

“Which the media are

going to love,” Ekström said.

“The lush who turned up, for

example, was none other than

Lasse Westman.”

“The actor?”

“The same. And that’s a
real problem.”

“Because it’ll be all over the front pages?”

“Partly that, yes, but also because there’s a risk we’ll end up with
a load of sticky divorce issues on our hands.

Westman claimed he was

there to bring home the eight-year-old son of his partner.

Balder had the boy there with him, a boy who ... hang on a moment ... I want to get this right ... who is certainly Balder's biological son, but who, according to a custody ruling, he's not competent to look after."

"Why wouldn't a professor who can get computers to behave like people be capable of looking after his own child?"

"Because previously he

had shown a shocking lack of
responsibility. He was a
completely hopeless father, if I've understood it right. It's all rather
sensitive. This little
boy,
who
wasn't
even
supposed to have been at

Balder's, probably witnessed the killing.”

“Jesus! And what does he

say?”

“Nothing.”

“Is he in shock?”

“He must be, but he never says anything anyway. He's mute and apparently disabled, so he's not going to be much

good to us.”

“I see. So there's no suspect.”

“Unless there was a reason
why Westman appeared at
precisely the same time as the killer entered the ground
floor.

You

should

get

Westman in for questioning.”

“If I decide to take on the investigation.”

“As you will.”

“Are you so sure of that?”

“In my view you have no choice. Besides, I’ve saved the best for last.”

“And that is?”

“Mikael Blomkvist.”

“What about him?”

“For some reason he was

out there too. I think Balder had asked to see him, to tell him something.”

“In the middle of the
night?”

“So it would seem.”

“And then he was shot?”

“Just

before

Blomkvist

rang the bell – and it seems the

journalist

caught

a

glimpse of the killer.”

Bublanski snorted. It was

an inappropriate reaction in every conceivable way and he

could not have explained it even to himself. Perhaps it was nerves, or a feeling that life was repeating itself.

“I’m sorry?” Ekström said.

“Just got a bit of a cough.

So you're worried that you'll end

up

with

a

private

investigator on your back, one who'll show you all up in a bad light.”

“Hmm, yes, maybe. We're

assuming that *Millennium* have already got going with the story and right now I'm trying to find some legal justification

for

stopping

them, or at least see to it that

they're restricted in some way. I won't rule out that this case is to be regarded as a matter

affecting

national

security.”

“So we're saddled with

Säpo as well?”

“No comment.”

Go to hell, Bublanski thought. “Are Olofsson and the

others

at

Industry

Protection working on this?”

“No comment, as I said.

When

can

you

start?”

Ekström said.

“I’ll do it, but I have some
conditions,” Bublanski said.

“I want my usual team:

Modig, Svensson, Holmberg
and Flod.”

“Of course, O.K., but you get Hans Faste as well.”

“No way!”

“Sorry, Jan, that’s not negotiable. You should be grateful you get to choose all the others.”

“You’re the bitter end, you know that?”

“I’ve heard it said.”

“So Faste’s going to be our

own little mole from Säpo?”

“Nonsense. I happen to

think that all teams benefit from someone who thinks differently.”

“Meaning that when the

rest of us have got rid of all

our

prejudices

and

preconceived notions, we're stuck with somebody who will take us back to square one?"

"Don't be absurd."

"Faste is an idiot."

"No, Jan, he isn't. He's just

...

"What?"

"Conservative. He's not

someone who falls for the latest feminist fads."

“Or for the earliest ones either. He may have just got his head around all that stuff about votes for women.”

“Come on, Jan, get a grip.

Faste is an extremely reliable and loyal investigator, and I won't listen to any more of this. Any other requests?”

How about you go take a running jump?

Bublanski

thought. “I need to go to my doctor's appointment, and in the meantime I want Modig to lead the investigation,” he said.

“Is that really such a wise idea?”

“It’s a damned wise idea,”

he growled.

“O.K., O.K., I’ll see to it that Zetterlund hands over to her,”
Ekström said with a wince.

Ekström was now far from

sure he should have agreed to

take on this investigation.

Alona Casales rarely worked nights. She had managed to avoid them for a decade and justified her stance on the grounds that her rheumatism forced her from time to time to take strong cortisone

tablets, which not only turned her face into the shape of a full moon, but also raised her

blood pressure. She needed her sleep and her routine. Yet here she was, at 3.10 in the morning.

She had driven from her

home in Laurel, Maryland, in

a light rain, past the sign saying “N.S.A. NEXT RIGHT –

STAFF ONLY”, past the barriers and

the

electric

fence,

towards the black, cube-like main building in Fort Meade.

She left her car in the

sprawling

parking

area

alongside the pale blue golf-ball-like radome with its

myriad dish aerials, and made her way through the security gates up to her workstation on the twelfth floor. She was surprised by the feverish

atmosphere there and soon
realized that it was Ed
Needham and his young
hacker
team
who
were
responsible for the heightened
concentration hanging over the department.

Needham looked like a
man possessed and was
standing there bawling out a young man whose face shone
with an icy pallor, a pretty weird guy, Casales thought, just like all
those young genius hackers Needham had surrounded himself
with. The
kid was skinny and anaemic-looking with a hairstyle from
hell,
and
had

strangely

rounded

shoulders

which

shook with some sort of

spasm.

Maybe

he

was

frightened.

He

shuddered

every now and then, and it did not help matters that Needham was kicking at his chair leg. The young man

looked as if he were waiting for a slap, a clip across the ear. But then something

unexpected happened.

Needham calmed down and ruffled the boy's hair like a loving father. That was not like him. He did not go in for demonstrative affection. He was a cowboy who would

never do anything as dubious
as hug another man. But
perhaps he was now so
desperate
that
he
was
prepared to give normal
humanity a go. Ed's zip was undone and he had spilled

coffee or Coca-Cola on his shirt. His face was an unhealthy flushed colour, his voice hoarse and rough from shouting. Casales thought that no-one of his age and weight should be pushing himself so hard.

Although only half a day

had gone by, it looked as if Needham and his boys had been living there for a week.

There were coffee cups and

fast-food

remnants

and

discarded caps and college jerseys everywhere, and a

rank stench of sweat and

tension in the air. The team was clearly in the process of turning
the whole world

upside down in their efforts to trace the hacker. She called out to
them in a hearty tone:

“Go for it, guys! ... Fix the

bastard!”

She did not really mean it.

Secretly she thought the
breach was amusing. Many of
these programmers seemed to
think they could do whatever liked, as if they had carte blanche,
and it might actually do them some good to see that the other side
could hit back. Here in the Puzzle
Palace their shortcomings
only showed when they were confronted with something
dire, as was happening now.
She had been woken by a call

saying that the Swedish
professor had been murdered at
his
home
outside

Stockholm, and even though that in itself was not a big deal for
the N.S.A. – not yet, at any rate – it did mean something to
Casales.

The killing showed that she
had read the signs right, and now she had to see if she

could move forward one more step. She logged in and

opened

the

diagrammatic

overview of the organization she had been tracking. The evasive
Thanos sat right at the top, but there were also names of real
people like the member of the Russian Duma

Ivan

Gribanov,

and

the

German, Gruber.

She did not understand

why the N.S.A. gave such

low priority to the matter, and why

her

superiors

kept

suggesting that other, more mainstream law-enforcement

agencies should be taking

care of it. They could not rule out the possibility that the network had state backing, or links

to

Russian

state

intelligence, and that it was all to do with the trade war between East and West. Even

though the evidence was

sparse and ambiguous, there were indications that western technology was being stolen and ending up in Russian hands.

But it was difficult to get a clear view of this tangled web or even to know whether any

crime had been committed –

perhaps it was purely by

chance

that

a

similar

technology

had

been

developed somewhere else.

These days, industrial theft was an altogether nebulous concept.
Assets were being borrowed

all

the

time,
sometimes as a part of
creative
exchanges,
sometimes just dressed up to seem legitimate.
Large businesses, bolstered
by
threatening
lawyers,

regularly scared the living daylights
out
of
small
companies,
and
nobody
seemed to find it odd that individual
innovators

had

almost

no

legal

rights.

Besides

which,

industrial

espionage and hacker attacks were often regarded as little more than routine research in a competitive environment.

You could hardly claim that the

N.S.A.

crowd

were

helping

to

raise

ethical

standards in the field.

On the other hand, it was not so easy to view murder in relative terms, and Casales took a solemn vow to leave no stone unturned in trying to unseat Thanos. She did not get far. In fact she only managed to stretch her arms and massage her neck before she heard puffing and panting behind her.

Needham looked dreadful.

His back must have given out

on him too. Her own neck felt better just looking at him.

“Ed, to what do I owe this honour?”

“I’m thinking you and I are
working
on
the
same
problem.”

“Park your butt, old man.”

“You know, from my
limited perspective ...”

“Don’t
knock
yourself,
Ed.”

“I’m not knocking myself at all. It’s no secret I couldn’t care less who’s high or low, who thinks this and who thinks that. I focus on my own stuff. I protect our systems, and the only thing that really impresses me is when people are good at their jobs.”

“You’d hire the Devil

himself if he was any good in I.T.”

“I can respect just about any enemy, if he knows what he’s doing. Does that make sense to you?”

“It does.”

“As I’m sure you’ve heard,

a rootkit’s been used to

access our server and install a R.A.T., and that program,

Alona, is like pure music. So compact

and

beautifully

written.”

“You’ve met a worthy opponent.”

“Without a doubt, and my

guys feel the same way.

They’re

putting

on

this

outraged patriotic act or

whatever the hell it is we're supposed to do. But actually they want nothing more than to meet that hacker and pit their skills against his, and for a while I thought: O.K., get over it! Maybe the damage

isn't so great after all. This is just one genius hacker who wants to show off, and maybe

there's a silver lining. I mean, we've already learned a lot about

our

vulnerability

chasing after this clown. But then I began to wonder if maybe I was being conned –

maybe

the

whole

performance on my mail

server

was

just

a

smokescreen,

hiding

something

altogether

different.”

“Such as?”

“Such as a search for

certain

pieces

of

information.”

“Now I’m curious.”

“You should be. We’ve

identified which areas the hacker was checking out and basically it’s all related to the same thing, the network

you’ve been working on,

Alona. They call themselves the Spiders, don’t they?”

“The Spider Society, to be precise. But I think it’s some kind of joke.”

“The hacker was looking

for information on that group and their connections to

Solifon and that made me

think, maybe he’s with them and wants to find out how much we know about them.”

“That

sounds

possible.

They know how to hack.”

“But then I changed my

mind.”

“Why?”

“Because it looks like the hacker also wanted to show us something. You know, he got himself superuser status which gave him access to

documents maybe even you

haven't

seen,

highly

classified stuff. But actually

the file he uploaded is so heavily encrypted that neither he nor we have the slightest chance of reading it unless the fucker who wrote it gives us the private keys. Anyway

...”

“What?”

“The

hacker

revealed

through our own system that we cooperate with Solifon too, the same way the Spiders do. Did you know that?"

"No, my God, I did not."

"I didn't think so. But

unfortunately what Solifon

does for the Spiders, it also does for us. It's part of our own

industrial-espionage

efforts. That must be why your project is such low

priority.

They're

worried

your investigation will drop us in the shit.”

“Idiots.”

“I'd have to agree with you there. Probably now you'll be taken off the job completely.”

“That

would

be

outrageous.”

“Relax, there’s a loophole.

And that’s why I dragged my

sorry ass all the way over to your desk. Start working for me instead.”

“What do you mean?”

“This

goddamn

hacker

knows

things

about

the

Spiders, and if we can crack his identity we'll both get a break and then you'll be able to see your investigation

through.”

“I see what you're saying.”

“So it's a yes?”

“It’s a sort of,” she said. “I want to focus on finding out who shot Frans Balder.”

“And you’ll keep me informed?”

“O.K.”

“Good.”

“Tell me,” she said, “if this hacker is so clever, won’t he have covered his tracks?”

“No need to worry about

that. No matter how smart he's been, we'll find him and we'll flay him alive."

"What happened to all that respect for your opponent?"

"It's still there, my friend.

But we'll crush him all the same and lock him up for life.

No fucker breaks into my system."

CHAPTER 13

21.xi

Once again Blomkvist did not
get much sleep. He could not
get the events of the night out of his head and at 11.15 he gave
up.

He went into the kitchen
where he made himself two sandwiches with cheddar and
prosciutto and a bowl of
yoghurt and muesli. But he did not eat much of it. He opted
instead for coffee and water and some headache
pills. He drank five glasses of Ramlösa,

swallowed

two

Alvedon, took out a notebook and tried to write a summary of what had happened. He did

not

get

far

before

the

telephone started ringing.

The news was out: “Star
reporter Mikael Blomkvist

and

T.V.

star

Lasse

Westman”

had

found
themselves at the centre of a
“mysterious” murder drama,
mysterious because no-one
was able to work out why
Westman and Blomkvist of all
people,
together
or

separately, had been on the scene

when

a

Swedish

professor was shot in the head. The questions seemed to be insinuating something sinister and that was why Blomkvist quite candidly said that he had gone there,

despite the lateness of the hour, because Balder had

asked to speak to him urgently.

“I was there because of my

job.”

He

was

being

more

defensive than he needed to be. He wanted to provide an explanation

for

the

accusations

out

there,

although that might prompt more reporters to dig into the story. Apart from that he said

“No comment”, and if that

was not the ideal response it was at least straightforward and unambiguous. After that he turned off his mobile, put his father’s old fur coat back on again and set out in the direction of Götgatan.

So much was going on at

the office that it reminded him of the old days. All over the place,
in every corner, there were colleagues sitting and

working

with

concentration. Berger was bound to have made one or two
impassioned speeches

and everybody must have

been

aware

of

the

significance of the moment.

The deadline was just ten days away. There was also the threat from Ove Levin and Serner hanging over them

and the whole team seemed up for the fight. They all jumped to their feet when

they saw him and asked to hear about Balder and the night, and his reaction to the Norwegians' proposal. But he

wanted to follow their good example.

“Later, later,” he said, and went to Andrei Zander’s

desk.

Zander

was

twenty-six

years

old,

the

youngest

person in the office. He had done his time as an intern at

the magazine and had stayed on, sometimes as a temp, as now,
and sometimes as a

freelancer.

It

pained

Blomkvist that they had not been able to give him a

permanent

job,

especially

since they had hired Emil Grandén and Sofie Melker.

He would have preferred to take on Zander. But Zander had not yet made a name for

himself, and he still had a lot to learn.

He was a superb team

player, and that was good for the

magazine,

but

not

necessarily good for him. Not in this cynical business. The boy
was
not
conceited
enough, although he had
every reason to be. He looked like
a
young
Antonio

Banderas, and was quicker on
the uptake than most. But he
did not go to any lengths to promote himself. He just
wanted to be a part of it all and produce good journalism and he
thought the world of *Millennium*.

Blomkvist

suddenly felt that he loved everyone

who

loved

Millennium. One fine day he would do something big for young Zander.

“Hi, Andrei,” he said.

“How are things?”

“Not bad. Busy.”

“I expected nothing less.

What have you managed to

dig up?”

“Quite a bit. It’s on your desk, and I’ve also written a summary. But can I give you

some advice?”

“Good advice is exactly

what I need.”

“In that case go straight to Zinkens väg, to see Farah Sharif.”

“Who?”

“A

seriously

gorgeous

professor

of

computer

science. She's taken the

whole day off."

"Are you saying that what I

really need right now is an attractive,

intelligent

woman."

"Not exactly that, no.

Professor Sharif just called and was under the impression

that Balder had wanted to tell

you something. She thinks she knows what it may have been all about, and she's keen to talk to you. Maybe to carry out his wishes. I think it sounds like an ideal place to start."

"Have you checked her out

otherwise?"

"Sure,

and

we

can't

altogether

rule

out

the

possibility that she has an agenda of her own. But she

was close to Balder. They were at university together and

have

co-authored

a

couple of scientific papers.

There are also a few society-page photos which show the two of them together. She's a big name in her field."

"O.K., I'll go. Will you let

her know I'm on my way?"

"I will," Zander said, and gave Blomkvist the address.

So Blomkvist left the office

almost immediately, just as he had the previous day, and began to leaf through the research material as he was walking

down

towards

Hornsgatan. Two or three

times he bumped into people,

but he was concentrating so hard

that

he

scarcely

apologized, and when at last he raised his head, his feet had not taken him as far as Farah Sharif's place.

He had stopped off at Mellqvist's coffee bar and so he

drank

two

double

espressos standing up. Not just to get rid of his tiredness.

He thought a jolt of caffeine might help with his headache, but afterwards he wondered if it had been the right cure. As he left the coffee shop he felt worse than when he had

arrived, but that was because of all the morons who had
read
about
the
night's
dramatic events and were
making idiotic remarks. They
say that young people want nothing more than to become
celebrities.

He

ought

to

explain to them that it is not worth aspiring to. It just drives you nuts, especially if you haven't slept and you've seen things that no human being should have to see.

Blomkvist

went

up

Hornsgatan, past McDonald's

and the Co-op, cut across to Ringvägen, and as he glanced

to the right he stiffened, as if he

had

seen

something

significant. But what? It was just a street crossing with a high traffic-accident rate and vast volumes of exhaust

fumes, nothing more. Then it came to him.

It was the very traffic light Balder had drawn with his mathematical precision, and so once again Blomkvist

puzzled over the choice of subject matter. It was not an in any way unusual crossing; it was run down and banal.

Maybe that was the point.

The work of art is in the eye of the beholder, and even that tells us no more than that Balder had been here, and

had maybe sat on a bench somewhere

studying

the

traffic light. Blomkvist went on past Zinkensdamm sports centre and turned right onto Zinkens väg.

Detective

Sergeant

Sonja

Modig had been running

around all morning. Now she was in her office and looked briefly

at

a

framed

photograph on her desk. It showed her six-year-old son Axel on the football pitch after scoring a goal. Modig was a single parent and had a hell of a time organizing her life. She was expecting to have a hellish time at work in the next few days too. There was a knock on the door. It was Bublanski at last, and she was supposed to be handing over responsibility for the

investigation. Not that Officer Bubble looked as if he wanted to take responsibility for anything at all.

He was looking unusually

dashing in a jacket and tie and a freshly ironed blue shirt. He had combed his hair over his bald patch. There was a dreamy and absent look

on his face, as if murder investigations were the last thing on his mind.

“What did the doctor say?”

she asked.

“The doctor said that what matters is not that we believe in God; God is not small-minded. What matters is for us to understand that life is serious and rich. We should appreciate it and also try to make the world a better place.

Whoever finds a balance

between the two is close to God.”

“So you were actually with your rabbi?”

“Yes.”

“O.K., Jan, I’m not sure if I can help with the bit about appreciating life. Apart from by offering you a piece of Swiss orange chocolate which

I happen to have in my desk drawer. But if we nail the guy who shot Professor Balder

then we’ll definitely make the world a little better.”

“Swiss orange chocolate and a solution to this murder sounds like a decent start.”

Modig broke off a piece of

chocolate and gave it to

Bublanski, who chewed it
with a certain reverence.

“Exquisite,” he said.

“Isn’t it?”

“Just think if life could be like that sometimes,” he said, pointing at
the photograph of the jubilant Axel on her desk.

“What do you mean?”

“If joy could express itself with the same force as pain,”
he said.

“Yes, just imagine.”

“How are things with
Balder’s son?” he said.

“Hard to tell,” she said.

“He’s with his mother now. A
psychologist has assessed
him.”

“And what have we got to go on?”

“Not

much

yet,

unfortunately. We've found

out what the murder weapon was. A Remington 1911 R1

Carry, bought recently. We're going follow it up, but I feel sure we're not going to be able to trace it. We have the images from the surveillance cameras,

which

we're

analysing.

But

whatever

angle we look at we still can't see the man's face, and we

can't spot any distinguishing features

either

—

no

birthmarks, nothing, only a wristwatch which is just

about visible in one sequence.

It looks expensive. The guy's clothes are black. His cap is grey without any branding.

Jerker tells me he moves like an old junkie. In one picture he's holding a small black box, presumably some kind

of

computer

or

G.S.M.

station. He probably used it to hack the alarm system.”

“I'd heard that. How *do* you hack a burglar alarm?”

“Jerker has looked into that

too

and

it

isn't

easy,

especially not an alarm of this specification, but it can be done.

The

system

was

connected to the net and to the mobile network and sent a feed of information to Milton Security over at Slussen. It's

not impossible that the guy recorded a frequency from the alarm with his box and managed to hack it that way.

Or else he'd bumped into

Balder when he was out

walking and stole some

information

electronically

from the professor's N.F.C.”

“What's an N.F.C.?”

“Near

Field

Communication, a function

on Balder's mobile which he used to activate the alarm.”

“It was simpler in the days

when burglars had crowbars,”

Bublanski said. "Any cars in the area?"

"A dark-coloured vehicle

was parked a hundred metres away by the side of the road with the engine running on and off, but the only person to have seen it is an old lady by the name of Birgitta Roos;

she has no idea what make it was.

Maybe

a

Volvo,

according to her. Or like the one her son has. Her son has a B.M.W.”

“Oh, wonderful.”

“Yes, so the investigation is looking a bit bleak,” Modig said. “The killers had the advantage of the night and the weather. They could move

around the area undisturbed, and apart from what Mikael

Blomkvist told us we’ve only got one sighting. It’s from a thirteen-year-old, Ivan Grede.

A slightly odd, skinny figure who had leukaemia when he was small and who has

decorated his room entirely in a Japanese style. He has a precocious way of expressing

himself. Young Ivan went for

a pee in the middle of the night and from the bathroom window he saw a tall man by

the water's edge. The man was looking out over the

water and making the sign of

the cross with his fists. It looked both aggressive and religious at the same time, Ivan said.”

“Not a good combination.”

“No, religion and violence combined don’t as a rule bode well. But Ivan wasn’t sure that it really was the sign of the cross. It looked like it, but

there was something else too, he says. Maybe it was a

military oath. For a while he was afraid that the man was going to walk into the water and drown himself. There

was something ceremonial

about the situation, he said, and something aggressive.”

“But there was no suicide.”

“No, the man jogged on in

the direction of Balder's
house. He had a rucksack,
and dark clothes, possibly camouflage trousers. He was powerful
and athletic and
reminded Ivan of his old toys, he said, his ninja warriors.”

“That doesn't sound good
either.”

“Not
good

at

all.

Presumably this was the man who shot at Blomkvist.”

“And Blomkvist didn’t see

his face?”

“No, he threw himself to the ground when the man

turned and shot at him. It all happened very quickly. But according to Blomkvist the man looked as if he had

military training and that fits with

Ivan

Grede's

observations. I have to agree: the speed and efficiency of the operation point in that direction."

"Have you got to the bottom of why Blomkvist was there?"

"Oh, definitely. If anything

was done properly last night, it was the interviews with him. Have a look at this."

Modig

handed

over

a

transcript. “Blomkvist had

been in touch with one of Balder’s former assistants

who

claimed

that

the

professor had been targeted

by a data breach and had his technology stolen. The story interested

Blomkvist.

But

Balder had been living as a recluse and had virtually no contact with the outside

world. All the shopping and errands were done by a

housekeeper called ... just a second ... Fru Rask, Lottie Rask, who incidentally had strict instructions not to say a word about the son living in

the house. I'll come to that in a moment. Then last night I'm guessing that Balder was worried and wanted to get some anxiety off his chest.

Don't forget, he had just been told that he was subject to a serious threat.

Plus

his

burglar alarm had gone off and two policemen were

guarding the house. Perhaps he suspected that his days were numbered. No way of

knowing. In any case he called Mikael Blomkvist in the middle of the night and said he wanted to tell him something.”

“In the olden days in

situations like that you would call a priest.”

“So now you call a

journalist. Well, it’s pure speculation. We only know

what

Balder

said

on

Blomkvist's voicemail. Apart

from that we have no idea what he was planning to tell him.

Blomkvist says he

doesn't know either, and I believe him. But I seem to be pretty
much the only one who

does. Ekström, who's being a

massive nuisance, by the

way, is convinced Blomkvist is holding back things which he plans
to publish in his magazine. I find that very hard to believe.

Blomkvist is

a tricky bugger, we all know that. But he isn't someone who

will

knowingly,

deliberately sabotage a police investigation.”

“Definitely not.”

“Ekström is coming on

strong

and

saying

that

Blomkvist should be arrested for perjury and obstruction and God knows what else.”

“That’s not going to help.”

“No, and bearing in mind what Blomkvist is capable of I think we’re better off

staying on good terms with him.”

“I suppose we’ll have to

talk to him again.”

“I agree.”

“And this thing with Lasse

Westman?”

“We’ve just spoken to him,

and it’s not an edifying story.

Westman had been to every

bar in town – Konstnärsbaren, Teatergrillen, Café Opera,

Riche, you get the idea – and was ranting and raving about Balder and the boy for hours on end. He drove his friends crazy. The more Westman

drank and the more money he

blew, the more fixated he became.”

“Why was this important to
him?”

“Partly it was a hang-up.

You get that with alcoholics.

I remember it from an old uncle. Every time he got
loaded, he got something
fixed in his mind. But

obviously there's more to it than that. At first Westman went on about the custody ruling, and if he had been a different person one might believe that he really was concerned for the boy. But in this case ... I suppose you know that Westman has a conviction for assault."

"No, I didn't."

"He had a relationship
some years ago with some
fashion
blogger,

Renata

Kapusinski. He beat the crap out of her. I think he even bit her rather badly in the cheek.

Also, Balder had intended to report him. He never sent in the paperwork – perhaps

because of the legal position he found himself in – but it clearly suggests

that

he

suspected Westman of being violent towards his son as well.”

“What are you saying?”

“Balder

had

noticed

unexplained bruises on the boy’s body – and in this he’s backed up by a psychologist from the Centre for Autism.

So it was ...”

“... probably not love and concern

which

drove

Westman

out

to

Saltsjöbaden.”

“More likely it was money.

After Balder took back his son, he had stopped or at least reduced the child support he had agreed to pay.”

“Westman didn’t try to

report him for that?”

“He probably didn’t dare
to, in the circumstances.”

“What

else

does

the

custody

ruling

say?”

Bublanski said, after a pause.

“That Balder was a useless
father.”

“Was he?”

“He certainly wasn’t evil, like Westman. But there’d

been an incident. After the divorce, Balder had his son every other
weekend, and at that time he was living in an apartment in
Östermalm with

books from floor to ceiling.

One of those weekends, when

August was six, he was in the sitting room – with Balder glued to his computer in the next room as usual. We don't

know exactly what happened.

But there was a small

stepladder propped against

one of the bookshelves.

August

climbed

it

and

probably took hold of some of the books higher up and

fell and broke his elbow. He knocked himself unconscious,

but

Balder

didn't

hear

anything.

He

just

kept

working

and

only

after

several hours did he discover August lying on the floor next to those books, moaning. At that he became hysterical and drove the boy to A. & E.”

“And he lost custody
altogether?”

“Not only that. He was declared
emotionally
immature and incapable of
taking care of his child. He was not to be allowed to be alone
with
August.

But

frankly, I don't think much of that ruling.”

“Why not?”

“Because

it

was

an

uncontested hearing. The ex-wife's lawyer went at it

hammer and tongs, while

Balder grovelled and said he was useless and irresponsible and unfit to live and God knows what else. What the tribunal wrote was malicious and tendentious, to my mind.

To the effect that Balder had never been able to connect with other people and had always sought refuge with

machines. Now that I've had time to look into his life a little, I'm not that impressed

by how it was dealt with. His guilt-laden tirades and self-criticism were taken as gospel by the tribunal. At any rate Balder

was

extremely

cooperative. As I said, he agreed to pay a large amount of

child

support,

forty

thousand a month, I believe, plus a one-off payment of nine hundred thousand kronor

for unforeseen expenses. Not

long after that he took himself off to America.”

“But then he came back.”

“Yes, and there were a
number of reasons for that.

He’d had his technology

stolen,

and

maybe

he

identified who had done it.

He found himself in a serious dispute with his employer.

But I think it had also to do with his son. The woman from the Centre for Autism I mentioned, she'd been very optimistic about the boy's development at an early stage. But then nothing turned out as she'd hoped. She also received reports that Hanna Balder and Westman had failed to live up to their responsibilities when it came to his schooling. It had been agreed that August would be taught at home, but the special-needs teachers seem

to have been played off against each other. Probably the money for his education was misappropriated and fake

teachers' names used, all

sorts of stuff like that. But that's an altogether different story which somebody will

have to look into at some point.”

“You were talking about

the woman from the Centre for Autism.”

“That's right. She smelled a rat and called Hanna and Westman and was informed

that everything was fine. But she had a feeling that wasn't true.

So

against

normal

practice

she

made

an

unannounced home visit and, when they finally let her in, she could tell that the boy was not doing well, that his development had stagnated.

She also saw those bruises.

So she rang Balder in San Francisco,

had

a

long

conversation with him and

soon after that he moved back and took his son with him to his

new

house

in

Saltsjöbaden, disregarding the custody order.”

“How did he manage that,

seeing as Westman was so

keen

to

get

the

child

support?”

“Good question. According to Westman, Balder more or less kidnapped the boy. But Hanna has a different version of the story. She says that Frans turned up and seemed to have changed, so she let him take August. She even thought he would be better off with his father.”

“And Westman?”

“According

to

her,

Westman was drunk and had

just landed a big part in a new T.V. production, and was

feeling cocky and over-

confident. So he agreed to it.

However much he may have

gone on about the boy's

welfare, I think he was glad to be rid of him.”

“But then?”

“Then he regretted it, and on top of everything else he was sacked from the series because he couldn’t stay

sober. He suddenly wanted to have August back, or not so much him, of course ...”

“The child support.”

“Exactly, and that was

confirmed by his drinking

pals. When Westman’s credit card was rejected during the course of yesterday evening, he really started ranting and raving about the boy. He

bummed five hundred kronor off a young woman in the bar

to

pay

for

a

taxi

to

Saltsjöbaden in the middle of the night.”

Bublanski was lost in his thoughts for a while and

gazed once again at the

photograph of Modig's son.

"What a mess," he said.

"Right."

"Under

normal

circumstances we would be

close to solving this one.

We'd

find

our

motive

somewhere in that custody battle. But these guys who hack alarm systems and look like ninja warriors, they don't fit the picture."

"No."

"There's something else

I'm wondering about."

"What's that?"

"If August can't read, then what was he doing climbing up to reach those books?"

Blomkvist

was

sitting

opposite Farah Sharif at her kitchen table with a cup of tea,

looking

out

at

Tantolunden

park.

Even

though he knew it was a sign

of weakness, he wished he did not have a story to write.

He wished he could just sit there without having to press her for information.

She did not look as if

talking would do her much

good. Her whole face had collapsed and the intense dark eyes, which had looked

straight through him at the front door, now seemed

disoriented. Sometimes she
muttered Balder's name like a mantra or an incantation.

Maybe she had loved him.

Farah was fifty-two years old and a very attractive woman, not
beautiful

in

a

conventional way surely but

with a regal bearing. He had surely loved *her*.

“Tell me, what was he
like,” Blomkvist said.

“Frans?”

“Yes.”

“A paradox.”

“In what way?”

“In all sorts of ways. But mainly because he worked so
hard on the one thing which worried
him

more

than

anything else. Maybe a bit

like Oppenheimer at Los Alamos. He was engrossed in something he believed could be our ruin.”

“Now you’ve lost me.”

“Frans wanted to replicate biological evolution on a digital level. He was working on self-teaching algorithms –

the idea is they can enhance themselves through trial and error. He also contributed to the development of quantum computers, as people call them, which Google, Solifon and the N.S.A. are working on. His objective was to achieve A.G.I., or Artificial General Intelligence.”

“And what is that?”

“It’s when something has the intelligence of a human being, but the speed and precision of a computer. If a thing like that could be created, it would give us

enormous advantages within numerous fields.”

“No doubt about it.”

“There is an extraordinary amount of research going on in this area, and even though most

scientists

aren't

specifically aiming for A.G.I., competition is driving us in that direction. Nobody can afford

not

to

create

applications which are as

intelligent

as

possible.

Nobody can afford to put the brake on development. Just think of what we have

achieved so far. Just think back to what you had in your

mobile

five

years

ago

compared to what's in there today.”

“True.”

“Before he became so

secretive, Frans told me he estimated that we could get to A.G.I.
within thirty or forty

years.

That

may

sound

ambitious, but for my part I wonder if he wasn't being too conservative. The capacity of computers

doubles

every

eighteen months, and the

human brain is bad at

grasping

that

kind

of

exponential growth. It's like the grain of rice on the chessboard, you know? You

put one grain of rice on the first square, two on the

second, four on the third, eight on the fourth.”

“And soon the grains of

rice have flooded the world.”

“The pace of growth goes

on increasing and in the end it escapes our control. The

interesting thing isn’t actually when we reach A.G.I., but what happens after that. Just a few days after we’ve reached

A.G.I., we’ll have A.S.I. –

Artificial Super-Intelligence –

used to describe something more intelligent than we are.

After that it’ll just get quicker and quicker. Computers will start enhancing themselves at an accelerating pace, perhaps by a

factor of ten, and

become

a

hundred,

a

thousand, ten thousand times cleverer than we are. What happens then?"

"I dread to think."

"Quite.

Intelligence

in

itself is not predictable. We don't know where human

intelligence will take us. We know even less what will

happen

with

a

super-

intelligence.”

“In the worst case we’ll be
no more interesting to the computer than little white mice,”

Blomkvist

said,

thinking of what he had

written to Salander.

“In the worst case? We share 90 per cent of our D.N.A. with mice,
and we’re assumed to be about one

hundred times as intelligent.

Only one hundred times.

Here's something completely new, not subject to these kinds
of

limitations,

according to mathematical

models. And it can become perhaps a million times more
intelligent. Imagine that.”

“I'm certainly trying to,”

Blomkvist said with a careful smile.

“I mean, how do you think

a computer would feel when it wakes up to find itself captured and controlled by primitive little creatures like us. Why would it put up with

that?” she said. “Why on

earth should it show us any consideration, still less let us dig around in its entrails in

order to shut down the process?

We

risk

being

confronted by an explosion of intelligence, a technological singularity, as Verner Vinge put

it.

Everything

that

happens after that lies beyond our event horizon.”

“So the very instant we

create a super-intelligence we lose control, is that right?”

“The risk is that everything
we know about the world will
cease to be relevant, and it’ll be
the
end
of
human
existence.”

“You *are* joking.”

“I know it sounds crazy,
but it’s a very real question.

There are thousands of people all over the world working to prevent a development like this. Many are optimists, or even foresee some kind of utopia.

There’s

talk

of

friendly

A.S.I.,

super-
intelligences which
are
programmed from the start to
do nothing but help us. The idea is something along the lines
of
what
Asimov

envisioned in his book *I, Robot*: built-in laws which forbid the machines to harm us. The writer and innovator Kurzweil has visions of a wonderful world in which

nanotechnology allows us to integrate

ourselves

with

computers, and share our future with them. But there are no guarantees. Laws can be repealed. The intent of initial programming can be changed and it's fatally easy to make anthropomorphic

mistakes: to ascribe human characteristics to machines and

misunderstand

what

drives them inherently. Frans was obsessed with these

questions and, as I said, he

was of two minds. He both longed

for

intelligent

computers

and

he

also

worried about them.”

“He couldn’t help but build

his monsters.”

“A bit like that, though

that’s putting it drastically.”

“How far had he got?”

“Further, I think, than

anyone could imagine, and

that may have been yet

another reason why he was so

secretive about his work at Solifon. He was afraid his program would end up in the wrong hands. He was even

afraid the program would

come into contact with the internet and merge with it. He called it August, after his son.”

“And where is it now?”

“He never went anywhere

without it. It must have been right by the bed when he was shot. But the terrible thing is that the police say there was no computer there.”

“I didn’t see one either.

But then my focus was elsewhere.”

“It
must
have

been

dreadful.”

“Perhaps you heard that I also saw the man who killed him,”
Blomkvist said. “He

was carrying a rucksack.”

“That doesn’t sound good.

But with a bit of luck the computer

will

turn

up

somewhere in the house.”

“Let’s hope so. Do you

have any idea who stole his technology the first time
around?”

“Yes, I do, as a matter of fact.”

“That interests me a lot.”

“I can see that. But the sad
thing is that I have some

personal responsibility for this mess. Frans was working himself to death, you see, and I was worried he would burn out. That was about the time he had lost custody of August.”

“When was that?”

“Two years ago. He was utterly worn out. He wasn’t sleeping, and he went around blaming himself, yet he was incapable of dropping his research. He threw himself into it as if it were all he had left in life, and so I arranged for him to get some assistants who could take

some of the load. I let him have my best students. I knew, of course, that none of them was a

model of probity, but they were ambitious and gifted, and their admiration for Frans was boundless. Everything

looked promising. But then

...”

“His

technology

was

stolen.”

“He had clear proof of that

when the application from

Truegames was submitted to the U.S. Patent Office in August last year. Every

unique

aspect

of

his

technology

had

been

duplicated and written down there – it was obvious. At

first they all suspected their computers had been hacked, but I
was sceptical from the start

–

I

knew

how

sophisticated

Frans'

encryption was. But since

there was no other plausible explanation, that was the

initial assumption, and for a while maybe Frans believed it himself. It was nonsense of course."

"What are you saying?"

Blomkvist burst out. "Surely the

data

breach

was

confirmed by experts.”

“Yes, by some idiot show-

off at the N.D.R.E. But that was just Frans’ way of

protecting his boys, or it could have been more than that. I suspect he also wanted to play detective, although heaven knows how he could be so stupid. You see ...”

Farah took a deep breath, “I learned all this only a few weeks ago. Frans and little August were here for dinner and I sensed at once that he had something important to tell me. It was hanging in the

air. After a couple of glasses he asked me to put away my mobile and began to speak in

a whisper. I have to admit that at first I was simply irritated. He was going on

again about his young hacker genius.”

“Hacker

genius?”

Blomkvist said, trying to

sound neutral.

“A girl he spoke about so much that it was doing my head in. I won’t bore you with the full story, but she’d turned up out of the blue at one of his lectures and

practically lectured *him* on the concept of singularity.

She impressed Frans, and he started to open up to her – it’s understandable. A mega-nerd like Frans can’t have found all that many people he could talk to at his own level, and when he realized that the girl was also a hacker he asked her to take a look at their computers. At the time they had all the equipment at the home of a guy called Linus

Brandell,

one

of

the

assistants.”

All Blomkvist said was,

“Linus Brandell.”

“Yes,” Farah said. “The

girl came round to his place in Östermalm and just threw him out.

Then she got to work on

the

computers.

She

couldn't find any sign of a breach, but she didn't leave it at that. She had a list of Frans' assistants and hacked

them

all

from

Linus'

computer. It didn't take long for her to realize that one of them had sold him out to none other than Solifon."

“And who was it?”

“Frans didn’t want to tell me, even though I pressed him. But the girl apparently called him directly from

Linus’ apartment. Frans was in San Francisco at the time, and

you

can

imagine:

betrayed by one of his own! I was expecting him to report the guy right away and raise hell. But he had a better idea.

He asked the girl to pretend they really had been hacked.”

“Why would he do that?”

“He didn’t want any traces
of evidence to be tidied away.

He wanted to understand

more

about

what

had

happened. I suppose it makes

sense – for one of the world's

leading software businesses to steal and exploit his

technology was obviously far more serious than if some good-for-nothing,

unprincipled shit of a student had done the same. Because Solifon isn't just one of the most

respected

research

groups in the U.S.A., they had also been trying to recruit Frans for years. He was livid.

‘Those bastards were trying

to seduce me, and they stole from me at the same time,’ he growled.”

“Let me be sure I’ve got this right.” Blomkvist said.

“You’re saying he took a job at Solifon in order to find out why and how they’d stolen from him?”

“If there’s one thing I’ve learned over the years, it’s just how difficult it can be to understand

a

person’s

motivation. The salary and the freedom and the resources obviously came into it. But apart from that, yes, I imagine you're right. He'd worked out that Solifon was involved in the theft even before this hacker girl examined his

computers. She gave him the specific information and that enabled him to dig into the mess. In the end it turned out to be much more difficult

than he expected, and people started

getting

very

suspicious. It wasn't long before

he

became

fantastically unpopular, so he kept more and more to

himself. But he did find

something.”

“What?”

“This is where it all gets sensitive. I really shouldn’t be telling you.”

“Yet here we are.”

“Yet here we are. Not only because I’ve always had the utmost

respect

for

your

journalism. It occurred to me this morning that it may not have been a coincidence that Frans rang you last night rather than Säpo's Industry Protection Group, whom he

had also been in touch with. I think he was beginning to suspect a leak there. It may have been no more than

paranoia – Frans displayed a variety

of

symptoms

of

persecution mania – but it was you he called, and now I

hope that I can fulfil his wish.”

“I hope you can.”

“At

Solifon

there’s

a

department called 'Y'," Farah said. "Google X is the model, the department where they

work on 'moonshots', as they

call them, wild and far-

etched ideas, like looking for eternal life or connecting search

engines

to

brain

neurons. If any place will achieve A.G.I. or A.S.I.,

that's probably it. Frans was assigned to 'Y'. But that wasn't as smart as it may have sounded."

"And why not?"

"Because he had found out

from his hacker girl that there was a secret group of

business intelligence analysts at 'Y', headed up by a

character

called

Zigmund

Eckerwald, also known as
Zeke.”

“And who is that?”

“The very person who had
been communicating with
Frans’ treacherous assistant.”

“So Eckerwald was the
thief.”

“A thief of the highest

order. On the face of it, the
work
carried
out
by
Eckerwald's
group
was
perfectly legitimate. They

compiled

information

on

leading

scientists

and

promising research projects.

Every large high-tech firm has a similar operation. They want to know what's going on and who they should be recruiting.

But

Frans

understood that the group

went beyond that. They stole

– through hacker attacks, espionage,

moles

and

bribery.”

“But then why didn’t he

report them?”

“It was tricky to prove.

They were careful, to be sure.

But in the end Frans went to the owner, Nicolas Grant.

Grant was horrified and

apparently

organized

an

internal investigation. But the investigation found nothing,

either because Eckerwald had got rid of the evidence or because the investigation was just for show. It left Frans in a tight spot. Everyone turned on him. Eckerwald must have

been behind it, and I'm sure he had no trouble getting the others to join in. Frans was already perceived as paranoid and became progressively

isolated and frozen out. I can picture it. How he would sit

there and become more and more awkward and contrary, and refuse to say a word to anyone.”

“So he had no concrete

evidence, you think?”

“Well, he did at least have the proof the hacker girl had given him:
that Eckerwald

had stolen Frans’ technology and sold it on.”

“And he knew that for

sure?”

“Without a shadow of a doubt.

Besides,

he

had

realized

that

Eckerwald's

group was not working alone.

It had backing from outside, in all likelihood from the American

intelligence

services and also ...”

Farah hesitated.

“Yes?”

“This is where he was a bit

more cryptic, and it may be that he didn’t know all that

much. But he had come across an alias, he said, for the person who was the real leader

outside

Solifon.

‘Thanos’.”

“Thanos?”

“That’s right. He said that this individual was greatly feared. But he didn’t want to say more than that. He

needed life insurance, he

claimed, for when the lawyers came after him.”

“You said you didn’t know which of his assistants sold him out. But you must have given it a great deal of thought,” Blomkvist said.

“I have, and sometimes, I don’t know ... I wonder if it wasn’t all of them.”

“Why do you say that?”

“When

they

started

working for Frans, they were young, ambitious and gifted.

By the time they finished,

they were fed up with life and full of anxieties. Maybe Frans worked them too hard. Or

maybe there's something else

tormenting them.”

“Do you have all their

names?”

“I do. They're my boys –

unfortunately, I'd have to say.

First there's Linus Brandell, I've already mentioned him.

He's twenty-four now, and

just drifts around playing

computer games and drinking too much. For a while he had

a good job as a games

developer at Crossfire. But he lost it when he started calling in sick and accusing his

colleagues of spying on him.

Then there's Arvid Wrangle, maybe you've heard of him.

He was a promising chess

player once upon a time. His father pushed him in a pretty inhuman way and in the end

Arvid had enough and came to study with me. I'd hoped that he would have completed

his Ph.D. long ago. But

instead he props up the bars around Stureplan and seems rootless. He came into his own for a while when he was

with Frans. But there was also a lot of silly competition among the boys. Arvid and Basim, the third guy, came to hate each other – at

least

Arvid hated Basim. Basim Malik probably doesn't do
hate.

He's

a

sensitive,

exceedingly smart boy who

was taken on by Solifon

Nordic a year ago. But he ran out of steam pretty quickly.

Right now he's being treated for

depression

at

Ersta

hospital and it so happens that his mother, whom I know

vaguely,

rang

me

this

morning to tell me that he's
under sedation. When he found out what had happened
to Frans, he tried to slash his wrists. It's devastating, but at the
same time I do wonder: was it just grief? Or was it also guilt?"

"How is he now?"

"He's not in any danger

from a physical point of view.

And then there's Niklas

Lagerstedt, and he ... well, what can I say about him?

He's not like the others, at least not on the surface. He wouldn't drink himself into oblivion or even think of harming himself. He's a

young

man

with

moral

objections to most things, including violent computer

games and porn. He's a

member

of

the

Mission

Covenant Church. His wife is

a paediatrician and they have a young son called Jesper. On

top of all that he's a consultant with the National Criminal Police,
responsible for the computer system

coming into service in the new year, which means he's had to go
through security clearance. But who knows

how thorough it was."

“Why do you say that?”

“Because

behind

that

respectable facade he’s a

nasty piece of work. I happen

to know that he’s embezzled parts of his father-in-law’s and his wife’s fortune. He’s a hypocrite.”

“Have

the

boys

been

questioned?”

“Säpo have talked to them,

but nothing came of it. At that time it was thought that Frans was the victim of a data breach.”

“I imagine police will want

to question them again now.”

“I assume so.”

“Do you happen to know if
Balder did much sketching in
his free time?”

“Sketching?”

“Really detailed drawings
of scenes.”

“No, I don’t know anything
about that,” she said. “Why do you ask?”

“I saw a fantastic drawing at his home, of a traffic light up here on the intersection of

Hornsgatan and Ringvägen. It was flawless, a sort of snapshot in the dark.”

“How

strange.

Frans

wasn't usually in this part of town.”

“There's something about

that drawing that won't let go of me," Blomkvist said, and he realized to his surprise that Farah had taken hold of his hand. He stroked her hair.

Then he stood up with a

feeling that he was onto something. He said goodbye and went out onto the street.

On the way back up

Zinkens väg he called Berger

and asked her to type another question in LISBETH STUFF.

CHAPTER 14

21.xi

Ove Levin was sitting in his office with a view over

Slussen and Riddarfjärden, not doing much at all except Googling himself in the hope

of coming across something to cheer him up. What he found himself reading was

that he was sleazy and flabby and that he had betrayed his ideals. All that in a blog written by a slip of a girl at the

Institute

for

Media

Studies

at

Stockholm

University. It made him so

furious that he even forgot to write her name in the little black book he kept, of people who would never get a job in

the Serner Group.

He could not be bothered

to burden his brain with idiots who had no idea what it takes and would only ever write underpaid articles in obscure cultural magazines. Rather

than wallow in destructive thoughts, he went into his

online account and checked his portfolio. That helped a bit, at least to begin with. It was a good day on the

markets. The Nasdaq and the Dow Jones had both gone up last

night

and

the

Stockholmsindex was 1.1 per cent higher too. The dollar, to which he was rather too

exposed, had risen, and

according to the update of a

few seconds ago his portfolio was worth 12,161,389 kronor.

Not bad for a man who had

once covered house fires and knife fights for the morning edition of *Expressen*. Twelve million, plus the apartment in Villastaden and the villa in Cannes. They could post

whatever they wanted on

their blogs. He was well provided for, and he checked the value of his portfolio again.

12,149,101.

Jesus

Christ, was it dropping?

12,131,737. He grimaced.

There was no reason why the market should be falling, was there?

The

employment

figures had been good, after all. He took the tumble in value almost personally and could not help thinking of *Millennium*,

however

insignificant it might be in the bigger picture. He found

himself getting worked up again and reluctantly he

remembered

the

openly

hostile look on Erika Berger's beautiful face at the meeting yesterday afternoon. Things had

not

improved

this

morning.

He had just about had a fit.

Blomkvist had cropped up on

every site, and that hurt. Not only because Levin had so gleefully registered that the

younger generation hardly knew who Blomkvist was. He

also hated that media logic which said that you became a

star – a star journalist or a star actor or whatever the hell it might be – simply because you found yourself in some sort of trouble. He would have been happier to read about

that

has-been

Blomkvist who wasn't even

going to keep his job at his

own magazine, not if Ove Levin and Serner Media had anything to do with it. Instead they said: why Frans Balder, of all people?

Why on earth did he have to be murdered right under Blomkvist's nose? Wasn't

that

just

typical?

So

infuriating. Even if those useless journalists out there hadn't realized it yet, Levin knew that Balder was a big

name. Not long ago Serner's own

newspaper,

Business

Daily, had produced a special supplement

on

Swedish

scientific research which had given him a price tag: four billion kronor, though God knows how they got to that figure. Balder was

a star, no doubt

about

it.

Most

importantly, he was a Garbo.

He never gave interviews,

and that made him all the more sought after.

How many requests had

Balder received from Serner's own journalists after all? As many as he had refused or, for that matter, simply not bothered to answer. Many of Levin's colleagues out there thought Balder was sitting on a fantastic story. He couldn't bear the idea that, so the newspaper

reports

said,

Balder had wanted to talk to Blomkvist in the middle of the night. Could Blomkvist really have a scoop on top of everything else? That would be disastrous. Once more,

almost obsessively, Levin

went onto the *Aftonbladet* site and was met with the
headline:

WHAT DID TOP

SWEDISH

SCIENTIST HAVE

TO SAY TO

MIKAEL

BLOMKVIST?

MYSTERY CALL JUST

BEFORE THE MURDER

The article was illustrated by

a

double-column

photograph

of

Mikael

Blomkvist which did not

show any flab at all. Those bastard editors had gone and

chosen the most flattering photograph they could find, and that made him angrier still. *I have to do something about this*, he thought. But what? How could he put a stop to Blomkvist without barging in like some old East German censor and making everything worse? He looked out towards Riddarfjärden and an idea came to him.

Borg, he thought. *My enemy's enemy can be my best friend.*

“Sanna,” he shouted.

“Yes, Ove?”

Sanna Lind was his young

secretary.

“Book a lunch at once with

William Borg at Sturehof. If he says he has something else on, tell him this is more important. He can even have a raise,” he said, and thought: why not? If he’s prepared to

help me in this mess then it’s only fair he gets something out of it.

Hanna Balder was standing in

the living room at Torsgatan looking in despair at August, who had yet again dug out paper and crayons. She had been told that she had to discourage him, and she did not like doing it. Not that she

questioned the psychologist's advice and expertise, but she had her doubts. August had seen his father murdered and if he wanted to draw, why stop him? Even if it did not seem to be doing him much

good.

His body trembled when he started drawing and his eyes shone with an intense,

tormented light. The pattern of squares spreading out and multiplying in mirrors was a strange theme, given what had happened. But what did she know? Maybe it was the same as with his series of numbers. Even though she did not understand it in the slightest, it presumably meant something to him, and perhaps – who knows? –

those squares were his own way of coming to terms with events.
Shouldn't she just

ignore the instructions? After all, who would find out? She had read somewhere that a mother should rely on her intuition. Gut feeling is often a better tool than all the psychological theories in the world. She decided to let August draw.

But suddenly the boy's

back stiffened like a bow, and Hanna

could

not

help

thinking back to what the

psychologist had said. She took a hesitant step forward and looked down at the paper.

She gave a start, and felt very uncomfortable. At first she could not make sense of it.

She saw the same pattern

of

squares

repeating

themselves

in

two

surrounding mirrors and it was extremely skilfully done.

But there was something else

there as well, a shadow which

grew out of the squares, like a demon, a phantom, and it

frightened the living daylights out of her. She started to think of films about children who become possessed. She

snatched the drawing from

the boy and crumpled it up without fully understanding why. Then she shut her eyes and expected to hear that heart-rending toneless cry

again.

But she heard no cry, just a muttering

which

sounded

almost

like

words

—

impossible because the boy did not speak. Instead Hanna prepared herself for a violent outburst,

with

August

thrashing back and forth over the living-room floor. But there was no attack either, only a calm and composed

determination as August took hold of a new piece of paper

and started to draw the same squares again. Hanna had no choice but to carry him to his room. Afterwards she would describe what happened as

pure horror.

August

kicked

and

screamed and lashed out, and

Hanna only just managed to keep hold of him. For a long time she lay in the bed with her arms knotted around him,

wishing that she could go to

pieces herself. She briefly considered waking Lasse and asking him to give August one of those tranquillizing suppositories they

now had, but then discarded that idea.

Lasse would be bound to be in a foul mood and she hated to give a child tranquilizers, however much Valium she

took herself. There had to be some other way.

She was falling apart, desperately considering one option after the other. She thought of her mother in

Katrineholm, of her agent

Mia, of the nice woman who rang last night, Gabriella Grane, and then of the

psychologist

again,

Einar

Fors-something,

who

had

brought August to her. She had not particularly liked him. On the other hand he

had offered to look after August for a while, and this was all his fault in the first place.

He was the one who said

August should not draw, so he should be sorting out this mess. In the end she let go of her son and dug out the psychologist's card to call him.

August

immediately

made a break for the living

room to start drawing his damn squares again.

Einar Forsberg did not have a great deal of experience. He was forty-eight years old and with his deep-set blue eyes, brand-new Dior glasses and brown corduroy jacket he

could easily be taken for an intellectual. But anyone who had ever disagreed with him

would know that there was something stiff and dogmatic about his way of thinking and he often concealed his lack of knowledge behind dogma and

cocksure pronouncements.

It had only been two years since he qualified as a

psychologist. Before that he was a gym teacher from

Tyresö, and if you had asked his old pupils about him they would

all

have

roared:

“Silence, cattle! Be quiet, oh my beasts!” Forsberg had

loved to shout those words, only half joking, when he wanted

order

in

the

classroom, and even though he had hardly been anyone’s favourite teacher he had kept his boys in line. It was this ability

which persuaded him that he could put his skills to better use elsewhere.

He had been working at Oden's Medical Centre for Children and Adolescents for one year. Oden's was an emergency

service

which

took in children and young people whose parents could not cope. Not even Forsberg

– who had always been a

staunch defender of whatever workplace he was at –
believed
that
the
centre
functioned especially well. It
was all crisis management and not enough long-term
work. Children would come

in after traumatic experiences at home and the psychologists were far too busy trying to manage

breakdowns

and

aggressive behaviour to be able to devote themselves to resolving underlying causes.

Even so, Forsberg thought he

was

doing

some

good,
especially when he used his
old classroom authority to quieten hysterical children, or when
he
handled
crisis
situations out in the field.
He liked to work with
policemen and he loved the tension in the air after

dramatic events. He had been

excited and expectant as he drove out to the house in Saltsjöbaden in the course of his night duty. There was a touch of Hollywood about the

situation, he thought. A Swedish scientist had been murdered, his eight-year-old son had been at the house, and he, Forsberg, had been sent to try to get the boy to open up. He straightened his hair and his glasses several times in the rear-view mirror.

He wanted to make a

stylish impression, but once he arrived he was not much of a success. He could not

make the boy out. Still, he felt

acknowledged

and

important.

The

detectives

asked him how they should go about questioning the

child and – even though he did not have a clue – his answer was received with

respect. That gave his ego a little boost and he did his best to be helpful. He found out that the boy suffered from infantile autism and had

never

spoken

or

been

receptive to the world around him.

“There’s nothing we can

do for the time being,” he said. “His mental faculties are too weak. As a psychologist I have to put his need for care first.” The policemen listened to

him

with

serious

expressions and let him drive the boy home to his mother –

who was another little bonus in the whole story.

She was the actress Hanna Balder. He had had the hots for her ever since he saw her in “The Mutineers” and he remembered her

hips and her long legs, and even though she was now a bit older she was still attractive. Besides, her

current

partner

was

clearly a bastard. Forsberg did his best to appear

knowledgeable and charming in a low-key way; within

moments

he

got

an

opportunity

to

be

authoritative, and that made him proud.

With a wild expression on his face the son began to draw black and white blocks, or squares, and Forsberg

pronounced that this was

unhealthy. It was precisely the

kind

of

destructive

compulsive behaviour that autistic children slip into, and he insisted that August stop immediately. This was not

received

with

as

much

gratitude as he had hoped for.

Still, it had made him feel decisive and manly, and

while he was at it he almost paid Hanna a compliment for

her performance in “The

Mutineers”. But then he

decided that it was probably

not the right time. Maybe that had been a mistake.

Now it was 1.00 in the

afternoon, and he was back home at his terraced house in Vällingby. He was in the

bathroom with his electric toothbrush, feeling exhausted, when his mobile rang. At first he was irritated – but then he smiled. It was none other than Hanna Balder.

“Forsberg,” he answered in an urbane voice.

“Hello,” she said. “August,

August ...”

She sounded desperate and

angry.

“Tell
me,
what’s
the
problem?”

“All he wants to do is draw
his chessboard squares. But you’re
saying
he

isn't

allowed to.”

“No, no, it's compulsive.

But please, just stay calm.”

“How the hell am I

supposed to stay calm?”

“The boy needs you to be composed.”

“But I can't be. He's

yelling and lashing out at everything. You said you

could help.”

“Well,

yes,”

he

said,

hesitant at first. Then he brightened, as if he had won

some

sort

of

victory.

“Absolutely, of course. I’ll see to it that he gets a place with us at Oden’s.”

“Wouldn’t that be letting
him down?”

“On the contrary, you’re
just taking account of his needs. I’ll see to it personally that you
can visit us as often as you like.”

“Maybe that’s the best
solution.”

“I’m sure of it.”

“Will you come right

away?”

“I’ll be with you as soon as

I can,” he said. First he had to smarten himself up a bit. Then he added: “Did I tell you that I

loved

you

in

‘The
Mutineers’?’”

It was no surprise to Levin that

William

Borg

was

already at the table at Sturehof, nor that he ordered the most expensive items on the menu, sole *meunière* and a glass of Pouilly-Fumé.

Journalists generally made

the most of it when he invited them to lunch. But it did surprise – and annoy – him that Borg had taken the

initiative, as if he were the one with the money and the power.

Why

had

he

mentioned that raise? He should have kept Borg on

tenterhooks, let him sit there and sweat instead.

“A little bird whispered in my ear that you’re having difficulties with *Millennium*,”

Borg said, and Levin thought, *I'd give my right arm to wipe that self-righteous smirk off his face.*

“You’ve

been

misinformed,” he said stiffly.

“Really?”

“We have the situation

under control.”

“How so, if you don’t mind

my asking?”

“If the editorial team is disposed to accept change
and is ready to recognize the problems it has, we’ll back them.”

“And if not ...”

“We’ll

pull

out,

and

Millennium will be unlikely

to stay afloat for more than a few months, which would of course be a great shame. But that's what the market looks like at the moment. Better magazines than *Millennium* have gone under. It's been only a modest investment for us and we can manage

without it.”

“Skip the bullshit, Ove. I know that this is a matter of pride for you.”

“It's just business.”

“I'd heard that you wanted

to get Mikael Blomkvist off the editorial team.”

“We've been thinking of

transferring him to London.”

“Isn’t that a bit harsh,

considering what he’s done for the magazine?”

“We’ve made him a very

generous offer,” Levin said, feeling that he was being

unnecessarily defensive and predictable.

He had almost forgotten

the purpose of the lunch.

“Personally I don’t blame

you,” Borg said. “You can ship him off to China, for all I care. I’m just wondering if it isn’t going to be a bit tricky for you if Blomkvist makes a

grand comeback with this

Frans Balder story.”

“Why would that happen?

He’s lost his sting. You of all people have pointed that out –

and

with

considerable

success, if I may say so,”

Levin said with an attempt at sarcasm.

“Well, yes, but I did get a little help.”

“Not from me, you didn’t; of that you can be sure. I hated that column. Thought it was

badly

written

and

tendentious. The one who kicked off the campaign

against him was Thorvald

Serner, you know that.”

“But

you

can't

be

altogether unhappy about the way things are going right now?”

“Listen to me, William. I have the greatest respect for Mikael Blomkvist.”

“You don’t have to put on your politician act with me,

Ove.”

Levin felt like ramming

something

down

Borg’s

throat.

“I’m just being open and

honest,” he said. “And I’ve always thought Blomkvist a fantastic

reporter,

of

a

different calibre to you and everyone

else

of

his

generation.”

“Is that so?” Borg said,

suddenly looking meek, and
that made Levin feel better right away.

“That’s how it is. We

should

be

grateful

to

Blomkvist for the revelations he’s given us, and I wish him all the best, I really do. But unfortunately it’s not my job to get nostalgic

and look back to the good old days. I have to concede that you have a point in suggesting that the man has got out of step with the times, and that he could get in the way of your plans to relaunch *Millennium*.”

“True, true.”

“So for that reason it would

be good if there weren’t too many headlines about him right now.”

“Positive headlines, you mean?”

“Maybe so, yes,” Levin

said. “That’s another reason I invited you to lunch.”

“Grateful

for

that,

of

course. And I do think I have something to offer. I had a call this morning from my old squash buddy,” Borg said,

clearly trying to regain his earlier self-confidence.

“And who’s that?”

“Richard

Ekström,

the

chief prosecutor. He’s in

charge of the preliminary

investigation into the Balder killing. And he’s not a

member of the Blomkvist fan club.”

“After

that

Zalachenko

business, right?”

“Exactly.

Blomkvist

scuppered his entire strategy on that case and now he’s worried that he’s sabotaging this investigation as well.”

“In what way?”

“Blomkvist isn’t saying

everything he knows. He

spoke to Balder just before

the murder and came face to face with the killer. Even so, he had surprisingly little to say for himself during the interviews. Ekström suspects he's saving the juiciest bits for his article.”

“Interesting.”

“Isn't it? We're talking

about a man who was

ridiculed in the media and is now so desperate for a scoop that he's prepared to let

someone get away with murder. An old star reporter willing

to

cast

social

responsibility to the winds when his magazine finds

itself in a financial crisis. And who has just learned that Serner Media wants to kick him off the editorial team.

Hardly surprising that he's gone a step or two too far."

"I see your point. Is it anything you'd like to write

about?”

“I don’t think that would be productive, to be honest.

Too many people know that Blomkvist and I have it in for each other. You’d be better off leaking to a news reporter and then supporting the story on your editorial pages.

You’ll get some good quotes from Ekström.”

Levin was looking out onto

Stureplan, where he spotted a

beautiful woman in a bright red

coat,

with

long

strawberry-blond hair. For the first time that day he gave a big smile.

“Maybe that isn’t such a

bad idea,” he added, ordering some wine for himself too.

Blomkvist

came

walking

down Hornsgatan towards

Mariatorget. Further away, by

Maria

Magdalena

kyrka,

there was a white van with an ugly dent in its front wing, and next to it two men were waving their arms around and

shouting at each other. But although

the

scene

had

attracted

a

crowd

of

onlookers, Blomkvist hardly noticed it.

He was thinking about how

Balder's son had sat on the floor of the large house in

Saltsjöbaden, reaching out over the Persian rug. The boy's hand had stains on the back of it and on the fingers, possibly ink from felt tips or pens, and that movement he was making had looked as if he were drawing something

complicated in mid-air, didn't it? Blomkvist was starting to see the whole scene in a new light.

Maybe it was not Frans Balder who had drawn the

traffic light after all. Perhaps the boy had an unexpected gift. For some reason that did not surprise him as much as he might have expected. The first time he had met August Balder, sitting by his dead father, and seen him throwing himself

against

the

headboard, he had already

understood that there was

something exceptional about him. Now, as he cut across
Mariatorget,

a

strange

thought occurred to him and would not let him go. Up by
Götgatsbacken he came to a stop.

He must at the very least follow it up, so he got out his mobile and looked up Hanna Balder. The number was

unlisted, and unlikely to be one which he would find in

Millennium's contacts. He thought of Freja Granliden, a society reporter at *Expressen* whose columns could not be said to enhance the prestige of the profession. She wrote about divorce, romance and royalty, but she had a quick brain and a good line in repartee, and whenever they met they had a good time together. He rang her number, but it was engaged of course.

These days, reporters on the evening papers were

forever on the telephone,

under such deadline pressure that they never left their desks to take a look at what real life was like. But he got her in the end and was not in the least surprised that she let out a little yelp of delight.

“Mikael,” she said, “what

an honour! Are you finally going to give me a scoop?

I’ve been waiting for so long.”

“Sorry. This time *you* have to help *me*. I need an address and a phone number.”

“What do I get in return?

Maybe a wicked quote about what you got up to last

night.”

“I could give you some

career advice.”

“And what might that be?”

“Stop writing crap.”

“Right, and then who’s going to keep track of all the telephone numbers the classy reporters need? Who are you looking for?”

“Hanna Balder.”

“I can imagine why. Did

you

meet

her

drunken

boyfriend out there?”

“Don’t you start fishing

now. Do you know where she

lives?”

“Torsgatan 40.”

“You know it just like that?”

“I have a brilliant memory for trivia. If you hang on, I’ll give you the phone number and the front-door code as well.”

“That’s really kind.”

“But you know ...”

“Yes?”

“You’re not the only one
looking for her. Our own
bloodhounds are on the trail

too, and from what I hear she hasn't

answered

her

telephone all day.”

“Wise woman.”

Afterwards

Blomkvist

stood in the street, unsure what to do. Chasing down

unhappy

mothers

in

competition

with

crime

reporters from the evening papers was not quite what he had hoped his day would

bring. But he hailed a taxi and

was driven off in the direction of Vasastan.

Hanna

Balder

had

accompanied

August

and

Forsberg to Oden's Medical Centre for Children and

Adolescents,

opposite

Observatorielunden

on

Sveavägen.

The

medical

centre

consisted

of

two

apartments which had been

knocked together, but even though the furnishings and the courtyard had a private and sheltered feel to them, there

was

nonetheless

something institutional about it all. Probably that had less to do with the long corridors and closed doors than the grim

and

watchful

expressions on the faces of the staff. They seemed to have developed a certain

distrust of the children for whom they were responsible.

The

director,

Torkel

Lindén, was a vain little man who claimed to have a wide experience of children with autism. But Hanna did not like the way he looked at August. It was also troubling that there seemed to be no separation between teenagers and small children. But it felt too late to be having doubts

now so on the way home she consoled herself with the
thought that it would only be for a short time. Maybe she would
pick up August as soon

as this evening?

Then she thought about

Lasse and his bouts of

drunkenness and she told

herself yet again that she needed to leave him and get a grip on
her life. As she walked out of the lift at her

apartment she gave a start.

An attractive man was sitting there on the landing, writing in a notebook. As he got to his feet and greeted her she saw that it was Mikael

Blomkvist. She was terrified, so guilt-ridden, that she supposed he was going to write some kind of exposé.

That was absurd. He just gave an embarrassed smile and twice apologized for

disturbing her. She could not help but feel a huge sense of relief. She had admired him for a long time.

“I have no comment to

make,” she said, in a voice which actually suggested the opposite.

“I’m not after a quote

either,”

he

said.

She

remembered hearing that he and

Lasse

had

arrived

together – or at least at the

same time – at Frans’ house the previous night, although she could not imagine what the two of them might have in common.

“Are you looking for

Lasse?” she said.

“I’d like to hear about

August’s

drawings,”

he

replied, and at that she felt a stab of panic.

Yet she allowed him in. It was probably careless of her.

Lasse had gone off to cure his hangover in some local dive and could be back any time.

He would go crazy if he

found a journalist in their home. But Blomkvist had not only worried Hanna, he had also made her curious. How on earth did he know about the drawings? She invited him to sit on the grey sofa in the living room while she went to the kitchen to get some tea and biscuits. When she came back with a tray he said: “I wouldn’t be bothering you if it wasn’t absolutely necessary.” “You’re not bothering me,” she said.

“You see, I met August last
night, and I haven’t been able to stop thinking about him.”

“Oh?”

“I didn’t understand it then,” he said, “but I had the feeling he was
trying to tell us something. Now I’m
convinced he wanted to draw.

He

was

making

these

determined movements with

his hand over the floor.”

“He’s become obsessed

with drawing.”

“So he went on doing that here at home?”

“And how! He started the minute we got here. He was manic, and what he drew was

amazing, but his face became

flushed and he was breathing heavily, so the psychologist said he had to stop. It was compulsive and destructive, was his opinion.”

“What did he draw?”

“Nothing special really. I’d

guess it was inspired by his puzzles. But it was very

cleverly done, with shadows and

perspective

and

everything.”

“But what was it?”

“Squares.”

“What kind of squares?”

“Chessboard

squares,

I

think you would call them,”

she said. Maybe she was

imagining things, but she

detected a trace of excitement in Blomkvist's eyes.

"Only chess squares?" he said. "Nothing more?"

"Mirrors too," she said.

"Chessboard

squares

reflected in mirrors."

"Have you been to Frans'

place?" he said, a new

sharpness in his voice.

“Why do you ask?”

“Because the design of the floor in the bedroom – where

he was killed – looks just like chessboard

squares,

and

they’re

reflected

in

the

mirrors of the wardrobe.”

“Oh my God!”

“What’s the matter?”

“Because ...”

A wave of shame washed
over her.

“Because the last thing I saw before I snatched the drawing away
from him was a menacing shadow emerging
out of those squares,” she said.

“Do you have the drawing here?”

“No, or rather yes.”

“Yes?”

“I’m afraid I threw it away.

But it will still be in the bin.”

Blomkvist had coffee grounds

and yoghurt all over his hands as he pulled a crumpled piece of paper out of the rubbish and smoothed it out on the

draining board. He brushed it off with the back of his hand and looked at it in the glare of the

kitchen

lights.

The

drawing was not finished, not by

any

means,

and

it

consisted

mostly

of

chessboard squares, just as Hanna had said, seen from above or from the side.

Unless you had been in

Balder's bedroom, it would not be obvious that the

squares represented a floor, but Blomkvist immediately

recognized the mirrors on the wardrobe to the right of the bed. He also recognized the darkness,

that

special

darkness that had met him in the course of the night.

He felt transported back to the moment when he had

walked in through the broken

window – apart from one

small important detail. The

room he had entered had been almost dark, whereas the

drawing showed a thin source

of light falling diagonally from above, extending out

over the squares. It gave contours to a shadow which was

not

distinct

or

meaningful, but which felt eerie, perhaps for that very reason.

The shadow was stretching

out an arm and Blomkvist,

who saw the drawing in a very different light to Hanna, had no trouble interpreting what that signified. The

figure meant to kill. Above the chessboard squares and the shadow there was a face which

had

not

yet

materialized.

“Where is August now?”

he said. “Is he sleeping?”

“No. He ... I’ve left him

with someone else for a
while. I couldn't handle him, to be honest.”

“Where is he?”

“At Oden's Medical Centre
for Children and Adolescents.

On Sveavägen.”

“Who knows that he's
there?”

“No-one.”

“Just you and the staff?”

Hanna nodded.

“Then it has to stay that way. Will you excuse me for a moment?”

Blomkvist took out his

mobile and called Bublanski.

In his mind he had already drafted yet another question for LISBETH STUFF.

Bublanski felt frustrated: the investigation

was

going

nowhere. Neither Balder's

Blackphone nor his laptop

had been found, so they had

not been able to map his contacts with the outside

world, despite having had

detailed discussions with the service provider.

For the time being they had

little more than smokescreens and
clichés
to
go
on,
Bublanski thought: a ninja warrior
had
materialized
swiftly and effectively and then

vanished

into

the

darkness. In fact the attack

had something far too perfect about it, as if it had been carried out by a person free of all the usual human failings and contradictions which as a rule feature in a murder. This was too clean, too clinical, and Bublanski could not help

thinking that it had been just another day at the office for the killer. He was pondering this and more besides when Blomkvist rang.

“Oh, it’s you,” Bublanski said. “We were just talking about you.
We’d like to have

another word with you as

soon as possible.”

“Of course, not a problem.

But right now I’ve got

something

much

more

important to tell you. The witness, August Balder, is a savant,”
Blomkvist said.

“A what?”

“A boy who may be severely mentally disabled

but nonetheless has a special gift. He draws like a master, with

a

remarkable

mathematical sharpness. Did someone

show

you

the

drawings of the traffic light which had been lying on the kitchen

table

in

Saltsjöbaden?”

“Yes, briefly. Are you

saying it wasn't Balder who

drew them?”

“It was the boy.”

“They

looked

like

astonishingly mature pieces of work.”

“But they were drawn by

August. This morning he sat down

and

drew

the

chessboard squares on the

floor in his father's bedroom, and he didn't stop at that. He sketched a shaft of light and a shadow. My theory is that it's

the killer's shadow and the light from his headlamp, but of course one couldn't yet say for certain. The boy was

interrupted in his work.”

“Are you pulling my leg?”

“This

is

hardly

the

moment.”

“How do you know all

this?’

“I’m at the home of the

boy’s mother, Hanna Balder, and I’m looking at the

drawing. The boy is no longer here. He’s at ...” The

journalist hesitated. “I don’t want to say more than that over the telephone.”

“You say that the boy was interrupted in the middle of his drawing?”

“His mother stopped him

on a psychologist’s advice.”

“How

could

one

do

something like that?”

“He probably didn’t realize what

the

drawings

represented, he just saw them as something compulsive. I suggest

you

send

some

people over right away.

You've got your witness."

"We'll be there as soon as we can be."

Bublanski ended the call

and

went

to

share

Blomkvist's news with the

team, though soon after he
wondered whether this had been wise.

CHAPTER 15

21.xi

Salander was at the Raucher Chess Club on Hälsingegatan.

She did not really feel like playing. Her head was aching

– she had been on the hunt all day long, but the hunt had taken
her here. When she

realized that Frans Balder had been betrayed by one of his own,
he had made her

promise that she would leave the traitor alone. She had not approved the strategy, but she had kept her word, and only now that Balder had been

killed did she feel absolved of her promise.

Now she was going to

proceed on her own terms.

But it was not all that easy.

Arvid Wrange had not been at

home, and instead of calling him she wanted to come

down on his life like a bolt of lightning and so had been out searching for him, her hoodie pulled over her head. Wrange

lived the life of a drone. But

as with so many other drones, he

had

a

routine,

and

Salander had been able to find a number of signposts through the trail of pictures he posted on Instagram and Facebook: Riche on

Birger

Jarlsgatan

and

the

Teatergrillen on Nybrogatan, the Raucher Chess Club and Café Ritorno on Odengatan

and a number of others,

including a shooting club on

Fridhelmsgatan, plus

the

addresses of two girlfriends.

Wrange had changed since

the last time she had him on her radar. Not only had he got rid of his nerdy look. His morals were also at an ebb.

Salander was not big on

psychological theory, but she could see for herself that his first major transgression had led to a succession of others.

Wrange was no longer an

ambitious student, eager to learn. Now he was addicted to porn and bought sex

online, violent sex. Two of the women had afterwards threatened to report him.

The man had a fair amount

of money. He also had a load

of problems. As recently as that morning he had Googled

“witness protection Sweden”, which was careless of him.

Even though he was no

longer

in

contact

with

Solifon, at least not from his computer, *they* were probably still keeping an eye on *him*. It would be unprofessional not to. Maybe he was beginning to crack up beneath the new urbane exterior, and that

served Salander's purpose.

When she once again rang the

chess club – chess being the only

apparent

connection

with his former life – she was

pleasantly surprised to hear that Wrange had just arrived there.

So now she walked down

the small flight of steps on Hälsingegatan and along a

corridor to some shabby

premises where a motley

crowd of mostly older men were sitting hunched over
their
chessboards.

The

atmosphere was somnolent,
and nobody seemed even to

notice her let alone question her presence. They were all busy
with their games, and the only sound was the click of the chess
clocks and the occasional swear word. There

were framed photographs of Kasparov, Magnus Carlsen

and Bobby Fischer on the

walls and even one of a

pimple,

teenaged

Arvid

Wrange playing the chess star Judit Polgár.

A different, older version of him was sitting at a table further in and to the right, and he seemed to be trying out some new opening.

Next to him

were

a

couple

of

shopping

bags.

He

was

wearing a yellow lambswool sweater with a clean and

ironed white shirt and a pair of shiny English shoes, a little too

stylish

for

the

surroundings.

Salander

approached him with careful, hesitant steps and asked if he would like a game. He

responded by looking her up and down, then he said,

“O.K.”

“Nice of you,” she replied like a well-mannered young girl, and sat down. She

opened with E4, he answered with B5, the Polish gambit, and then she closed her eyes and let him play on.

Wrange tried to concentrate on the game, but he was not managing

too

well.

Fortunately this punk girl was going to be easy pickings.

She wasn't bad, as it turned out – she probably played a lot – but what good was that?

He toyed with her a little, and she

was

bound

to

be

impressed.

Who

knows?

Maybe he could even get her to come home with him

afterwards. True, she looked stroppy, and Wrangle did not go in for stroppy girls, but she had nice tits and he might be able

to

take

out

his

frustrations on her. It had been a disaster of a morning.

The news that Balder had

been murdered had floored

him.

It wasn't grief that he felt: it was fear. Wrange really did try hard to convince himself

that he had done the right thing. What did the goddamn professor expect when he

treated him as if he didn't exist? But of course it

wouldn't look good that

Wrange had sold him down

the river. He consoled himself with the thought that an idiot like Balder must have made thousands of enemies, but

deep down he knew: the one

event was linked to the other, and that scared him to death.

Ever since Balder had

started working at Solifon, Wrange had been afraid that the drama would take a

frightening new turn, and

here he was now, wishing

that it would all just go away.

That must have been why he went into town this morning on a compulsive spree to buy

a load of designer clothes,
and had ended up here at the chess
club.

Chess

still

managed to distract him, and the fact was that he was feeling
better already. He felt like he was in control and smart enough to
keep on

fooling them all. Look at how he was playing.

This girl was not half bad.

In fact there was something unorthodox and creative in her play, and she would

probably be able to teach most people in here a thing or two.

It was just that he, Arvid Wrangle, was crushing her.

His play was so brilliant and sophisticated that she had not even noticed he was on the brink of trapping her queen.

Stealthily he moved his

pieces forward and snapped hers up without sacrificing more than a knight. In a flirty, casual tone bound to impress

her he said, "Sorry, baby.

Your queen is down.”

But he got nothing in

return, no smile, not a word, nothing. The girl upped the tempo, as if she wanted to put a

quick

end

to

her

humiliation, and why not?

He'd be happy to keep the process short and take her out for two or three drinks before he pulled her. Maybe he

would not be very nice to her

in bed. The chances were that she would still thank him afterwards. A miserable cunt like her would be unlikely to have had a fuck for a long time and would be totally unused to guys like him, cool guys who played at this level.

He decided to show off a bit and explain some higher

chess theory. But he never got the chance. Something on

the board did not feel quite

right. His game began to run into some sort of resistance he could not understand. For a while he persuaded himself that

it

was

only

his

imagination,

perhaps

the

result of a few careless
moves.

If

only

he

concentrated he would be

able to put things right, and so he mobilized his killer instinct.

But it only got worse.

He felt trapped – however hard he tried to regain the initiative she hit back – and in the end he had no choice but to acknowledge that the

balance of power had shifted, and shifted irreversibly. How crazy was that? He had taken

her queen, but instead of building on that advantage he had landed in a fatally weak position. Surely she had not deliberately sacrificed her

queen so early in the game?

That would be impossible –

the sort of thing you read about in books, it didn't happen in your local chess club in Vasastan, and it

definitely wasn't something that pierced punk chicks with attitude problems

did,

especially not to great players like him. Yet there was no escape.

In four or five moves he would be beaten and so he saw no alternative but to knock over his king with his index finger and mumble

congratulations. Even though he would have liked to serve up some excuses, something told him that that would make matters

worse. He had a
sneaking feeling that his
defeat was not just down to bad luck, and almost against
his will he began to feel frightened again. Who the
hell *was* she?

Cautiously he looked her in
the eye, and now she no
longer seemed like a stropky and
somewhat

insecure

nobody. Now she seemed

cold – like a predator eyeing its prey. He felt deeply ill at ease, as if the defeat on the chessboard

were

but

a

prelude to something much,

much worse. He glanced towards the door.

“You’re

not

going

anywhere,” she said.

“Who are you?” he said.

“Nobody special.”

“So

we

haven’t

met

before?”

“Not exactly.”

“But nearly, is that it?”

“We’ve

met

in

your

nightmares, Arvid.”

“Is this some kind of joke?”

“Not really.”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you think I
mean?”

“How should I know?”

He could not understand
why he was so scared.

“Frans

Balder

was

murdered last night,” she said in a monotone.

“Well ... yes ... I read that,” he stammered.

“Terrible, isn’t it?”

“Awful.”

“Especially for you, right?”

“Why especially for me?”

“Because

you

betrayed

him, Arvid. Because you

gave him the kiss of Judas.”

His body froze. “That’s

bullshit,” he spat out.

“As a matter of fact it’s not. I hacked your computer,

cracked your encryption and saw very clearly that you sold on his technology to Solifon.

And you know what?”

He was finding it hard to breathe.

“I’m sure you woke up this

morning and wondered if his death was your fault. I can help you there: it was your fault. If you hadn’t been so greedy

and

bitter

and

pathetic, Frans Balder would

be alive now. I should warn you that's making me pretty fucking angry, Arvid. I'm

going to hurt you badly. First of all by making you suffer the same sort of treatment you inflict on the women you

find online.”

“Are you insane?”

“Probably, yes,” she said.

“Empathy-deficit

disorder.

Excessive

violence.

Something along those lines.”

She gripped his hand with a force which scared him out of his wits.

“Arvid, do you know what

I’m doing right now? Do you

know why I seem a bit

distracted?”

“No.”

“I’m sitting here trying to decide what to do with you.

I’m thinking in terms of

suffering

of

biblical

proportions. That’s why I’m a bit distracted.”

“What do you want?”

“I want revenge – haven’t I

made that clear?”

“You’re talking crap.”

“Definitely not, and I think

you know it too. But there is a way out.”

“What do I have to do?”

He could not understand

why he said it. *What do I have to do?* It was an

admission, a capitulation, and he considered taking it back,
putting

pressure

on

her

instead, to see if she had any proof or if she was bluffing.

But he could not bring

himself to do it. Only later did he realize that it was not just the threats she tossed out or the uncanny strength of her hands.

It was the game of chess, the queen sacrifice. He was in

shock, and something in his subconscious told him that a woman who plays like that must also know his secrets.

“What do I have to do?” he

said again.

“You’re going to follow

me out of here and you’re going to tell me everything, Arvid.
You’re going to tell me exactly what happened

when you sold out Frans

Balder.”

“It’s a miracle,” Bublanski said as he stood in the kitchen in Hanna
Balder’s home

looking at the crumpled

drawing which Blomkvist had

plucked out of the rubbish.

“Let’s not exaggerate,”

said

Modig,

who

was

standing right next to him.

She was right. It was not much more than some chess squares on a piece of paper, after all, and as Mikael

Blomkvist had pointed out over the telephone there was something

strangely

mathematical about the work,

as if the boy were more

interested in the geometry than

in

the

threatening

shadow above. But Bublanski

was excited all the same. He had been told over and over how mentally impaired the

Balder boy was, how little he would be able to help them.

Now the boy had produced a drawing

which

gave

Bublanski more hope than

anything

else

in

the

investigation. It strengthened his long-held conviction that one must never underestimate

anyone

or

cling

to

preconceived ideas.

They had no way of being sure that what August was illustrating here was the

moment of the murder. The

shadow could, at least in theory, be associated with some other occasion, and

there was no guarantee that the boy had seen the killer's face or that he would be able to draw it. And yet deep down

that

was

what

Bublanski believed. Not just because the drawing, even in its

present

state,

was

masterful. He had studied the other drawings too, in which

you could see, beyond the street crossing and the traffic light, a shabby man with thin lips who had been caught red-handed jaywalking, if you

looked at it purely from a law-enforcement

point

of

view. He was crossing the street on a red, and Amanda Flod, another officer on the team, had recognized him

straight away as the out-of-work actor Roger Winter,

who had convictions for drink-driving and assault.

The photographic precision

of August's eye ought to be a dream

for

any

murder

investigator. But Bublanski did realize that it would be unprofessional to set his

hopes too high. Maybe the murderer had been masked at

the time of the killing or his face had already faded from the child's memory. There

were many possible scenarios and Bublanski cast a glum look in the direction of

Modig.

“Maybe this is just wishful
thinking on my part,” he said.

“For

a

man

who’s

beginning

to

doubt

the

existence of God, you seem to have no problem hoping for miracles.”

“Well, maybe.”

“But it’s worth getting to the bottom of. I agree with that,” Modig said.

“Good, in that case let’s see the boy.”

Bublanski went out of the kitchen and nodded at Hanna Balder, who was sunk in the living-room sofa, fumbling

with some tablets.

Lisbeth Salander and Arvid Wrangle

came

out

into

Vasaparken arm in arm, like a pair of old friends out for a stroll.
Appearances can be deceptive:

Wrangle

was

terrified as Salander steered them towards a park bench.

The wind was getting up
again and the temperature
creeping down – it was hardly a day for feeding the pigeons
– and Wrangle was cold. But
Salander decided that the bench would do and forced him to sit
down, holding his arm in a vice-like grip.

“Right,” she said. “Let’s
make this quick.”

“Will you keep my name

out of it?”

“I’m promising nothing,

Arvid. But your chances of being able to go back to your miserable life will increase significantly if you tell me

every

detail

of

what

happened.”

“O.K.,” he said. “Do you

know Darknet?”

“I know it,” she said.

No-one knew Darknet like

Lisbeth Salander. Darknet

was the lawless undergrowth of the Internet. The only way to

access

it

was

with

especially

encrypted

software, and the user's

anonymity was guaranteed.

No-one could Google your details or trace your activity on the web. So Darknet was full of drug dealers, terrorists, con men, gangsters, illegal arms dealers, pimps and black hats. If there was an Internet hell, then this was it.

But Darknet was not in

itself

evil.

Salander

understood that better than anyone. These days, when

spy agencies and the big

software companies follow every step we take online, even honest people can need a hiding place. Darknet was also a hub for dissidents, whistle-blowers

and

informants. Opposition forces could protest on Darknet out of reach of their government, and Salander had used it for her

own

more

discreet

investigations and attacks.

She knew its sites and search

engines and its old-fashioned workings far away from the known, visible net.

“Did you put Balder’s

technology up for sale on Darknet?” she said.

“No, I was just casting

about. I was pissed off. You know, Frans hardly even said

hello to me. He treated me like dirt, and he didn’t really care about that technology of his either. It had the potential

to make all of us rich, but he only wanted to play and

experiment with it like a little kid. One evening when I’d had a few drinks I just

chucked out a question on a geek site: ‘Who can pay good

money

for

some

revolutionary

A.I.

technology?’

“And did you get an

answer?”

“It took a while. I had time to forget that I’d even asked.

But in the end someone

calling himself Bogey wrote back with some pretty well-informed questions. At first my answers were ridiculously

unguarded,

but

soon

I

realized what a mess I'd got myself into, and I became terrified that Bogey would steal the technology.”

“Without

you

getting

anything for it.”

“It was a dangerous game.

To be able to sell Frans’

technology I had to tell

people about it. But if I said too much then I would

already have lost it. Bogey flattered me rotten – in the end he knew exactly where we were and what sort of software we were working

on.”

“He meant to hack you.”

“Presumably. He somehow

managed to get hold of my name, and that floored me. I became totally paranoid and announced that I wanted to pull out. But by then it was too late. Not that Bogey

threatened me, at least not directly. He just went on and on about how he and I were going to do great things

together and earn masses of

money. In the end I agreed to meet him in Stockholm at a Chinese boat restaurant on Söder Mälarstrand. It was a windy day, I remember, and I

stood there freezing. I waited more than half an hour, and afterwards I wondered if he had been checking me out in some way.”

“But then he showed up?”

“Yes. At first I didn’t

believe it was him. He looked

like a junkie, or a beggar, and if I hadn’t seen that Patek Philippe watch on his wrist I probably would have tossed him twenty kronor. He had amateur tattoos and dodgy-looking scars on his arms, which he waved about as he walked. He was wearing this awful-looking trench coat and he seemed to have been more

or less living on the streets.

The strangest thing of all was

that he was proud of it. It was only the watch and the hand-made shoes which showed

that he had at some point managed to lift himself out of the gutter. Other than that, he seemed keen to stick to his roots. Later on, when I'd given him everything and we were celebrating our deal

over a few bottles of wine, I asked about his background.”

“I hope for your sake that he gave you some details.”

“If you want to track him down, I have to warn you ...”

“I don’t want advice,

Arvid. I want facts.”

“Fine. He was careful,” he said. “But I still got a few things. He probably couldn’t help himself. He grew up in a big city in Russia, though he didn’t name it. He’d had

everything stacked against

him, he said. His mother was a whore and a heroin addict and his father could have been anybody. As a small boy

he had ended up in the

orphanage from hell. There was some lunatic there, he told me, who used to make him lie on a butcher’s slab in the kitchen and

whipped him with a broken cane. When he
was eleven he ran away and lived on the street. He stole,
broke
into
cellars
and
stairwells to get a little warmth, got drunk on cheap vodka, sniffed
glue and was abused and beaten. But he also discovered one
thing.”

“What?”

“That he had talent. He

was an expert at breaking and entering, which became his first source of pride, his first identity. He was capable of doing in just a few seconds

what took others hours.

Before that he had been a homeless brat, everyone had despised him and spat at him.

Now he was the boy who

could get himself in wherever he wanted. It became an

obsession. All day long he dreamed of being some sort of Houdini in reverse – he didn’t want to break out, he wanted to break in. He

practised for ten, twelve,

fourteen hours a day, and in the end he was a legend on the streets – or so he said. He started to carry out bigger operations, using computers he stole and reconfigured to hack in everywhere. He made

a heap of money which he blew on drugs, and often he was

robbed

or

taken

advantage of. He could be clear as a bell when he was on one of his jobs, but

afterwards he would lie around in a narcotic haze and someone would walk all over

him. He was a genius and a total idiot at the same time, he said. But one day everything changed. He was saved,

raised up out of his hell.”

“How?”

“He had been asleep in

some dump of a place that was due to be pulled down, and when he opened his eyes

and looked around in the yellowish light there was an angel standing before him.”

“An angel?”

“That’s what he said, an

angel, and maybe it was

partly

the

contrast

with

everything else in there, the syringes, the left-over food, the cockroaches. He said she was

the

most

beautiful

woman he had ever seen. He could scarcely look at her,

and he got this idea that he was going to die. It was an ominous, solemn feeling. But the woman explained, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, that she would make him rich and happy. If I've understood it right, she kept her promise. She gave him new teeth, got him into rehab. She arranged for him to train as a computer

engineer.”

“So ever since he’s been hacking

computers

and

stealing for this woman and her network.”

“That’s right. He became a

new person, or maybe not

completely new – in many

ways he’s still the same old thief and bum. But he no longer takes drugs, he says, and he spends all his free time keeping up to date with new technology. He finds a

lot on Darknet and he claims to be stinking rich.”

“And the woman – did he
say anything more about
her?”

“No, he was extremely

careful about that. He spoke in such evasive and respectful terms
that I wondered for a while if she wasn't a fantasy or hallucination.
But I reckon she really does exist. I could sense sheer physical
fear

when he was talking about her – he said that he would rather die
than let her down, and then he showed me a

Russian

patriarchal

cross

made of gold, which she had given him. One of those

crosses, you know, which has

a slanted beam down by the foot, one end pointing up and the other down. He told me this was a reference to the Gospel according to St Luke

and the two thieves who were hanged next to Jesus on the cross. The one thief believes in Jesus and goes to heaven.

The other mocks him and is thrust down into hell.”

“That’s what awaits you if you fail her.”

“That’s about it, yes.”

“So she sees herself as

Jesus?”

“In this context the cross probably has almost nothing to do with Christianity. It’s the message she wants to pass on.”

“Loyalty or the torments of hell.”

“Something along those
lines.”

“Yet you’re sitting here,
Arvid, spilling the beans.”

“I
didn’t
see
an
alternative.”

“I hope you got paid a lot.”

“Well, yes ...”

“And

then

Balder’s

technology

was

sold

to

Solifon and Truegames.”

“Yes, but I don’t get it ...

not when I think of it now.”

“What don’t you get?”

“How could you know all

this?”

“Because you were dumb

enough to send an email to Eckerwald at Solifon, don’t you remember?”

“But I wrote nothing to suggest that I’d sold the technology.

I

was

very

careful about that.”

“What

you

said

was

enough for me,” she said. She got to her feet, and it was as if his entire being collapsed.

“Wait, what’s going to

happen now? Will you keep me out of this?”

“You can always hope,”

she said, and walked off

towards

Odenplan

with

purposeful steps.

Bublanski's mobile rang as he was on his way down to the

front

entrance

on

Torsgatan. It was Professor Edelman. Bublanski had been

trying to reach him ever since he realized that the boy was a savant. Bublanski had found out online that two Swedish

authorities were regularly quoted on this subject: Lena Ek at Lund University and Charles

Edelman

at

the

Karolinska Institute. But he had not been able to get hold of either, so he had postponed the search and gone off to see Hanna Balder. Now Edelman

was ringing back, and he

sounded shaken. He was in Budapest, he said, at a

conference on heightened

memory capacity. He had just arrived there and seen the news about the murder a

moment ago, on C.N.N.

“Otherwise I would have

got in touch right away,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“Professor Balder rang me

yesterday evening.”

That

made

Bublanski

jump. “What did he want?”

“He wanted to talk about his son and his son’s talent.”

“Did

you

know

each

other?”

“Not in the slightest. He contacted me because he was worried about his boy, and I was stunned to hear from him.”

“Why?”

“Because it was Frans Balder. He’s a household name to us neurologists. We tend to say he’s like us in wanting to understand the brain. The only difference is that he also wants to build one.”

“I’ve
heard
something
about that.”

“I’d been told that he was an introverted and difficult man. A bit like a machine himself, people sometimes used to joke: nothing but logic circuits. But with me he was incredibly emotional, and it shocked me, to be honest. It was ... I don’t know, as if you were to hear your toughest policeman cry. I

remember

thinking

that

something

must

have

happened, something other

than what we were talking about.”

“That sounds right. He had

finally accepted that he was

under

a

serious

threat,”

Bublanski said.

“But he also had reason to be

excited.

His

son's

drawings were apparently

exceptionally good, and that's not common at all at that age, not even with savants, and especially not in combination with

proficiency

in

mathematics.”

“Mathematics?”

“Yes indeed. From what Balder said his son had

mathematical skills too. I could spend a long time talking about that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Because I was utterly amazed, and at the same time

maybe not so amazed after all. We now know that there’s a hereditary factor in savants, and here we have a father who is a legend, thanks to his

advanced algorithms. But still

... artistic and numerical

talents do not usually present themselves together in these children.”

“Surely the great thing

about life is that every now and then it springs a surprise on us,”
Bublanski said.

“True, Chief Inspector. So what can I do for you?”

Bublanski thought through

everything that had happened

in Saltsjöbaden and it struck him that it would do no harm

to be cautious.

“All I can say is that we need your help and expert knowledge as a matter of

urgency.”

“The boy was a witness to the murder, was he not?”

“Yes.”

“And you want me to try to

get him to draw what he

saw?”

“I’d

prefer

not

to

comment.”

Professor

Edelman

was

standing in the lobby of the Hotel Boscolo in Budapest, a
conference centre not far

from the glittering Danube.

The place looked like an

opera

house,

with

magnificent high ceilings,

old-fashioned cupolas and

pillars. He had been looking forward to the week here, the dinners and the presentations.

Yet he was agitated and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Unfortunately I’m not in a

position to help you. I have to give an important lecture

tomorrow morning,” he had

said to Bublanski, and that was true.

He had been preparing the talk for some weeks and he

was

going

to

take

a

controversial line with several eminent memory experts. He recommended an associate

professor, Martin Wolgers, to Bublanski.

But as soon as he hung up and exchanged looks with

Lena Ek – Lena had paused next to him, holding a

sandwich – he began to have regrets. He even began to envy young Martin Wolgers,

who was not yet thirty-five, always looked far too good in photographs, and on top of it all was beginning to make a name for himself.

It was true that Edelman

did not fully understand what had happened. The police

inspector had been cryptic and was probably worried

that

someone

might

be

listening in on the call. Yet the professor still managed to grasp the bigger picture. The boy was good at drawing and was witness to a murder. That could mean only one thing, and the longer Edelman thought about it the more he fretted. He would be giving many more important lectures in his life, but he would never get another chance to play a part in a murder investigation at this level. However he looked at the assignment he had so casually passed on to Wolgers, it was bound to be much more interesting than anything

he

might

be

involved in here in Budapest.

Who knows? It could even

make him some sort of

celebrity.

He visualised the headline: **PROMINENT**

NEUROLOGIST

HELPS

POLICE

SOLVE

MURDER, or better still:

EDELMAN'S RESEARCH

LEADS

TO

BREAKTHROUGH

IN

MURDER

HUNT.

How

could he have been so stupid as to turn it down? He took out his mobile and called Chief Inspector Bublanski.

Bublanski and Modig had

managed to park not far from

the Stockholm Public Library

and had just crossed the street. Once again the weather was

dreadful,

and

Bublanski's

hands

were

freezing.

“Did he change his mind?”

Modig said.

“Yes. He's going to shelve

his lecture.”

“When can he be here?”

“He’s looking into it.

Tomorrow morning at the

latest.”

They were on their way to Oden’s Medical Centre on

Sveavägen

to

meet

the

director, Torkel Lindén. The meeting was only meant to settle

the

practical

arrangements

for

August

Balder's testimony – at least as far as Bublanski was

concerned. But even though Lindén did not yet know the true purpose of their visit, he had

been

strangely

discouraging over

the

telephone and said that right now the boy was not to be disturbed “in any way”.

Bublanski had sensed an

instinctive hostility and was not particularly pleasant in return. It had not been a promising start.

Lindén turned out not to be

the hefty figure Bublanski had expected. He was hardly more than 150 centimetres

tall and had short, possibly dyed black hair and pinched lips. He wore black jeans, a black polo-necked sweater

and a small cross on a ribbon around his neck. There was something

ecclesiastical

about him, and his hostility was genuine.

He had a haughty look and
Bublanski became aware of
his own Jewishness – which tended to happen whenever
he encountered this sort of malevolence and air of moral
superiority. Lindén wanted to show that he was better,
because he put the boy's
physical
well-being
first

rather than offering him up for

police

purposes.

Bublanski saw no choice but to be as amiable as possible.

“Pleased to meet you,” he said.

“Is that so?” Lindén said.

“Oh yes, and it’s kind of you to see us at such short notice. We really wouldn’t come barging in like this if we didn’t think this matter was

of

the

utmost

importance.”

“I imagine you want to

interview the boy in some way.”

“Not exactly,” Bublanski

said, not quite so amiably. “I have to emphasize first of all

that what I’m saying now must remain strictly between us.

It’s

a

question

of

security.”

“Confidentiality is a given for us. We have no loose lips here,” Lindén said, in such a way as to imply that it was the opposite with the police.

“My only concern is for the boy’s safety,” Bublanski said sharply.

“So that’s your priority?”

“As a matter of fact, yes,”

the policeman said with even greater severity. “And that is why nothing of what I’m

about to tell you must be passed on in any way – least of all by email or by

telephone.

Can

we

sit

somewhere private?”

Sonja Modig did not think much of the place. But then she was probably affected by the crying.

Somewhere

nearby a little girl was

sobbing relentlessly. They

were sitting in a room which smelled of detergent and also of something else, maybe a lingering trace of incense. A cross hung on the wall and there was a worn teddy bear lying on the floor. There was not much else to make the place cosy or attractive, and

since Bublanski, usually so good-natured, was about to lose his temper, she took matters into her own hands and gave a calm, factual

account of what had taken place.

“We

are

given

to

understand,” she said, “that your

colleague,

Einar

Forsberg, said that August should not be allowed to draw.”

“That was his professional judgement and I agree with it. It doesn’t do the boy any good,” Lindén said.

“Well, I don’t see how anything could do him much good under these

circumstances. He probably
saw his father being killed.”

“But we don’t want to
make things any worse, do we?”

“True. But the drawing August was not allowed to finish
could
lead
to
a

breakthrough

in

the

investigation and therefore I'm afraid we must insist.

You can of course ensure

there are people present with the necessary expertise.”

“I still have to say no.”

Modig could hardly believe

her ears.

“With all due respect for your work,” Lindén went on doggedly,
“here at Oden’s we

help

vulnerable

children.

That’s our job and our

calling.

We’re

not

an

extension of the police force.

That's how it is, and we're proud of it. For as long as the children are here, they should feel confident that we put their interests first."

Modig laid a restraining hand on Bublanski's thigh.

"We can easily get a court order," she said, "but we'd prefer not to go that route."

"Wise of you."

"Let

me

ask

you

something,” she said. “Are you

and

Forsberg

so

absolutely sure what’s best for August, or for the girl crying over there, for that matter? Couldn’t it be instead

that we all need to express ourselves? You and I can talk or write, or even go out and get a lawyer. August doesn't have

those

means

of

communication. But he can

draw, and he seems to want to tell us something. Shouldn't we let him give form to

something which must be

tormenting him?"

“In our judgement—”

“No,” she cut him off.

“Don’t tell us about your judgement. We’re in contact with the person who knows more than anyone else in this country about this particular condition.

His

name

is

Charles Edelman, he’s a

professor of neurology and he's on his way here from Hungary to meet the boy."

"We can of course listen to him," Lindén said reluctantly.

"Not just listen. We let him decide."

"I promise to engage in a constructive dialogue, between experts."

"Fine.

What's

August

doing now?"

"He's sleeping. He was

exhausted when he came to us."

Modig could tell that

nothing good would come of

it were she to suggest that the boy be woken up.

"In that case we'll come

back tomorrow morning with Professor Edelman, and I am sure we will all be able to work together on this matter.”

CHAPTER 16

21.xi – 22.xi

Gabriella Grane buried her face in her hands. She had not been to bed for forty hours and she was racked by a deep sense of guilt, only made worse by the lack of sleep.

Yet she had been working

hard all day long. Since this morning she had been part of

a team at Säpo – a sort of shadow unit – which was
investigating in secret every detail of the Frans Balder murder,
under
cover
of
looking into broader domestic policy implications.
Superintendent
Mårten

Nielsen was formally leading the team and had recently returned from a year of study at the University of Maryland in

the

U.S.

He

was

undoubtedly intelligent and well informed, but too right-wing for Grane's tastes. It was rare to find a well-educated Swede who was

also a wholehearted supporter of the American Republican Party – he even expressed some sympathy for the Tea Party

movement. He was

passionate

about

military

history and lectured at the Military Academy. Although

still young – thirty-nine – he was

believed

to

have

extensive

international

contacts.

He often had trouble, however, asserting himself in the group, and in practice the real

leader

was

Ragnar

Olofsson, who was older and cockier and could silence

Nielsen with one peevish

little sigh or a displeased wrinkle above his bushy

eyebrows. Nor was Nielsen's life made any easier by the fact that Detective Inspector Lars Åke Grankvist was also

on the team.

Before joining the Security

Service, Grankvist had been a semi-legendary

investigator

in

the

Swedish

police's

National Murder Squad, at

least in the sense that he was said to be able to drink anybody else under the table and to manage, with a sort of boisterous charm, to keep a lover in every town. It was not an easy team in which to

hold one's own, and Grane kept an ever lower profile as the afternoon wore on. But this was due less to the men and their macho rivalry than to a growing sense of

uncertainty.

Sometimes she wondered if

she knew even less now than before. She realized, for

example, that there was little or no proof to support the theory of the suspected data

breach. All they had was a statement from Stefan Molde at the N.D.R.E., and not even he had been sure of what he was saying. In her view his analysis was more or less rubbish. Balder seemed to

have relied primarily on the female hacker he had turned to for help, the woman not even

named

in

the

investigation, but whom his assistant, Linus Brandell, had described in such vivid terms.

It was likely that Balder had been withholding a lot from Grane before he left for

America.

For example, was it a

coincidence that he had found a job at Solifon?

The uncertainty gnawed at

her and she was indignant that no help was coming from

Fort Meade. She could not get hold of Alona Casales,

and the N.S.A. was once again a closed door, and so she in turn was no longer passing on any news. Just like Nielsen and Grankvist, she found herself overshadowed

by Olofsson. He kept getting information from his source at

the

Violent

Crimes

Division and immediately

passing it on to Helena Kraft.

Grane did not like it, and in vain she had pointed out that

this traffic not only increased the risk of a leak but also seemed to be costing them their independence. Instead of searching their own channels, they were all too slavishly relying on the information which

flowed

in

from

Bublanski's team.

"We're

like

people

cheating in an exam, waiting for someone to whisper the answer instead of thinking for

ourselves," she had said to the whole team, and this had not made her popular.

Now she was alone in her office, determined to move ahead on her own, trying to see the bigger picture. It might get her nowhere, but on the other hand it would do no harm. She heard steps outside in the corridor, the click-clack of determined high heels

which

Grane

by

now

recognized only too well. It was Kraft, who came in

wearing

a

grey

Armani

jacket, her hair pulled into a tight bun. Kraft gave her an affectionate look. There were times when Grane resented this favouritism.

“How’s it going?” Kraft

said. “Are you surviving?”

“Just about.”

“I’m going to send you
home after this conversation.

You have to get some sleep.

We need an analyst with a clear head.”

“Sounds sensible.”

“Do you know what Erich
Maria Remarque said?”

“That it’s not much fun in the trenches, or something.”

“Ha, no, that it’s always the wrong people who have the guilty conscience. Those who are really responsible for suffering

in

the

world

couldn’t care less. It’s the ones fighting for good who are consumed by remorse.

You’ve got nothing to be

ashamed of, Gabriella. You did what you could.”

“I’m not so sure about that.

But thanks anyway.”

“Have you heard about

Balder’s son?”

“Just very quickly from

Ragnar.”

“At

10.00

tomorrow

morning

Chief

Inspector

Bublanski,

Detective

Sergeant

Modig

and

a

Professor Edelman will be

seeing the boy at Oden's
Medical Centre for Children and
Adolescents,

on

Sveavägen. They're going to try and get him to draw some
more."

"I'll keep my fingers
crossed. But I'm not too
happy to know about it."

“Relax, leave the paranoia to me. The only ones who know about this are people who can keep their traps shut.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“I want to show you something.

There

are

photographs of the man who hacked

Balder's

burglar

alarm.”

“I've seen them already.

I've even studied them in detail.”

“Have you?” Kraft said,

handing over an enlarged and

blurred picture of a wrist.

“What about it?”

“Take another look. What
do you see?”

Grane looked and saw two

things: the luxury watch she had noted before and, beneath it,
barely

distinguishable

between the glove and the jacket cuff, a couple of lines which
looked like amateur

tattoos.

“Contrasts,”

she

said.

“Some cheap tattoos and a very expensive watch.”

“More than that,” Kraft

said. “That’s a 1951 Patek Philippe, model 2499, first series, or just possibly second series.”

“Means nothing to me.”

“It’s one of the finest wristwatches in the world. A few years ago a watch like this sold at auction at

Christie's in Geneva for just over two million dollars.”

“Are you kidding?”

“No, and it wasn't just

anyone who bought it. It was

Jan van der Waal, a lawyer at Dackstone & Partner. He bid for it on behalf of a client.”

“Dackstone & Partner?”

Don't

they

represent

Solifon?”

“Correct. We don’t know

whether the watch in the

surveillance image is the one that was sold in Geneva, and we haven’t been able to find out who that client was. But it’s a start, Gabriella. A scrawny type who looks like a junkie and who wears a

watch of this calibre – that should narrow the field.”

“Does Bublanski know

this?”

“It was his technical expert

Jerker

Holmberg

who

discovered it. Now I want you and your analytical brain to take it further. Go home, get some sleep and get started on it in the morning.”

The man who called himself Jan Holtser was sitting at home in his apartment on

Högbergsgatan in Helsinki,

not far from Esplanaden park, looking through an album of photographs of his daughter Olga, who was now twenty-two and studying medicine in

Gdansk.

Olga was tall and dark and

intense and, as he had a habit of saying, the best thing that ever happened to him. Not just because it sounded good

– he believed it. But now Olga had come to suspect what he was actually doing.

“Are you protecting evil people?” she had asked him one day, before embarking on a manic pursuit of what she called her commitment to the “weak and vulnerable”.

It was pure pinko left-wing

lunacy, in Holtser’s opinion,

not at all in keeping with Olga’s character. He saw it as her attempt to stake out her independence. Behind all the talk about beggars and the sick he thought she was still quite like him. Once upon a time Olga had been a

promising 100-metre runner.

She was 186 centimetres tall, muscular and explosive, and in the old days she had loved watching action films and

listening to him reminisce about the war in Chechnya.

Everyone at school had

known better than to pick a fight with her. She hit back, like a warrior. Olga was

definitely not cut out to minister to the sick and

degenerate.

Yet she claimed to want to

work for Médecins Sans

Frontières or go off to

Calcutta like some Mother

Teresa. Holtser could not bear the
thought.

The

world

belongs to the strong, he felt.

But he loved his daughter, however daft some of her

ideas, and tomorrow she was coming home for the first time in six months for a few days' leave. He solemnly

resolved that he would be a better listener this time, and not pontificate about Stalin

and

great

leaders

and

everything that she hated.

He would instead try to

bring them closer again. He was certain that she needed him. At least he was pretty sure that he needed her. It was 8.00 in the evening and he went into the kitchen and pressed three oranges and

poured Smirnoff into a glass.

It was his third Screwdriver of the day. Once he had

finished a job he could put away six or seven of them, and maybe he would do that now. He was tired, weighed down by all the responsibility laid on his shoulders, and he needed to relax. For a few minutes he stood with his drink

in

his

hand

and

dreamed about a different sort of life. But the man who called himself Jan Holtser had set his hopes too high.

The tranquillity came to an abrupt end as Bogdanov rang on his secure mobile. At first Holtser hoped that Bogdanov just wanted to chat, to release some of the excitement that came with every assignment.

But his colleague was calling about a very specific matter and sounded less than happy.

“I’ve spoken to T.,” he
said. Holtser felt a number of
things all at once, jealousy perhaps most of all.

Why

did

Kira

ring

Bogdanov and not him? Even

if it was Bogdanov who

brought in the big money, and was rewarded accordingly,
Holtser had always been
convinced that he was the one closer to Kira. But Holtser was
also
worried.

Had
something gone wrong after all?

“Is there a problem?” he said.

“The job isn’t finished.”

“Where are you?”

“In town.”

“Come on up in that case and explain what the hell you mean.”

“I’ve booked a table at

Postres.”

“I don’t feel like going to some posh restaurant. Get yourself over here.”

“I haven’t eaten.”

“I’ll fry something up.”

“Sounds good. We’ve got a
long night ahead of us.”

Holtser did not want another long night. Still less did he feel like
telling his daughter that he would not be at home

the next day. But he had no choice. He knew as surely as
he knew that he loved Olga: you could not say no to Kira.

She wielded some invisible

power and however hard he tried he could never be as dignified in
her presence as he wanted. She reduced him to a little boy and
often he turned himself inside out just to see her smile.

Kira

was

staggeringly

beautiful and knew how to make the most of it like no

other beauty before her. She was unmatched when it came

to power games; she knew all

the moves. She could be

weak and needy when it

suiting, but also indomitable, hard and cold as ice, and sometimes plain evil. Nobody

brought out the sadist in him like she did.

She may not have been

intelligent in the conventional sense, and many pointed that

out to try to take her down a peg or two. But the same people were still stupefied in her presence. Kira played

them like a violin and could reduce even the toughest of men to blushing and giggling

schoolchildren.

It was 9.00 and Bogdanov
was sitting next to him
shovelling in the lamb chop
Holtser had prepared. Oddly enough his table manners
were almost passable. That may
have
been
Kira's
influence. In many ways

Bogdanov had become quite
civilized – and then again not.

However he tried to put on airs, he could never entirely rid himself of the appearance of the petty thief and speed addict. He had been off drugs for ages and was a computer

engineer

with

university

qualifications, but still looked ravaged by street life.

“Where’s

your

bling

watch?” Holtser said. “Are you in the doghouse?”

“We both are.”

“It’s that bad?”

“Maybe not.”

“The job isn’t finished, you

said?”

“No, it’s that boy.”

“Which

boy?”

Holtser

pretended not to understand.

“The one you so nobly

spared.”

“What about him? He’s a

retard, you know.”

“Maybe so, but he can

draw.”

“What

do

you

mean,

draw?”

“He’s a savant.”

“A *what?*”

“You should try reading something other than your

fucking gun magazines for
once.”

“What are you talking
about?”

“It’s

someone

who’s

autistic or handicapped in some other way, but who has

a special gift. This boy may not be able to talk or think like a normal person, but he has a photographic memory.

The police think the little bastard is going to be able to draw your face, and then

they're going to run it

through

their

facial-

recognition

software,

and

then you're screwed, aren't you? You must be there

somewhere

in

Interpol's

records?"

"Yes, but Kira can't expect

us to—"

"That's exactly what she expects. We have to fix the boy."

A wave of emotion and

confusion

washed

over

Holtser and once again he saw before him that empty, glassy look from the double bed which had made him feel

so uncomfortable.

“The hell I will,” he said, without really believing it.

“I

know

you've

got

problems with children. I

don't like it either. But we can't avoid this one. Besides, you should be grateful. Kira could just as easily have sacrificed you."

"I suppose so."

"Then it's settled. I've got the plane tickets in my pocket. We'll take the first flight in the morning to

Arlanda, at 6.30, and then
we're going to some place on Sveavägen
called
Oden's
Medical Centre for Children and Adolescents.”
“So the boy's in a clinic.”
“Yes, and that's why we
need to do some planning.
Let me just finish eating.”

The

man

who

called

himself Jan Holtser closed his eyes and tried to figure out what he was going to say to Olga.

Salander was up at 5.00 in the morning and hacked into the N.S.F.

Major

Research

Institute supercomputer at the New

Jersey

Institute

of

Technology – she needed all the mathematical skills she could muster. Then she got out her own program for

elliptic curve factorization and set about cracking the file she had downloaded from the

N.S.A.

But however hard she tried, she could not manage it. She had not really been expecting to

do

so.

It

was

a

sophisticated

encryption,

named after the originators Rivest, Shamir and Adleman.

R.S.A. has two keys – one public, one secret – and is based on Euler's *phi* function and Fermat's little theorem, but above all on the simple fact that it is easy to multiply

two large prime numbers. A calculator will give you the answer in the blink of an eye.

Yet it is all but impossible to work backwards and, on the basis of the answer, calculate the

prime

numbers

you

started out with. Computers are not yet efficient at prime-number factorization, something which had exasperated Lisbeth Salander and the world's intelligence organizations many times in the past. For about a year now Salander had been thinking that E.C.M., the Elliptic

Curve Method, would be

more promising than previous

algorithms, and she had spent long nights writing her own factorization program. But

now, in the early hours of the morning, she realized it

would need more refinement

to have even the slightest chance of success. After three hours of work, she took a break and went to the kitchen, drank some orange juice

straight from the carton and ate two microwaved piroshki.

Back at her desk she
hacked
into
Blomkvist's
computer to see if he had come up with anything new.
He had posted two more
questions for her and she
realized at once: he wasn't so hopeless after all.
<Which of Frans Balder's

assistants betrayed him?> he wrote. And that was a reasonable question.

But she did not answer.

She could not care less about Arvid Wrange. And she had made progress and worked

out who the hollow-eyed

junkie was, the man Wrange had been in touch with, who

had called himself Bogey.

Trinity in Hacker Republic remembered somebody with

that same handle from a number of sites some years previously. That did not necessarily mean anything – Bogey was not the most original alias. But Salander had traced the posts and thought she could be onto something – especially when he carelessly dropped that he was a computer engineer from Moscow University. Salander was unable to

find out when he graduated, or any other dates for that matter, but she got hold of a couple of nerdy details about how Bogey was hooked on

fine watches and crazy for the Arsène Lupin films from the

'70s, about the gentleman

thief of that name.

Then

Salander

posted

questions

on

every

conceivable

website

for

former and current students at Moscow University, asking if

anybody knew a scrawny,

hollow-eyed ex-junkie who

had been a street urchin and master thief and loved Arsène Lupin films. It was not long before she got a reply.

“That sounds like Jurij

Bogdanov,” wrote someone

who introduced herself as Galina.

According to this Galina,

Bogdanov was a legend at the

university. Not just because he had hacked into all the lecturers’ computers and had dirt on every one of them. He was always asking people:

will you bet me one hundred roubles I can't break into that house over there?

Many who did not know him thought this was easy money. But Jurij could pick any door lock, and if for some reason he failed he would shin up the facade or the walls instead. He was known for his daring, and for his evil. He was said once to have kicked a dog to death when it disturbed him in his work and he was always

stealing things, just for the

hell of it. Galina thought he might

have

been

a

kleptomaniac. But he was

also a genius hacker and a talented analyst, and after he graduated the world was his oyster. He did not want a job, he wanted to go his own way,

he said, and it did not take Salander long to work out what he got up to after

university – at least according to the official version.

Jurij Bogdanov was now thirty-four years old. He had left Russia and lived in Berlin on Budapester Strasse, not far from the Michelin-starred

restaurant Hugo's. He ran a white-hat computer security business
– Outcast Security –

with seven employees and a turnover in the last financial year of
twenty-two million euros. It was ironic – yet somehow entirely
logical –

that his front was a company which protected industrial
groups from people like

himself. He had not had any criminal convictions since he took his
exams in 2009 and managed a wide network of contacts

–

one

of

the

members of his board of

directors was Ivan Gribanov, member of the Russian Duma

and a major shareholder in the oil company Gazprom –

but she could find nothing to get her further.

Blomkvist's

second

question was:

<Oden's Medical Centre on Sveavägen:

is

it

safe?

(Delete this as soon as you read it)>

He did not explain why he was interested in the place.

But she knew that Blomkvist was not someone who threw questions out at random. Nor

did he make a habit of being unclear.

If he was being cryptic,
then he had a reason to be: the information must be
sensitive.

There
was
evidently
something
significant about this medical centre.

Salander

soon

discovered

that

it

had

attracted

a

number

of

complaints – children had
been forgotten or ignored and
had been able to self-harm.

Oden's

was

managed

privately by its director, Torkel

Lindén,

and

his

company Care Me and, if one

was

to

believe

past

employees, Lindén's word

was law. The profit margin was always high because

nothing was bought unless

absolutely necessary.

Lindén himself was a

former star gymnast, among

other

things

a

one-time

Swedish high-bar champion.

Nowadays

he

was

a

passionate

hunter

and

member

of

a

Christian
congregation that took an
uncompromising
line
on
homosexuality. Salander went
onto the websites of the
Swedish
Association

for

Hunting

and

Wildlife

Management and the Friends of Christ to see what kinds of activities were going on there.

Then she sent Lindén two

fake but enticing emails

which looked as if they had come from the organizations,
attaching PDF files with

sophisticated malware which would open automatically if Lindén

clicked

on

the

messages.

By 8.23 she had got onto the server and immediately confirmed
her suspicions.

August Balder had been admitted to the clinic the previous afternoon. In the medical file, underneath a description

of

the

circumstances

which

had

resulted in his admittance, it said:

Infantile autism, severe mental

impairment.

Restless.

Severely

traumatized by death of father.

Constant

observation

required.

Difficult to

handle.

Brought jigsaw puzzles.

Not

allowed

to

draw!

Observed

to

be

compulsive

and

destructive. Diagnosis by psychologist

Forsberg,

confirmed by T.L.

And the following had been added underneath, clearly somewhat later:

Professor

Charles

Edelman, Chief Inspector Bublanski and Detective

Sergeant Modig will visit

A. Balder at 10.00 on Wednesday,

November

22. T.L. will be present.

Drawing

under

supervision.

Further down still it said:

Change

of

venue.

A.

Balder to be taken by T.L.

and Professor Edelman to

his mother Hanna Balder on Torsgatan, Bublanski

and Modig will join. A.B. is thought likely to draw

better

in

his

home

environment.

Salander quickly checked who Edelman was, and when she saw that his specialism was

savant

skills

she

understood

straight

away

what was going on. They

seemed

to

be

working

towards some sort of witness statement in the form of a sketch.
Why else would

Bublanski and Sonja Modig

be interested in the boy's drawing, and why else would

Blomkvist have been so cautious

in

framing

his

question?

None of this must be

allowed to get out. No killer must be able to find out that the boy might be able to draw a picture of him. Salander decided to see for herself how careful Lindén had been in his correspondence. Luckily he had not written anything more about the boy's drawing

ability. He had on the other hand received an email from Edelman at 23.10 last night, copied

to

Modig

and

Bublanski. That email was

clearly the reason why the meeting place had been

changed. Edelman wrote:

<Hi Torkel, How good of you to see me at your medical centre. I really appreciate it.

But I'm afraid I have to be a bit awkward. I think we

stand the best chance of

getting a good result if we

arrange for the boy to draw in an environment where he

feels secure. That's not in any way to criticize your medical centre. I've heard a

lot of good things about it.> The

hell

you

have,

Salander thought, and read on:

<Therefore I'd like us to move the boy to his mother,

Hanna

Balder,

on

Torsgatan,

tomorrow

morning. The reason being

that it is recognized in

literature on the subject that

the presence of the mother has a positive effect on

children with savant skills. If you and the boy wait

outside the entrance on

Sveavägen at 9.15, then I can pick you up as I go by.

That would give us the

opportunity for a bit of a chat between colleagues.

Best regards

Charles Edelman>

Bublanski and Modig had

replied at 7.01 and 7.14

respectively. There was good reason, they wrote, to rely on

Edelman's

expertise

and

follow his advice. Lindén had just now, at 7.57, confirmed that he and the boy would wait for Charles Edelman

outside

the

entrance

on

Sveavägen. Salander sat for a while, lost in thought. Then she went to the kitchen and picked up a few old biscuits from the larder, and looked out towards Slussen and

Riddarfjärden.

So,

she

thought, *the venue for the meeting has been changed.*

Instead

of

doing

his

drawing at the medical centre, the boy would be driven

home to his mother. The

presence of the mother has a positive
effect,

Edelman

wrote. There was something about that phrase Salander did not like. It felt old-fashioned, didn't it? And the introduction itself was not

much better: "The reason being that it is recognized in literature on the subject ..."

It was stilted. Although it was true that many academics

could not write to save their lives, and she knew nothing about the way in which this professor normally expressed himself, would

one of the world's leading neurologists really feel the need to lean
on what is recognized in the

literature? Wouldn't he be more self-assured?

Salander

went

to

her

computer

and

skimmed

through some of Edelman's

papers on the net; she may have found the odd little touch of vanity, even in the most factual passages, but there was nothing clumsy or psychologically naive in what he had written. On the

contrary, the man was sharp.

So she went back to the emails and checked to find out which SMTP server it had

been transmitted through, and that made her jump right

away. The server, Birdino, was not familiar, which it should have been, so she sent it a series of commands to see exactly what it

was. In a matter of seconds she had the evidence in black and white: the server supported open

mail relay, and the sender could

therefore

transmit

messages from any address

he or she wanted.

In other words, the email from Edelman was a fake,

and the copies to Bublanski and Modig were no more than

a smokescreen. She hardly
even needed to check; she already
knew
what
had
happened: the police's replies and the approval of the
altered arrangements were also a bluff. It didn't just mean that
someone was
pretending to be Edelman.

There also had to be a leak, and above all, somebody wanted the boy outside on the street on Sveavägen.

Somebody

wanted

him

defenceless in the street so that ... what? They could kidnap or get rid of him?

Salander looked at her watch;

it was already 8.55. In just twenty

minutes

Torkel

Lindén and August Balder

would be outside waiting for someone

who

was

not

Professor Edelman, and who had

anything

but

good

intentions towards them.

What should she do? Call

the police? That was never her first choice. She was especially

reluctant

when

there was a risk of leaks.

Instead, she went onto Oden's website and got hold of

Lindén's office number. But she only made it as far as the switchboard. Lindén was in a

meeting. So she found his mobile. After ending up in his voicemail, she swore out

loud, and sent him both a text and an email telling him not to go out into the street with the boy, not under any

circumstances. She signed

herself "Wasp" for lack of any better idea.

Then she threw on her

leather jacket and rushed out.

But she turned, ran back into the apartment and packed her laptop with the encrypted file and her pistol, a Beretta 92, into a black sports bag before hurrying out again. She wondered if she should take her car, the B.M.W. M6 Convertible gathering dust in the garage. But she decided a taxi would be quicker. She soon regretted it. When a taxi finally appeared, it was clear that rush-hour had not

subsided.

Traffic inched forward and Centralbron was almost at a standstill. Had there been an accident? Everything went

slowly, everything but the time, which flew. Soon it was 9.05, then 9.10. She was in a

tearing hurry and in the worst case it was already too late.

Most likely Lindén and the boy went out onto the street ahead of time and the killer, or whoever it was, had

already struck.

She

dialled

Lindén's

number again. This time the call went through, but there was no answer, so she swore again and thought of Mikael Blomkvist. She had not

actually spoken to him in ages. But now she called him

and he answered, sounding

irritated.

Only

when

he

realized who it was did he brighten up:

“Lisbeth, is that you?”

“Shut up and listen,” she said.

Blomkvist

was

in

the

Millennium

offices

on

Götgatan, in a foul mood. It was not just because he had had another bad night. It was T.T. Usually a serious and decent news agency, T.T. had

put out a bulletin claiming that Mikael Blomkvist was

sabotaging

the

murder

enquiry

by

withholding

crucial information, which he intended to publish first in *Millennium*.

Allegedly his aim was to save the magazine from financial disaster and rebuild his own “ruined reputation”.

Blomkvist had known that the

story was in the offing. He had had a long conversation with

its

author,

Harald

Wallin, the evening before.

But he could not have

imagined such a devastating result.

It was made up of idiotic insinuations

and

unsubstantiated accusations, but Wallin had nonetheless managed

to

produce

something which sounded

almost

objective,

almost

credible. The man obviously had good sources both within

the Serner Group and the

police.

Admittedly

the

headline was innocuous –

PROSECUTOR CRITICAL

OF MIKAEL BLOMKVIST

– and there was plenty of room

in

the

story

for

Blomkvist to defend himself.

But whichever of his enemies

was

responsible

he

understood media logic: if a news bureau as serious as T.T.
publishes a story like this one, not only does that make

it

legitimate

for

everybody else to jump on the bandwagon, it just about

requires them to take a tougher line. It explained why Blomkvist
woke up to the

online papers saying

BLOMKVIST

SABOTAGES

MURDER

INVESTIGATION

and

BLOMKVIST

ATTEMPTS TO

SAVE MAGAZINE.

MURDERER

RUNS FREE.

The print media were good

enough to put quotation

marks around the headlines.

But the overall impression was nevertheless that a new truth was being served up with the breakfast coffee. A

columnist by the name of Gustav Lund, who claimed to

be fed up with all the

hypocrisy, began his piece by writing: “Mikael Blomkvist, who has always thought of himself as a cut above the rest, has now been unmasked as the biggest cynic of us all”.

“Let’s hope they don’t start

waving subpoenas at us,” said Malm, designer and part-owner of the magazine, as he

stood next to Blomkvist, nervously chewing gum.

“Let’s hope they don’t call
in the Marines,” Blomkvist said.

“What?”

“It was meant to be a
joke.”

“Oh, O.K. But I don’t like the tone,” Malm said.

“Nobody likes it. But the best we can do is grit our
teeth and get on with business as usual.”

“Your phone’s buzzing.”

“It’s always buzzing.”

“How about answering it,
before they come up with
anything worse?”

“Yes,

yes,”

Blomkvist

muttered.

It was a girl. He thought he
recognized the voice but,
caught off guard, he could not at first place it.

“Who’s that?” he said.

“Salander,” she said, and at
that he gave a big smile.

“Lisbeth, is that you?”

“Shut up and listen,” she said. And so he did.

The traffic had eased and Salander and the taxi driver, a young man called Ahmed

who told her he had seen the Iraq war at close quarters and

lost his mother and two brothers in terrorist attacks, had emerged onto Sveavägen and passed the Stockholm

Concert Hall on their left.

Salander, who was a terrible passenger,

sent

off

yet

another text message to

Lindén and tried to call some other member of staff at

Oden's, anybody who could

run out and warn him. No reply. She swore aloud,

hoping that Blomkvist would do better.

“Is it panic stations?”

Ahmed said from the driver's

seat.

When Salander replied,

“Yes,” Ahmed shot the red light and got a fleeting smile out of her.

After that she focused on every metre they covered.

Away to the left she caught a glimpse of the School of

Economics and the Public Library – there was not far to go now. She scanned for the street numbers on the right-hand side, and at last saw the address. Thankfully there was no-one lying dead on the

pavement. Salander pulled

out

some

hundred-kronor

notes for Ahmed. It was an ordinary, dreary November

day, no more than that, and people were on their way to

work. But wait ... She looked over towards the low, green-speckled wall on the other side of the street.

A powerfully built man in a woollen hat and dark

glasses was standing there, staring

intently

at

the

entrance on Sveavägen. There

was something about his

body language – his right hand was not visible but the arm was tensed and ready.

Salander looked again at the door across the street, to the extent that she could see anything from her oblique

angle, and she noticed it opening.

It opened slowly, as if the person about to come out was

hesitant or found the door heavy, and all of a sudden Salander shouted to Ahmed

to stop. She jumped out of the moving car, just as the man

across the street raised his right hand and aimed a pistol with a telescopic sight at the door sliding slowly open.

CHAPTER 17

22.xi

The man who called himself Jan Holtser was not happy

with the situation. The place was wide open and it was the

wrong time of day. The street was too busy, and although he had done his best to cover his

face,

he

was

uncomfortable in daylight,

and so near the park. More than ever he felt that he hated killing children.

But that's the way it was and he had to accept that the situation was of his own making.

He had underestimated the

boy and now he had to

correct his mistake. He must not let wishful thinking or his own demons get in the way.

He would keep his mind on the job, be the professional he always was and above all not

think about Olga, still less recall that glassy stare which

had

confronted

him

in

Balder's bedroom.

He had to concentrate now

on the doorway across the street and on his Remington pistol
which he was keeping under his windbreaker. But why

wasn't

anything

happening? His mouth felt

dry. The wind was biting.

There was snow lying in the street and on the pavement and people were hurrying

back and forth to work. He tightened his grip on the pistol and glanced at his watch.

It was 9.16, and then 9.17.

But still no-one emerged

from the doorway across the road and he cursed: was

something wrong? All he had

to go on was Bogdanov's

word, but that was assurance enough. The man was a

wizard with computers and

last

night

he

had

sat

engrossed

in

his

work,

sending off fake emails and getting the language right with the help of his contacts in Sweden. Holtser had taken

care of the rest: studying pictures

of

the

place,

selecting the weapon and

above all organizing the

getaway car – a rental which Dennis

Wilton

of

the

Svavelsjö Motorcycle Club

had fixed for them under a false name and which was

now standing ready three

blocks away, with Bogdanov at the wheel.

Holtser sensed a movement

immediately behind him and jumped. But it was just two young men walking past a

little too close to him. The street seemed to be getting busier and he did not like that. In the distance a dog was

barking and there was a smell, maybe food frying at McDonald's, then ... at long last ... a short man in a grey overcoat and a curly-haired boy in a red quilted jacket could be seen through the glass door on the other side of the street. Holtser crossed himself with his left hand as he always did and started to take up the pressure on the

trigger of his weapon. But what was happening?

The door did not open. The

man hesitated and looked

down at his mobile. *Get a move on*, Holtser thought. *At last, here we go ...* slowly, slowly the door was pushed open and they were on their way out, and Holtser raised his pistol, aiming at the boy's face through the telescopic sight, and saw once more

those glassy eyes. Suddenly he felt an unexpected, violent rush of excitement. Suddenly he did want to kill the boy.

Suddenly he wanted to snuff out that frightening look, once and for all. But then something happened.

A young woman came

running out of nowhere and threw herself over the boy as Holtser fired and hit the target.

At

least

he

hit

something, and he shot again and again. But the boy and the woman had rolled behind a car, quick as lightning.

Holtser caught his breath and looked right and left. Then he raced

across

the

street,

commando-style.

This time he was not going

to fail.

Lindén had never been on satisfactory terms with his telephones. His wife, Saga, leaped with anticipation at every call, hoping that it would bring a new job or a new offer; he just felt

uncomfortable whenever his

mobile rang.

It was because of all the complaints.

He

and

the

medical centre were always taking abuse. In his view that

was all part of their business

– Oden's was an emergency centre and so inevitably

emotions tended to run high.

But he also knew on some level that the complaints were justified.
He may have driven his

cost-cutting

too

far.

Occasionally he just ran

away, went out to the woods and let the others get on with it. On
the other hand, he did from time to time get

recognition, most recently from no less a person than Professor
Edelman.

The professor had irritated him at first. He did not like it when outsiders meddled in

the way the clinic managed their procedures. But he felt more conciliatory since he had been praised in that email this morning. Who knows?

He might even get the

professor to support the idea

of the boy staying on at Oden's for a while. That

might add some spark to his life, although he could not quite understand why. As a rule he tended to keep himself apart from the children.

There
was
something
enigmatic about this August Balder which intrigued him.
From the very first he had been aggravated by the police and
their
demands.
He
wanted August to himself and hoped

perhaps

to

be

associated with some of the mystique surrounding the boy

– or at least be able to understand

what

those

endless rows of numbers

meant, the ones he had

written on that comic in the playroom. But it was far from easy.
The boy seemed to shun

any form of contact and now he was refusing to come out

to the street. He was being hopelessly

contrary,

and

Lindén was forced to drag him by his elbow.

“Come on, come *on*,” he muttered.

Then his mobile buzzed.

Somebody was determined to
get hold of him.

He

did

not

answer.

Probably it was some trivial nonsense,

yet

another

complaint. But as he reached
the door, he decided to check his messages. There were
several texts from a withheld number, and they were saying
something
strange,
presumably some kind of a joke: they told him not go outside. He
was under no
circumstances to go into the street.
Incomprehensible, and at

that moment August seemed

to want to run for it. Lindén

took a firm grip on his arm, opened the door hesitantly and pulled the boy out.

Everything

was

normal.

People walked by as they did

every day and he wondered again about the text messages but, before he had time to complete the thought, a figure came rushing

in from the left and threw itself over August.

In that instant he heard a shot.

Obviously

he

was

in

danger, and he looked across the street in terror, and there saw a tall, powerful man

running towards him across Sveavägen. What the hell did

he have in his hand? Was that a pistol?

Without a thought for

August, Lindén turned to go back through the door and for a second or two he thought he

was going to make it to safety. But he never did.

Salander's reaction had been instinctive as she launched herself on top of the boy. She had hurt herself when she hit the pavement, or at least there was pain in her shoulder and chest. But she had no time to take stock. She took hold of the child and hid behind a car

and they lay there breathing heavily while shots were

fired. After that it became disturbingly quiet, and when Salander peered under the car she could see the sturdy legs of their attacker racing across the street. It crossed her mind to grab the Beretta from her sports bag and return fire, but she realized she would not have time. On the other hand

... a large Volvo came

crawling past, so she jumped to her feet and in one

confused rush lifted the boy and ran towards the car. She wrenched open the back door

and threw herself in with him.

“Drive!” she yelled, as she saw blood spreading onto the

seat.

Jacob Charro was twenty-two

and the proud owner of a

Volvo XC60 which he had bought on credit with his father as guarantor. He was on his way to Uppsala to have lunch with his uncle and aunt and cousins, and he was

looking forward to it. He was dying to tell them that he'd got a place on Syrian F.C.'s first team.

The radio was playing

Avicii's "Wake Me Up" and he was drumming his fingers

on the steering wheel as he drove past the Concert Hall and the School of Economics.

Something was going on

further

down

the

street.

People were running in all directions.

A

man

was

shouting and the cars in front of

him

were

driving

erratically, so he slowed

down. If there had been an accident, he might be able to

help. Charro was always dreaming of being a hero.

But this time he got a

fright. The man to the left of him ran through the traffic across the road, looking like a soldier on an offensive. There was something brutal in his movements and Charro was

about to floor the accelerator when he heard his rear door being yanked open. Someone had thrown themselves in and

he started shouting. He had no idea what. Maybe it was not even in Swedish. But the person – it was a girl with a child – yelled back:

“Drive!”

He hesitated for a second.

Who *were* these people?

Maybe they meant to rob

him, or steal the car. He could not think straight, the whole situation was crazy. Then he had no choice but to act. His

rear window was shattered because

someone

was

shooting at them, so he

accelerated wildly and with a pounding heart drove through

a red at the intersection with Odengatan.

“What’s all this about?” he

shouted. “What’s going on?”

“Shut it!” the girl snapped back. In the rear-view mirror he could see her examining the small boy who had large

terrified eyes, checking him over

with

practised

movements, like a hospital nurse. Then he noticed for the first time that there was not just broken glass all over the back seat.

There was blood too.

“Has he been shot?”

“I don’t know. Just keep
driving. Go left there ...

Now!”

“O.K., O.K.,” he said, terrified now, and he took a hard

left

up

along

Vanadisvägen and drove at
high speed towards Vasastan,
wondering if they were being
followed and if anyone would
shoot at them again.

He

lowered

his

head

towards the steering wheel and felt the draught through the broken rear window.

What the hell had he been

dragged into, and who *was* this girl? He looked at her again in the mirror. Black hair and piercings and a

glowering look, and for a moment he felt that as far as she was concerned he simply did not exist. But then she muttered something which

sounded almost cheerful.

“Good news?” he asked.

She did not answer. Instead

she pulled off her leather

jacket, took hold of her white T-shirt and then ... Jesus! She ripped it apart with a sudden jerk and was sitting there naked from the waist up, not wearing a bra or anything, and

he

glanced

in

bewilderment at her breasts which stood straight out, and above all at the blood that ran over them like a rivulet, down towards her stomach and the waistband of her jeans.

The girl had been hit somewhere

below

the

shoulder, not far above her heart, and was bleeding

heavily. Using the T-shirt for a bandage, she wound it

tightly to staunch the flow of blood and put her leather jacket back on . She looked ridiculously

pleased

with

herself, especially since some of the blood had splashed

onto her cheek and forehead, like war paint.

“So the good news is that you got shot and not the boy?” he said.

“Something like that,” she said.

“Should I take you to the Karolinska hospital?”

“No.”

Salander had found both the entry and exit holes. The bullet must have gone straight through the front of her

shoulder, which was bleeding

profusely – she could feel her heart pounding all the way up to her temples. But she did not think any artery had been severed, or at

least so she hoped. She looked back. The attacker must have had a

getaway car somewhere close

by, but nobody seemed to be following them. With any

luck they had managed to

escape fast enough.

She quickly looked down

at the boy – August – who was sitting with his hands crossed

over

his

chest,

rocking

backwards

and

forwards. It struck Salander that

she

ought

to

do

something, so she brushed the glass fragments from the boy's hair and legs, and that made him sit still for a moment. Salander was not sure that was a good sign.

The look in his eyes was rigid and blank. She nodded at him and tried to look as if she had the situation under control.

She was feeling sick and dizzy and the T-shirt she had wound around her shoulder

was by now soaked in blood.

She was afraid that she might

be losing consciousness and tried to come up with some sort of plan. One thing was crystal clear: the police were not an option. They had led the boy right into the path of the assailant and were plainly not on top of the situation. So what should she do?

She could not stay in this car. It had been seen at the shooting and the shattered rear window was bound to

attract attention. She should get the man to drive her home to Fiskargatan. Then she

could take her B.M.W.,

registered to Irene Nesser, if only she had the strength to drive it.

“Head

towards

Västerbron!” she ordered.

“O.K., O.K.,” said the man

driving.

“Do you have anything to

drink?”

“A bottle of whisky – I was going to give it to my uncle.”

“Pass it back here,” she
said, and was handed a bottle of Grant’s, which she opened
with difficulty.

She tore off her makeshift bandage and poured whisky
onto the bullet wound. She took one, two, three big
mouthfuls, and was just
offering some to August
when it dawned on her that
that perhaps was not such a good idea. Children don’t

drink whisky. Not even

children

in

shock.

Her

thoughts

were

getting

confused. Was that what was happening?

“You’ll have to give me
your shirt,” she said to the man up front.

“What?”

“I need something else to bandage my shoulder with.”

“O.K., but—”

“No buts.”

“If you want me to help
you, you could at least tell me why you were being shot at.
Are you criminals?”

“I’m trying to protect the boy, it’s that simple. Those bastards were after him.”

“Why?”

“None of your business.”

“So he’s not your son.”

“I don’t even know him.”

“So why are you helping him?”

Salander hesitated.

“We

have

the

same

enemies,” she said. At that the young man pulled off his V-necked pullover – with a certain amount of reluctance and difficulty – as he steered the car with his other hand.

Then he unbuttoned his shirt, took it off and handed it back to Salander, who wound it

gingerly around her shoulder.

August, who was worryingly immobile now, looked down

at his skinny legs with a frozen expression, and once again Salander asked herself what she ought to be doing.

They could hide out at her place

on

Fiskargatan.

Blomkvist was the only

person who knew the address,

and the apartment could not be traced through her name

on any public register. But it was still a risk. There had been a time when she was known up and down the

country as a complete lunatic, and this enemy was certainly skilled

at

digging

up

information.

Someone on Sveavägen

might have recognized her; the police might already be turning everything upside

down to find her. She needed

a new hiding place, not linked to any of her identities, and so she needed help. But from whom? Holger?

Her

former

guardian,

Holger Palmgren, had almost recovered from his stroke and was living in a two-room

apartment

on

Liljeholmstorget. Holger was the only person who really knew her. He was loyal to a fault and would do everything

in his power to help. But he was elderly and anxious and she did not want to drag him into this if she could help it.

There was Blomkvist of

course, and in fact there was nothing wrong with him.

Still, she was reluctant to contact him again – perhaps *precisely* because there was nothing wrong with him. He was such a damn good

person. But what the hell ...

you could hardly hold that against him, or at least not too much.
She called his mobile.

He picked up after just one ring, sounding alarmed.

“It’s such a relief to hear your voice! What the hell has happened?”

“I can’t tell you now.”

“It looks like one of you’s been shot. There’s blood
here.”

“The boy’s O.K.”

“And you?”

“I’m O.K.”

“You’ve been shot.”

“You’ll have to wait,

Blomkvist.”

She looked out at the town

and saw that they were close to Västerbron already. She turned to the driver:

“Pull up there, by the bus stop.”

“Are you getting out?”

“*You’re* getting out. You’re going to give me your mobile and wait outside while I talk.

Is that clear?”

He glanced at her, terrified, then passed back his mobile, stopped the car and got out.

Salander

continued

her

conversation.

“What’s

going

on?”

Blomkvist said.

“Don’t you worry about

that,” she said. “From now on

I want you to carry an Android phone with you, a Samsung or something. You

must have one at the office?”

“Yes, I think there are a couple.”

“Good. So go straight into Google Play and install the Redphone app and also the Threema

app

for

text

messaging. We need a secure

line of communication.”

“Right.”

“If you’re as much of an idiot as I think you are, whoever helps you do it has to remain anonymous. I don’t want any weak links.”

“Of course.”

“And then ...”

“Yes?”

“Only

use

it

in

an

emergency.

All

other

communication should be

through a special link on your computer. You or the person

who isn't an idiot needs to go into

www.pgpi.org

and

download

an

encryption

program for your emails. I want you to do that right now, then I want you to find a safe hiding place for the boy and me

—

somewhere

not

connected

to

you

or

Millennium – and let me have the address in an encrypted email.”

“It’s not your job to keep the boy safe, Lisbeth.”

“I don’t trust the police.”

“Then we’ll have to find

someone else you *do* trust.

The boy is autistic, he has special needs. I don't think you should be responsible for him, especially not if you're wounded ..."

"Are you going to keep talking crap or do you want to help me?"

"Help you of course."

"Good.

Check

LISBETH

STUFF in five minutes. I'll give you more information

there. Then delete it.”

“Lisbeth, listen to me, you need to get to a hospital. You need to be fixed up. I can tell by your voice ...”

She hung up, waved the

young man back in from the bus stop, got out her laptop and through her mobile

hacked

into

Blomkvist’s

computer. She wrote out

instructions

on

how

to

download and install the

encryption program.

She then told the man to drive her to Mosebacke torg.

It was a risk, but she had no choice.

The

city

was

beginning to look more and more blurred.

Blomkvist swore under his breath. He was standing on Sveavägen, not far from the body of Torkel Lindén and the cordon which the police who had been first on the scene were putting in place.

Ever since Salander's original call he had been engaged in a frenzy of activity. He had thrown himself into a taxi to get here and had done

everything he could during

the trip to stop the boy and the director from walking out onto the street.

The only other member of

staff he had managed to get hold of at Oden's Medical Centre was Birgitta Lindgren, who had rushed into the

hallway only to see her

colleague fall against the door with a fatal bullet wound to his head. When Blomkvist

arrived ten minutes later she

was beside herself, but she and another woman by the

name of Ulrika Franzén, who

had been on her way to the offices of Albert Bonniers the publishers further up the

street, had still been able to give Blomkvist a pretty

coherent account of what had

happened.

Which was why Blomkvist

knew, even before his mobile

rang again, that Salander had

saved August Balder's life.

She and the boy were now in
some car with a driver who had
no
reason
to
be
enthusiastic about helping
them having been shot at.

Blomkvist had seen the blood

on the pavement and in the street and, even though the call reassured him somewhat,

he

was

still

extremely

concerned.

Salander

had

sounded in a bad way and yet

– no surprise there – she had been as pig-headed as ever.

She had a gunshot wound,

but she was determined to hide the boy herself. That was understandable, given her

history, but should he and the magazine

get

involved?

However heroic her actions on Sveavägen, what she had done might from a legal point of

view

be

seen

as

kidnapping. He could not

help her with that. He was already in trouble with the media as well as the public prosecutor.

But this was Salander after

all, and he had given his word. He would damn well help her, even if Berger threw a fit. He took a deep breath and pulled out his mobile.

But a familiar voice was calling out behind him. It was Jan Bublanski.

Bublanski came running along the pavement looking as if he were close

to

physical

collapse, and with him were Detective Sergeant Modig

and a tall, athletic man in his fifties,

presumably

the

professor

Salander

had

mentioned.

“Where’s

the

boy?”

Bublanski panted.

“He was whisked away in a

big red Volvo, somebody

rescued him.”

“Who?”

“I’ll tell you what I know,”

Blomkvist said, not sure what he would or should say. “But first I have to make a call.”

“Oh no, first you’re going to talk to us. We have to send out a nationwide alert.”

“Talk to that lady over

there. Her name is Ulrika Franzén. She knows more

than I do. She saw it happen,

she’s even got some sort of description of the assailant. I arrived after it happened.”

“And the man who saved
the boy?”

“The *woman* who saved him. Fru Franzén has a
description of her as well. But just give me a minute here
...”

“How
did
you
know

something was going to
happen in the first place,”

Modig spat, with unexpected anger. “They said on the
radio that you had called the emergency services before
any shots were fired.”

“I had a tip-off.”

“From whom?”

Blomkvist took another
deep

breath

and

looked

Modig straight in the eye, unmoveable as ever.

“Whatever may have been

written in today’s papers, I

hope you realize that I want to cooperate with you in

every way I can.”

“I’ve always trusted you,

Mikael. But I'm beginning to
have my doubts," Modig said.

"O.K., I understand that.

But you have to understand that *I* don't trust *you* either.

There's been a serious leak –

you've grasped that much,

haven't you? Otherwise this wouldn't have happened," he

said, pointing at the prone body inside the cordon.

"That's

true,

and

it's

absolutely

terrible,”

Bublanski said.

“I'm going to make my call

now,” Blomkvist said, and he

walked up the street so he could talk undisturbed.

But he never made any
call. He realised that the time had come to get serious about
security, so he walked back
and informed Bublanski and Modig that he had to go to his office
immediately, but he was
at
their
disposal
whenever they needed him.
At that moment, to her own surprise, Modig took hold of his arm.

“First you have to tell us how you knew that something was going to happen,” she said firmly.

“I’m afraid I have to invoke my right to protect my sources,”

Blomkvist

answered with a pained smile.

Then he waved down a taxi

and took off for the office, deep in thought. *Millennium* usually used Tech Source, a consultancy firm with a team of young women who gave

the magazine quick and

efficient help whenever they had more complex I.T. issues.

But he did not want to bring them in now. Nor did he feel like turning to Christer Malm, even though he knew more

about I.T. than anyone on the editorial team. Instead he thought of Zander, who was already involved in the story and was also great with

computers.

Blomkvist

decided to ask for his help, and promised himself that he would fight to get the boy a

permanent job – just as soon as

he

and

Berger

had

managed to sort out this

mess.

Berger's morning had been a nightmare even before shots were fired on Sveavägen, and

that was due to the sickening T.T. bulletin. To some extent it was a continuation of the old

campaign

against

Blomkvist – all the jealous, twisted souls came crawling out of the woodwork again, spewing their bile on Twitter and online forums and in

emails. This time the racist mob had joined in, because *Millennium* had been in the forefront of the battles against xenophobia and racism for

many years.

The worst part was surely that this hate campaign made

it so much more difficult for everyone to do their jobs. All of a sudden people were less inclined to share information with the magazine. On top of

that there was a rumour that Chief Prosecutor Ekström

was planning to issue a search warrant for the magazine's offices. Berger did not really believe it. That kind of

warrant was a serious matter,

given the right to source protection.

But she did agree with

Malm that the present toxic atmosphere would give even lawyers ludicrous ideas about how they should act. She was

standing there thinking about how

to

retaliate

when

Blomkvist stepped into the offices. To her surprise, he did not want to talk to her.

Instead he went straight to

Zander and ushered him into her room.

After a while she followed.

She found the young man

looking tense. She heard

Blomkvist mention "P.G.P."

She had been on an I.T.

security course so she knew what that meant, and she saw

Zander making notes before, without so much as a glance in her direction, he made a

beeline

for

Blomkvist's

laptop in the open-plan office.

“What was all that about?”

she said.

Blomkvist told her in a

whisper. She could barely

take it in, and he had to repeat himself.

“So you want me to find a hiding place for them?”

“Sorry to drag you into

this, Erika,” he said. “But I don’t know anyone who has as many friends with summer houses as you do.”

“I don’t know, Mikael. I really don’t know.”

“We can’t let them down.

Salander has been shot. The situation is desperate.”

“If she’s been shot, she should go to a hospital.”

“She won’t. She wants to

protect the boy at all costs.”

“To give him the calm he needs to draw the murderer.”

“Yes.”

“It’s

too

great

a

responsibility, Mikael, too great a risk. If something happens, the fallout would destroy

the

magazine.

Witness protection is not our job. This is something for the police – just think of all the questions that will be thrown up by those drawings, both for the investigation and on a

psychological level. There has to be another solution.”

“Maybe – if we were

dealing with someone other than Lisbeth Salander.”

“You know what? I get

really pissed off with the way you always defend her.”

“I’m only trying to be

realistic. The authorities have let the Balder boy down and put his life in danger – I know that infuriates Salander.”

“So we just have to go along with it, is that it?”

“We don’t have a choice.

She’s out there somewhere, hopping

mad,

and

has

nowhere to go.”

“Take them to Sandhamn

then.”

“There’s too much of a

connection between Lisbeth

and me. If it comes out that it’s her, they would search my addresses straight away.”

“O.K. then.”

“O.K. then, what?”

“O.K., I’ll find something.”

She could hardly believe

she was saying it. That was how it was with Blomkvist –

she was incapable of saying no – but there was no limit to what he would do for her either.

“Great, Ricky. Where?”

She tried to think, but her mind was a blank. She could

not come up with a single name.

“I’m racking my brains,”

she said.

“Well, do it quickly, then give

the

address

and

directions to Andrei. He

knows what to do.”

Berger needed some air

and so she went down into Götgatan and walked in the direction

of

Medborgarplatsen,

running

through

one

name

after

another in her mind. But not one of them felt right. There was too much at stake, and everyone she thought of was in some way not right or had some drawback or even if not

she was reluctant to expose them to the risk or put them to the trouble by asking, perhaps because she herself was so upset by the situation.

On the other hand ... here

was a small boy and people were trying to kill him and she had promised. She had to

come up with something.

A police siren wailed in the

distance and she looked over towards the park and the

Tunnelbana station and at the mosque on the hill. A young man went by, surreptitiously shuffling some papers, and then suddenly

– Gabriella

Grane. At first the name

surprised her. Grane was not a close friend and she worked at a place where it was

unwise to flout any laws.

Grane would risk losing her job if she so much as thought about this, and yet ... Berger could not get it out of her head.

It was not just that Grane was an exceptionally good

and responsible person. A

memory also kept intruding.

It was from last summer, in the early hours of the morning or maybe even at daybreak after a crayfish party out at Grane's summer house on Ingarö island, when the two had been sitting in a garden swing on the terrace looking down at the water through a gap in the trees.

"This is where I'd run to if the hyenas were after me," Berger had said, without

really knowing what she meant. She had been feeling tired and vulnerable at work, and there was something about that house which she thought would make it an ideal place of refuge.

It

stood

on

a

rock

promontory

with

steep,

smooth

sides,

and

the

surrounding

trees

and

elevation shielded it from onlookers. She remembered

Grane saying, “If the hyenas come

after

you,

you’re

welcome to be here, Erika.”

Maybe it was asking too

much, but she decided to give it a try. She went back to the office to call from the

encrypted

Redphone

app

which Zander had by then

installed for her too.

CHAPTER 18

22.xi

Gabriella Grane was on her way to a meeting at Säpo when her personal mobile buzzed. The meeting had been called at very short notice to discuss the incident at Sveavägen. She answered tersely:

“Yes?”

“It’s Erika.”

“Hi there. Can’t talk now.

We’ll speak later.”

“I have a ...” Berger said.

But Grane had already
hung up – this was no time
for personal calls. She walked into
the
meeting
room
wearing an expression that suggested she meant to start a minor
war.

Crucial

information had been leaked and now a second person was
dead and one more apparently
seriously wounded. She had never felt more like telling the whole
lot of them to go to hell. They had been so eager to
get
hold
of
new
information that they had lost their heads. For half a minute she
did not hear one word her colleagues were saying. She just sat

there, seething. But then she pricked up her ears.

Someone was saying that

Blomkvist, the journalist, had called the emergency services before shots were fired on Sveavägen. That was strange,

and now Erika Berger had

called, and she was not the

type to make casual calls, and certainly not during working hours. She might have had something important or even critical to say. Grane got up and made an excuse.

“Gabriella, you need to

listen to this,” Kraft said in an unusually sharp tone.

“I have to make a call,” she

replied, and suddenly she was not in the least interested in

what the head of the Security Police thought of her.

“What sort of call?”

“A call,” she said, and left them to go into her office.

Berger at once asked Grane to call her instead on the

Samsung. The minute she had

her friend on the line again, she could tell that something was going on. There was

none of the usual friendly enthusiasm in her voice. On the contrary, Grane sounded worried and tense, as if she knew from the start that the conversation was important.

“Hi,” she said simply. “I’m

still really pushed. But is this about August Balder?”

Berger

felt

acutely

uncomfortable. “How did you
know?”

“I’m on the investigation and I’ve just heard that

Mikael Blomkvist was tipped off about what was going to happen
on Sveavägen.”

“You’ve
already
heard
that?”

“Yes, and now of course
we’re eager to know how that
came about.”

“Sorry. I can’t tell you
that.”

“O.K.

Understood.

But

why did you call?”

Berger closed her eyes.

How could she have been

such an idiot?

“I’m so sorry. I’ll have to ask somebody else,” she said.

“You have a conflict of

interest.”

“I’m happy to take on

almost

any

conflict

of

interest, Erika. But I can't stand the thought of your

withholding information. This investigation means more to me than you can imagine."

"Really?"

"Yes, it does. I knew that Balder was under serious

threat, but still I couldn't prevent the murder, and I'm going to have to live with that for the rest of my life. So, please, don't hide anything from me."

“I’m going to have to, Gabriella. I’m sorry. I don’t want you to get into trouble because of us.”

“I

saw

Mikael

in

Saltsjöbaden the night before last, the night of the murder.”

“He didn’t mention that.”

“It wouldn’t have made

sense for me to identify

myself.”

“I see.”

“We could help each other out in this mess.”

“That sounds like a good

idea. I can ask Mikael to call you later. But now I have to get on with this.”

“I know just as well as you

do that there’s a leak in the police team. At this stage we could benefit from unlikely alliances.”

“Absolutely. I’m sorry, but

I have to press on.”

“O.K.,”

Grane

said,

obviously disappointed. “I’ll pretend

this

call

never

happened. Good luck now.”

“Thanks,” Berger said, and

went

back

to

searching

through her contacts.

Grane went back to the

meeting room, her mind

whirling. What was it that Erika had wanted? She did not fully understand and yet she had a vague idea. As she came back into the room the conversation

died

and

everyone looked at her.

“What was that about?”

Kraft said.

“Something private.”

“That you had to deal with
now?”

“That I had to deal with.

How far had you got?”

“We were talking about what

happened

on

Sveavägen,”

said

Ragnar

Olofsson,

the

head

of

division, “but as I was saying, we don’t yet have enough

information. The situation is chaotic, and it looks as if we’re losing our source in Bublanski’s

group.

The

detective inspector seems to have become paranoid.”

“You can’t blame him,”

Grane said.

“Well ... perhaps not.

We’ve talked about that too.

We’ll leave no stone unturned until we know how the

attacker worked out that the boy was at the medical centre and that he was going to go out by the front door when he did. No

effort will be spared, I need hardly say. But I must emphasize that a leak did not

necessarily come from within the police. The information was quite widely known – at the medical centre of course, by the mother and her

unreliable

partner

Lasse

Westman, and in the offices of *Millennium*. And we can't rule out hacker attacks. I'll come back to that. If I might continue with my report?"

“Please.”

“We’ve been discussing how Mikael Blomkvist comes into this, and this is where we’re worried. How could he know about a shooting before

it happens? In my opinion, he’s got some source close to the criminals themselves, and I see no reason for us to tiptoe around his efforts to protect those sources. We have to find out where he got his information from.”

“The more so since he seems desperate and will do anything for

a

scoop,”

Superintendent

Mårten

Nielsen said.

“It would appear that

Mårten has some excellent

sources too. He reads the evening papers,” Grane said acidly.

“Not the evening papers,

sweetie. T.T. – a source

which even we at Säpo regard as fairly reliable.”

“That was absurd and

defamatory, and you know it as well as I do,” Grane said.

“I had no idea you were so

besotted with Blomkvist.”

“Idiot!”

“Stop this at once!” Kraft said. “This is ridiculous

behaviour! Carry on, Ragnar.

What do we know about what
happened?”

“The first people on the scene were two regular police officers,
Erik Sandström and Tord Landgren,” Olofsson

said. “My information comes from them. They were there on the
dot of 9.24, and by then it was all over. Torkel Lindén was dead,
shot in the back of the head, and the boy, well,

we

don't

know.

According to witnesses, he was hit too. We have blood in the street. But nothing is confirmed. The boy was driven away in a red Volvo –

we do at least have parts of the registration number plus the model of the vehicle.

We'll get the name of its owner very shortly.”

Grane noticed that Kraft

was writing everything down,

just as she had done at their earlier meetings.

“But
what
actually
happened?” she said.

“According to two students
from
the
School
of

Economics

who

were

standing on the opposite side of Sveavägen, it looked like a settling of scores between two criminal gangs who were

both after the boy.”

“Sounds far-fetched.”

“I’m not so sure,” Olofsson

said.

“What makes you say that?” Kraft said.

“There were professionals

on both sides. The assailant seems to have been standing and watching the door from a

low green wall on the other side of Sveavägen, in front of the park. There’s a lot to suggest that this is the man who shot Frans Balder. Not that anyone has seen his face clearly; it’s possible he was

wearing some sort of mask.

But he seems to have moved with the same exceptional

efficiency and speed. And in the opposite camp there was this woman.”

“What do we know about

her?”

“Not

much.

She

was

wearing

a

black

leather

jacket, we think, and dark jeans. She was young with black hair
and piercings – a

punk,

according

to

one

witness – also short, but fierce. She appeared out of nowhere, throwing herself

over the boy and shielding him. The witnesses all agree that she was not some

ordinary member of the

public. She seemed to have training, or had at least found herself in similar situations before. Then there's the car –

we have conflicting reports.

One witness says it just happened to be driving by, and the woman and the boy threw themselves in more or less while it was moving.

Others – especially those
guys from the School of
Economics – think the car was part of the operation.

Either way, we have a
kidnapping on our hands.”

“It doesn’t make sense.

This woman saved the boy
only to abscond with him?”

Grane said.

“That’s what it looks like.

Otherwise we would have

heard from her by now,

wouldn’t we?”

“How did she get to

Sveavägen?”

“We don’t know yet. But a

witness, a former editor-in-chief of a trade-union paper, says the woman looked

somehow familiar,” Olofsson said.

He

went

on

to

say

something else, but by then Grane had stopped listening.

She

was

thinking,

Zalachenko's daughter – it has

to

be

Zalachenko's

daughter, knowing full well how unfair it was to call her that.

The

daughter

had

nothing to do with the father.

On the contrary, she had hated him.

But Grane had known her

by that name ever since, years earlier,

she

had

read

everything she could lay her hands

on

about
the
Zalachenko
affair.
While
Olofsson
went
on

speculating, she began to feel the pieces were falling into place. Already the day before she had identified some

commonalities between

Zalachenko's old network

and the group which called itself the Spiders, but had dismissed them. She had

believed there was a limit to how far thuggish criminals could develop their skills; it seemed entirely unreasonable to suppose that they could go from

seedy-looking

biker

types

in

their

leather

waistcoats to cutting-edge

hackers. Yet the thought had occurred to her. Grane had even wondered if the girl who helped Linus Brandell trace the break-in on Balder's

computers might have been

Zalachenko's daughter. There

was a Säpo file on the

woman, with a note that said

“Hacker? Computer savvy?”,

and even though it seemed prompted by the surprisingly favourable reference she had

received for her work at Milton Security, it was clear from the document that she had devoted a great deal of time to research into her father’s

criminal

organization.

Most striking of all was
that there was a known
connection
between
the
woman
and
Mikael
Blomkvist. It was unclear

what exactly that connection
was; Grane did not for one moment believe the malicious
rumours
that
it
was
a
blackmail
situation

or

something to do with sado-masochistic sex, but the connection was there. Both Blomkvist and the woman – who matched the description of Zalachenko’s daughter – appeared to have known something about the shooting on Sveavägen beforehand, and afterwards Erika Berger had rung

to

discuss

something important. Wasn't it all pointing in the same direction?

"I was wondering ..."

Grane said, perhaps too

loudly, interrupting Olofsson.

"Yes?" he said testily.

She was about to present

her theory when she noticed something which made her

hesitate.

It

was

nothing

so

remarkable, not at all. It was just that Kraft was once again meticulously writing down

what Olofsson had said. It was probably good to have a senior boss who was so

committed, but there was

something rather too zealous about that scratching pen, and it made Grane wonder if a senior boss, whose job it was to see the bigger picture,

should be so preoccupied with

every

tiny

detail.

Without really knowing why, she began to feel very uneasy.

It may have been because

she herself was busy pointing a finger at someone on flimsy grounds,

but

also

Kraft

seemed to blush at that

moment perhaps because she realized that she was being observed, and looked away in

embarrassment.

Grane

decided not to finish the sentence she had begun.

“Or rather ...”

“Yes, Gabriella?”

“Oh, nothing,” she said,

feeling a sudden need to get away, and even though she knew that it would not look good, she left the meeting room once more and went to the toilet.

Later she would remember

how she stared at herself in

the mirror and tried to understand what she had

seen.

Had

Kraft

really

blushed, and if so, what did that mean? Maybe nothing,

she

decided,

absolutely

nothing, and, even if it was indeed shame or guilt that Grane had read in her face, it could have been about almost

anything. It occurred to her that she did not know her boss all that well. But she

knew enough to be sure that she would not send a child to his death for financial or any other gain, no, that was out of the question.

Grane had simply become

paranoid,

a

typically

suspicious spy who saw
moles everywhere, even in

her own reflection. “Idiot,”

she muttered, and smiled at herself despondently, as if to dismiss
the idea and come

back down to earth. But that didn’t solve anything. In that instant
she thought she saw a new kind of truth in her own eyes.

She suspected that she was
quite like Helena Kraft in that she
was

capable

and

ambitious and wanted to get a pat on the back from her superiors.

That

was

not

necessarily always a good

thing, though. With that

tendency, if you operate in an unhealthy culture you risk becoming just as unhealthy yourself and – who knows –

perhaps it is the will to please that leads people to crime just as often as evil or greed.

People want to fit in and do

well,

and

so

they

do

indescribably stupid things. Is that what had happened here?

If nothing else then Hans Faste – because surely he was

Säpo's source in Bublanski's group – had been leaking to them because that was what he was expected to do and because he wanted to score points with Säpo. Olofsson had seen to it that Kraft was kept informed of every little detail; she was his boss and he wanted to be in her good books and then ... well,

maybe Kraft in turn had

passed on some information

because she wanted to be seen to be doing a good job.

But, if so, by whom? The head of the national police, the

government,

foreign

intelligence, in that case most likely American or English, who perhaps then ...

Grane did not take this

train of thought any further.

She asked herself again if she was letting her imagination run away with her but, even if

she was, she still could not trust her team. She wanted to be good at her job, but not necessarily by doing her duty to Säpo. She just

wanted the Balder boy to be safe. Instead of Kraft's face she now saw Berger's, so she went to her office and got out her

Blackphone, the same one she

had been using to call Frans Balder.

Berger had left the office to have

an

undisturbed

conversation and was now

standing

in

front

of

Söderbokhandeln,

the

bookstore

on

Götgatan,

wondering if she had done something stupid. Grane had argued her case so well that Berger could not defend

herself. That is no doubt the disadvantage

of

having

intelligent friends: they see straight through you.

Not

only

had

Grane

worked out what Berger

wanted to talk to her about, she had also persuaded her that

she

felt

a

moral

responsibility

and

would

never reveal the hiding place, however much that might

appear to conflict with her professional duty. She said she had a debt to repay and

insisted on helping. She was going to courier over the keys to her summer house on

Ingarö

and

arrange

for

directions to be sent over the encrypted link which Andrei Zander had set up.

Further up Götgatan a

beggar collapsed, scattering two carrier bags full of plastic bottles across the pavement.

Berger hurried over but the man, who was soon on his

feet again, declined her help so she gave him a sad smile and went back up to the

Millennium offices.

Blomkvist was looking

upset and exhausted. His hair was standing on end and his shirt
hung
outside
his
trousers. She had not seen him looking so worn out in a
long time. Yet when his eyes
shone like that, there was no stopping him. It meant he had
entered into that absolute concentration from which he would not
emerge until he had got to the heart of the story.

“Have you found a hiding place?” he said.

She nodded.

“It might be best if you say nothing more. We have to keep this to as small a circle of people as possible.”

“That sounds sensible. But let’s hope it’s a short-term solution. I don’t like the idea of Lisbeth Salander being responsible for the boy.”

“Who

knows?

Maybe

they’ll be good for each

other.”

“What did you tell the

police?”

“Almost nothing.”

“Not a good time to be

keeping things under wraps.”

“Not really, no.”

“Maybe

Salander

is

prepared to make a statement, so you can get some peace and quiet.”

“I don’t want to put any pressure on her. She’s in bad shape. Can you get Zander to

ask her if we can send a doctor out there?”

“I will. But you know ...”

“What?”

“I’m

actually

coming

round to the idea that she’s doing the right thing,” Berger said.

“Why do you say that, all of a sudden?”

“Because I too have my

sources. Police headquarters isn't a secure place right now," she said, and walked over to Zander with a

determined stride.

CHAPTER 19

22.xi, Evening

Bublanski was standing alone

in his office. In the end Hans

Faste had admitted to keeping Säpo informed, and without even

listening

to

his

justification

Bublanski

removed

him

from

the

investigation. But even if that had provided further evidence that

Faste

was

an

unscrupulous opportunist, he could not bring himself to believe that the man had also been leaking to criminals.

Inevitably there were corrupt

and depraved people in the force. But to deliver a small, mentally disabled boy into the hands of a cold-blooded murderer was beyond the

pale, and he refused to

believe that anyone in the force would be capable of that. Perhaps the information had seeped out by some other

route. Their telephones might be tapped or they had been hacked, although he could not

think

that

notes

about

August's abilities had been written in any computer. He had been trying to reach the Säpo head, Helena Kraft, to discuss the matter.

He had stressed that it was important, but she had not returned his call.

The

Swedish

Trade

Council and the Ministry of Enterprise had been onto him, which was worrisome. Even

if it was not said in so many words, their main concern

was not for the boy or the shooting on Sveavägen, but rather

for

the

research

programme

which

Frans

Balder had been working on, which appeared to have been stolen on the night of his murder.

Several of the most skilled computer technicians in the force and three I.T. experts

from Linköping University and the Royal Institute of Technology had been to the house in Saltsjöbaden, but they had found no trace of this research, either on his computers or among the papers which he had left behind.

“So now, on top of everything else, we have an Artificial Intelligence on the loose,” Bublanski muttered to himself. He was reminded of an old riddle his mischievous cousin Samuel liked to put to his friends in synagogue. It was a paradox:

if God is indeed omnipotent, is he then capable of creating something more intelligent than himself?

The riddle was considered

disrespectful,

he

recalled,

even blasphemous. It had that evasive quality which meant that, however you answered,

you were wrong. There was a knock at the door, and

Bublanski was brought back to the questions at hand. It was Modig, ceremoniously

handing over another piece of Swiss orange chocolate.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Have you got anything

new?”

“We think we know how

the killers got Lindén and the boy out of the building. They

sent fake emails from our and Professor

Edelman's

addresses and arranged a

pick-up on the street.”

“Is that possible?”

“Yes, and it's not even

very difficult.”

“Terrifying.”

“True, but that still doesn't explain how they knew to

access the Oden's Medical

Centre computer, or how they
found out that Edelman was involved.”

“I suppose we’d better
have our own computers
checked out,” Bublanski said gloomily.

“Already in hand.”

“Is this how it was meant to be, that we won’t dare to write or say
anything for fear of being overheard?”

“I don’t know. I hope not.

Meanwhile we have a Jacob

Charro out there waiting to be interviewed.”

“Who’s he?”

“A footballer, plays for

Syrian F.C. And he’s the man

who drove the woman and

August Balder away from

Sveavägen.”

A muscular young man with short dark hair and high

cheekbones was sitting in the interview room. He was wearing a mustard-coloured V-neck pullover without a shirt and seemed at once agitated and a little proud. Modig opened with: "18.35 on November 22. Interview with witness Jacob Charro, twenty-two years

old,

resident in Norborg. Tell us what happened this morning.”

“Well ...” Charro said. “I

was driving along Sveavägen

and noticed some commotion in the street ahead of me. I thought there'd been an

accident, so I slowed down.

But then I saw a man come from the left and run across the road. He ran out without even looking at the traffic and I remember thinking he must be a terrorist.”

“Why is that?”

“He seemed to be bursting with this sacred fury.”

“Were you able to see what he looked like?”

“Not really, but since then it’s struck me that there was something unnatural about his face.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like it wasn’t his real

face.

He

was

wearing

sunglasses which must have been secured around his ears, but his cheeks, it looked as if he had something in his

mouth, I don't know. Then there was his moustache and eyebrows, and the colour of his skin."

"Do you think he was

wearing a mask?"

"Something like that. But I

didn't have time to think too much about it. Before I knew

it the rear door of the car was yanked open and then ...

what can I say? It was one of those

moments

when

everything happens all at once – the whole world

comes down onto your head.

Suddenly there were strangers in my car and the rear

windscreen shattered. I was in shock.”

“What did you do?”

“I accelerated like crazy.

The girl who jumped in was shouting at me to drive, and I was so scared I hardly knew

what I was doing. I just followed orders.”

“Orders?”

“That’s how it seemed. I

reckoned we were being

chased, and I didn’t see any other

way

out.

I

kept

swerving and that, just like the girl told me to, and besides ...”

“Go on.”

“There

was

something

about her voice. It was so

cold and intense, I found myself hanging on to it, as if it were the only thing that was in control in all the mayhem.”

“You said you thought you
recognized the woman?”

“Yes, but not at the time, definitely not. I was scared to death
and
was
busy
concentrating on all the weird things that were happening.

There was blood all over the place back there.”

“Coming from the boy or

the woman?”

“I wasn’t sure at first, and neither of them seemed to know either. But then I heard her say something like ‘Yes!’, like something good had

happened.”

“What was that about?”

“The girl realized she was the one bleeding and not the

boy, and that really struck me. It was like, 'Hurray, I've been shot,' and I tell you, it wasn't some little graze.

However she tried to bandage

it, she couldn't staunch the blood. It just kept oozing out, and the girl kept getting paler and paler. She must have felt like shit."

"And still she was happy

that it wasn't the boy who'd been hit."

"Exactly. Like a mother."

"But she wasn't the child's

mother."

“No. They didn’t even know each other, she said, and that became more and more obvious. She didn’t have a clue about children.”

“On the whole,” Modig said, “how did you think she treated the boy?”

“Not sure how to answer that, to be honest. I wouldn’t

say she had the world's best social skills. She treated me like a damn servant, but even so ...”

“Yes?”

“I reckon she was a good person. I wouldn't have

wanted

her

to

be

my

babysitter, if you see what I mean. But she was O.K.”

“So you reckon the child is

safe with her?”

“She’s obviously fucking crazy. But the little boy ...

he’s called August, right?”

“That’s correct.”

“She’ll guard August with

her life, if it comes to it. That was my impression.”

“How

did

you

part

company?”

“She asked me to drive

them to Mosebacke torg.”

“Is that where she lives, on

the square?”

“I have no idea. She gave me

no

explanation

whatsoever, but I got the feeling she had some other kind of transport from there.

She didn't say more than was

necessary. She just asked me to write down my details. She was going to pay for the damage to the car, she said, plus a little extra."

"Did she look as though

she had money?"

“Going by her appearance alone, I’d say she lived in a dump. But the way she

behaved ... I don’t know. It wouldn’t surprise me if she was loaded. You could tell that she was used to getting her own way.”

“What happened then?”

“She told the boy to get out

of the car.”

“And did he?”

“He just rocked backwards and forwards and didn’t

move. But then her tone

hardened. She said it was a matter of life and death or something like that, and he tottered out of the car with his arms stiff, as if he was sleepwalking.”

“Did you see where they went?”

“Only that it was to the left – towards Slussen. But the girl ...”

“Yes?”

“Well, she was obviously

feeling like shit. She was weaving about and seemed on the point of collapse.”

“Doesn’t sound good. And the boy?”

“Probably wasn’t in great

shape either. He was looking really odd. The whole time in the car I worried he was going to have some sort of fit.

But when he got out he seemed to have come to terms

with the situation. In any case he kept asking, ‘Where?’ over and over. ‘Where?’”

Modig

and

Bublanski

looked at each other.

“Are you sure about that?”

Modig said.

“Why shouldn’t I be?”

“Well, you might have

thought you heard him saying

that because he had a questioning look on his face.”

“Why

would

I

have

thought that?”

“Because the boy’s mother

says he doesn’t speak at all, has never said a single word,”

Modig said.

“Are you joking?”

“No, and it would be odd for him to suddenly start speaking under these very circumstances.”

“I heard what I heard.”

“O.K., and what did the woman answer?”

“‘Away’, I think. ‘Away from here.’ Something like that.

Then

she

almost

collapsed, like I said. And she told me to drive off.”

“And you did?”

“Like a bat out of hell.”

“And then you realized

who you’d had in your car?”

“I’d already worked out that the boy was the son of that

genius

who'd

been

murdered. But the girl ... she

vaguely reminded me of

someone. I was shaking like a leaf and in the end I couldn't drive any more. I stopped on Ringvägen, by Skanstull, got myself a beer at Clarion Hotel and tried to calm down. And that's when it hit me. It was the girl who was wanted for

murder a few years ago, but then

the

charges

were

dropped, and it came out that she'd been through some

terrible things in a mental hospital when she was a

child. I remember it well –

the father of a friend of mine had been tortured in Syria, and he was having more or less the same stuff done to him at the time, electroshock therapy and that sort of shit,

because he couldn't deal with his memories. It was like he was being tortured all over again."

"Are you sure about that?"

"That he was tortured?"

"No, that it was her,

Lisbeth Salander."

"I looked at all the pictures online and there's no doubt about it. There were other things that fit too, you know

..."

Charro hesitated, as if embarrassed.

“She took off her T-shirt because she needed to use it as a bandage, and when she turned to wrap it around her shoulder I saw that she had a large tattoo of a dragon all the way up her back. That same tattoo was mentioned in one of

the

old

newspaper

articles.”

Berger arrived at Grane’s summer house with several

shopping bags filled with

food, crayons and paper, a couple of difficult puzzles and a few other things. But there was no sign of August or Salander. Salander had not responded, either on her

Redphone app or on the

encrypted link. Berger was sick with anxiety.

Whichever way she looked at it, this did not bode well.

Admittedly Salander was not known

for

needless

communication

or

reassurance, but it was she who had asked for a safe house.

Also

she

had

responsibility for a child, and if she was not answering their calls

under

those

circumstances, she must be in a bad way.

Berger cursed aloud and walked out onto the terrace where she and Grane had

been sitting and talking about escaping from the world. That was only a few months ago, but it felt like an age. There was no table now, no chairs, no bottles, no hubbub behind them, only snow, branches

and debris flung there by the storm. It was as if life itself had abandoned the place.

Somehow the memory of that crayfish party increased the sense of desolation, as if the festivities were draped like a ghost over its walls.

Berger went back into the kitchen

and

put

some

microwaveable food into the refrigerator:

meatballs,

packets of spaghetti with

meat

sauce,

sausage

stroganoff, fish pie, potato cakes and a whole lot of even

worse junk food Blomkvist had advised her to buy:

Billy's Pan Pizza, piroshki, chips, Coca-Cola, a bottle of Tullamore Dew, a carton of cigarettes, three bags of

crisps, three bars of chocolate and some sticks of fresh

liquorice. She set out drawing paper, crayons, pencils, an eraser and a ruler and

compass on the large round table. On the top sheet of

paper she drew a sun and a flower and wrote the word *WELCOME* in four warm colours.

The house was close to

Ingarö beach, but you could not see it from there. It lay high

up

on

the

rock

promontory,

concealed

behind pine trees. It consisted of four rooms. The kitchen with glass doors onto the terrace was the largest and

also the heart of the house. In addition to the round table there was an old rocking chair and two worn, sagging sofas which nonetheless managed

to look inviting thanks to a pair of red tartan rugs. It was a cosy home.

It was also a good safe

house. Berger left the door open, put the keys in the top drawer of the hall closet, as agreed, and made her way

back down the flight of wooden steps flanking the

steep, smooth rock slope –

the only way to the house for anyone arriving by car.

The sky was dark and

turbulent, the wind blowing hard again. Her spirits were low and did not improve

during the drive home. Her thoughts turned to Hanna

Balder.

Berger

had

not

exactly been a member of the

fan club – Hanna often played the parts of women who were

both sexy and dim-witted,

whom all men thought they could seduce, and Berger was

disgusted

by

the

film

industry's devotion to that type of character. But none of that was true any longer and Berger regretted that she had been so ungracious at the time. She had been too hard on the woman; it was much

too easy to criticize when a pretty girl gets a big break early in her career.

Nowadays, on the rare

occasions

Hanna

Balder

appeared

in

a

major

production, her eyes tended to reflect a restrained sorrow, which gave depth to the parts she played, and – what did Berger know? – that may

have been genuine. She had been through some difficult

times, not least the past twenty-four

hours.

Since

morning, Berger had been

insisting that Hanna be taken to August. This was surely a situation in which a child needed his mother more than ever.

But Salander, who was still

communicating with them at the time, had been against the idea. No-one yet knew where

the leak had come from, she

had written, and they could not rule out the mother's immediate circle.

Lasse

Westman for one, whom

nobody trusted, seemed to be staying in the house all day to avoid the journalists camped outside. They were in a bind, and Berger did not like it. She hoped *Millennium* would still be able to tell the story with dignity and depth, without the magazine or anyone else

coming to harm. She had no doubt that Blomkvist would be up to it, given the way he looked right now. Besides, he had Zander to help him.

Berger had a soft spot for Zander. Not long ago, over dinner at her and Greger's home in Saltsjöbaden, he had

told them his life story, which had

only

increased

her

sympathy.

When Zander was eleven he lost both his parents in a bomb blast in Sarajevo. After that he came to live in Tensta outside Stockholm with an

aunt who altogether failed to notice either his intellectual disposition

or

the

psychological

wounds

he

bore. He had not been there when his parents were killed, but his body reacted still as if he were suffering from post-

traumatic stress. To this day he detested loud noises and sudden movements. He hated seeing unattended bags in

public places, and loathed violence with a passion

Berger had never encountered

in anyone else.

As a child he sought refuge

in his own worlds. He

immersed himself in fantasy literature, read poetry and
biographies, adored Sylvia

Plath, Borges and Tolkien and learned everything there was

to

know

about

computers. He dreamed of
writing heart-rending novels about
love
and
human
tragedy, and was an incurable romantic who hoped that
great passion would heal his wounds. He was not in the least bit
interested in the outside world. One evening in his late teens,
however, he
attended a public lecture given by Mikael Blomkvist at

the

Institute

for

Media

Studies

at

Stockholm

University. It changed his life.

Blomkvist's

fervour

inspired him to bear witness to a world which was

bleeding

with

injustice,

intolerance

and

petty

corruption. He started to

imagine

himself

writing

articles critical of society instead

of

tear-jerking

romances. Not long after that he knocked on *Millennium's* door and asked if there was anything they would let him do – make coffee, proofread, run errands. Berger, who had seen the fire in his eyes right from the start, assigned him some minor editorial tasks: public notices, research and brief portraits. But most of all

she told him to study, and he did so with the same energy he put into everything else.

He read political science, mass-media communications,

finance

and

international

conflict resolution, and at the same time he helped out on temporary

assignments

at

Millennium.

He wanted to become a
heavyweight
investigative
journalist, like Blomkvist.

But unlike so many other investigative journalists he was no tough
guy. He

remained

a

romantic.

Blomkvist and Berger had

both spent time trying to sort out his relationship problems.

He

was

too

open

and

transparent. Too good, as

Blomkvist would often say.

But Berger believed that

Zander was in the process of shedding

that

youthful

vulnerability. She had been seeing the change in his

journalism. That ferocious

ambition to reach out and touch people, which had

made his writing heavy-

handed at first, had been replaced by a more effective, matter-of-fact

style.

She

knew he would pull out all the stops now that he had been given the chance to help Blomkvist with the Balder

story. The plan was for Blomkvist to write the big, central narrative, and for Zander to help with the

research as well as writing some explanatory sidebars.

Berger thought they made a great team.

After parking on Hökens

gata she walked into the

offices and found Blomkvist and Zander sitting there, deep in concentration, just as she

expected. Every now and then, however, Blomkvist

muttered to himself and she saw that magnificent sense of purpose in his eyes, but there was also suffering. He had hardly slept all night. The media campaign against him had not let up and in his police interviews he had had to do the very thing the press accused him of – withhold

information. Blomkvist did not like it one atom.

He was in many ways a
model, law-abiding citizen.

But if there was anyone who could get him to cross the line, it was
Lisbeth Salander.

Blomkvist

would

rather

dishonour himself than betray her, which is why he kept repeating
to the police: “I assert my right to protect my sources.” No wonder
he was

unhappy and worried about the consequences. But, like Berger, he had far greater fears for Salander and the boy than for their own situation.

“How’s it going?” she asked, after watching him for a while.

“What? ... Well ... O.K.

How was it out there?”

“I made up the beds and put food in the fridge.”

“Good. And the neighbours didn’t see you?”

“There
wasn’t
a
soul
there.”

“Why are they taking so
long?” he said.

“I just don’t know, but I’m
worried sick.”

“Let’s hope they’re resting at Lisbeth’s.”

“Let’s hope so. What else did you find out?”

“Quite a bit. But ...”

Blomkvist trailed off.

“Yes?’

“It’s just that ... it feels as if I’m being thrown back in time, going back to places I’ve been to before.”

“You’ll have to explain

better,” she said.

“I will ...” Blomkvist

glanced at his computer

screen. “But first I have to keep on digging. Let’s speak

later,” he said, and so she left him and got her things to drive home, although she

would be ready to stay with him at a second’s notice.

CHAPTER 20

23.xi

The night turned out to be calm, alarmingly calm, and at

8.00 in the morning a brooding Bublanski stood

facing his team in the meeting room. Having kicked out

Faste, he felt reasonably sure that he could talk freely again. At least he felt safer in here with his colleagues than at his computer, or on his mobile.

“You all appreciate how

serious the situation is,” he said.

“Confidential

information has been leaked.

One person is dead as a

result. A small boy's life is in danger. In spite of immense efforts we still don't know how this happened. The leak could have been at our end, or at Säpo, or at Oden's Medical Centre, or in the group

around Professor Edelman, or

from the boy's mother and her partner, Lasse Westman.

We know nothing for certain,

and therefore we have to be *extremely*

circumspect,

paranoid even.”

“We may also have been

hacked

or

phonetapped,”

Modig said. “We seem to be dealing with criminals whose command

of

new

technologies is far beyond anything we’ve seen before.”

“Very

true,”

Bublanski

said. “We need to take

precautions at every level, not

say

anything

significant

relating to this investigation –

or to any other – over the telephone, no matter how highly our superiors rate our new mobile-phone system.”

“They think it’s great

because it cost so much to install,” Holmberg said.

“Maybe we should also be

reflecting a little on our own role,”

Bublanski

said,

ignoring him. “I was just

talking to a gifted young analyst at Säpo, Gabriella Grane – you may have heard of her. She pointed out that the concept of loyalty is not as straightforward as one

might think for us policemen.

We have many different

loyalties, don't we? There's the obvious one, to the law.

There's a loyalty to the

public,

and

to

one's

colleagues, but also to our

bosses, and to ourselves and our careers. Sometimes, as all of you know, these interests end up competing with each other. We might choose to protect a colleague at work and thereby fail in our duty to the public, or we might be given orders from higher up, as Hans Faste was, and then that conflicts with the loyalty he should have had to us. But from now on – and I'm

deadly serious – there's only one loyalty I want to hear of, and that is to the investigation itself. We're going to catch the murderers and we're

going to make sure that no-one else falls victim to them.

Agreed? Even if the prime minister himself or the head of the C.I.A. calls and goes on about patriotism and major career opportunities, you still won't utter a peep, will you?"

"No," they said, as one.

"Excellent. As we all

know,

the

person

who

intervened on Sveavägen was

none other than Lisbeth
Salander, and we're doing
everything in our power to find out where she is.”
“Which is why we've got
to release her name to the media!” Svensson called out,
somewhat
heatedly.
“We
need help from the public.”

“We don’t all agree on this, so I’d like to raise the question again.

Let’s

remember that in the past Lisbeth Salander has had some very shabby treatment, from us and from the media ...”

“At this point that doesn’t matter,” Svensson said.

“And it’s conceivable that people recognized her on Sveavägen and her name will

come out at any moment anyway, in which case this would no longer be an issue.

But before that happens, bear in mind that she saved the boy's life."

"No doubt about that,"

Svensson said. "But then she more or less kidnapped him."

"Our information suggests

that she was determined to protect the boy at all costs,"

Modig

said.

“Salander’s

experience

of

public

institutions has been anything but positive – her entire childhood was marred by the injustices inflicted on her by Swedish officialdom. If she suspects, as we do, that

there’s a leak inside the police force, then there’s no chance she’s going to contact us. Fact.”

“That’s

irrelevant,”

Svensson insisted.

“Maybe,” Modig said. “Jan and I share your view that the most important thing here is whether it’s in the interests of the investigation to release her name. And as to the

investigation, our priority is the boy’s safety, and that’s where we have a big element

of uncertainty.”

“I follow your reasoning,”

Holmberg said in a low,

thoughtful

tone

which

immediately commanded

everyone's

attention.

"If

people know of Salander's

involvement then the boy will be at risk. But that still leaves a number of questions – first: what’s the ethical thing to do?

And I have to say, even if there’s been a leak here we cannot accept that Salander should keep the boy hidden away. He’s a crucial part of the investigation and, leak or

no leak, we’re better at protecting a child than an emotionally disturbed young woman could ever be.”

“Absolutely. Of course,”

Bublanski muttered.

“And even if this isn’t a kidnapping in the ordinary sense – yes, even if it’s been carried out with the best of intentions – the

potential harm to the child could be just as great. Psychologically it must be hugely damaging for him to be, as it were, on the run after everything he's been through."

"True," Bublanski said.

"But

the

question

still

remains: how do we deal with

the information we have?”

“There I agree with Curt.

We have to release her name and photograph right away. It could

produce

invaluable

leads.”

“Probably,”

Bublanski

said. “But it could at the same time help the killers. We have to assume that they haven’t given up looking for the boy.

Quite the opposite in fact.

And since we have no idea what

the

connection

is

between

the

boy

and

Salander, we don't know

what sort of clues her name would provide them with. I'm

not persuaded that we would

be protecting the boy by giving

the

media

these

details.”

“But neither do we know if

we’re protecting him by

holding

them

back,”

Holmberg said. “There are

too many pieces of the puzzle missing for us to draw any conclusions.

Is

Salander

doing this for someone else, for example? Or does she have her own agenda for the child, apart from to protect him?”

“And how could she have

known that Torkel Lindén

and the boy would come out onto Sveavägen at that exact moment?” Svensson said.

“Maybe she just happened
to be there.”

“Doesn’t seem likely.”

“The

truth

is

often

unlikely,” Bublanski said.

“That’s the nature of truth.

But I agree, it doesn't feel like a coincidence in this case,
not
under
the
circumstances.”

“What about the fact that Mikael Blomkvist also knew something
was going to

happen?” Amanda Flod said.

“There's some sort of

connection

between

Blomkvist and Salander,”

Holmberg said.

“True.”

“Blomkvist knew that the boy was at Oden’s Medical Centre, didn’t he?”

“The mother told him,”

Bublanski said. “As you

might imagine, she's feeling quite desperate now. I've just had a long conversation with her. But there was no reason on earth why Blomkvist

should have known that

Lindén and the boy would be

tricked into going out onto the street.”

“Could he have had access

to a computer at Oden's?”

Flod said pensively.

“I can't imagine Mikael

Blomkvist getting involved in hacking,” Modig said.

“But

what

about

Salander?” Holmberg said.

“What do we actually know about her? We have a

massive file on the girl. Yet

the last time we had anything to do with her, she surprised us on every count. Maybe

appearances

are

just

as

deceptive this time around.”

“I agree,” Svensson said.

“We have far too many

question marks.”

“Question marks are about

all we have. And that's
exactly why we ought to stick to the rules," Holmberg said.
"I didn't realize the rule book covered quite so much,"
Bublanski
said,
with
a
sarcasm he regretted.
"I only mean that we

should take this for what it is

– the kidnapping of a child.

They

disappeared

almost

twenty-four hours ago. We

haven't heard a word from them. We should put out

Salander's name and picture and then look carefully at all

the tip-offs that come in,"

Holmberg said with authority.

He seemed to have the

backing of the whole group, and at that Bublanski closed his eyes and reflected that he loved them all. He felt a greater affinity with his team than he did for his own

brothers and sisters, or even his parents. But right now he felt compelled to disagree with them.

“We’ll do everything we can to try to find them. But for the time being we will not release the name and picture.

That would only make the

situation more fraught, and I don't want to risk giving the killers any leads at all."

"And you feel guilty,"

Holmberg

said,

without

warmth.

"I

feel

very

guilty,”

Bublanski said, thinking of

his rabbi.

Blomkvist was so worried

about the boy and Salander that he hardly slept. Time and again he had tried to reach Salander via the Redphone

app,

but

she

had

not

answered. He had not heard a

word

from

her

since

yesterday afternoon. Now he was sitting in the office,

trying to immerse himself in his work and figure out what it was that had escaped him.

For some time already he had

had a sense – impossible to put his finger on – that there was a key piece missing,

something which could shed light on the whole story.

Perhaps

he

was

fooling

himself. Maybe it was just wishful thinking, a need to see a grand design. The last

message from Salander on the encrypted link was:

<Jurij Bogdanov. Check him out. He's the one who sold Balder's technology

to

Eckerwald at Solifon.>

There were some images of

Bogdanov on the net. They showed

him

wearing

pinstriped suits which fit perfectly but still managed to look wrong on him, as if he had stolen them on the way to the

photographer's.

Bogdanov had long, lank hair, a pockmarked face and large rings under his eyes and you could just about make out some

amateurish

tattoos

beneath his shirt cuffs. His look was dark, intense and piercing. He was tall, but he cannot have weighed more than sixty kilos.

He looked like an old

jailbird, but, most striking, there was something about

his body language which Blomkvist recognized from

the

images

on

the

surveillance

cameras

at

Balder's place. The man gave

the same tattered, rough-

edged impression.

There were also interviews he

had

given

as

a

businessman in Berlin in

which he vouchsafed that he had been born more or less on the streets. “I was doomed to

end up dead in an alleyway with a needle stuck in my arm. But I managed to pull myself out of the muck. I’m intelligent and I’m one hell of a fighter,” he said. There was nothing in the details of his life to contradict these claims, save for the suspicion that he may not have been raised

exclusively through his own efforts. There were clues to suggest he had been given a

helping hand by powerful people who had spotted his talent.

In

a

German

technology

magazine,

a

security chief at the Horst credit institution was quoted as saying,
“Bogdanov has

magic in his eyes. He can detect

vulnerabilities

in

security systems like no-one else. He’s a genius.”

So Bogdanov was a star

hacker, although the official

version had him acting only as a “white hat”, someone who served
the good, legal side, who helped companies identify flaws in their

I.T.

security in exchange for
decent compensation. There
was nothing in the least
suspicious
about
his
company, Outcast Security.

The board members were all respectable,

well-educated

people. But Blomkvist did not

leave it at that. He and Zander scrutinized every individual who had had any contact with

the company, even partners of partners, and they noticed that somebody called Orlov had

been a deputy board member for a short time. This seemed strange, because Vladimir

Orlov was no I.T. man, but a minor

player

in

the

construction sector. He had once

been

a

promising

heavyweight boxer in the Crimea and, judging by the few pictures
Blomkvist found

online, he looked ravaged and brutal.

There were rumours that he
had
been
convicted
of
grievous bodily harm and
procuring. He had been
married twice – both wives were dead, and Blomkvist
had not been able to find a cause of death in either case.

But the most interesting discovery he made was that the man had served as a

substitute board member of a company – minor and long-since defunct – by the name of Bodin Construction & Export, which had dealt in

“sales

of

construction

materials”.

The owner of the company

had been Karl Axel Bodin, the

alias

of

Alexander

Zalachenko, a name that revived memories of the evil conspiracy
which became the subject

of

Millennium's

greatest scoop. Zalachenko

who was Salander's father, and her dark shadow, the

black

heart

behind

her

throbbing determination to

exact revenge.

Was it a coincidence that his name had cropped up?

Blomkvist knew better than

anyone that if you dig deep enough into a story, you will always find links. Life is constantly treating us to

illusory connections. It was just that, when it came to Lisbeth Salander, he stopped believing in coincidence.

If she broke a surgeon's

fingers or delved into the theft of some advanced A.I.

technology, you could be sure that she had not only thought

it through to the last particle, she would also have a reason.

Salander was not one to

forget

an

injustice.

She

retaliated and she righted wrongs.

Could

her

involvement in this story be connected

to

her

own

background? It was by no

means inconceivable.

Blomkvist looked up from

his computer and glanced at Zander. Zander nodded back

at him. The faint smell of something

cooking

was

coming from the kitchen.

Thudding rock music could
be heard from Götgatan.

Outside

the

storm

was

howling, and the sky was still dark and wild. Blomkvist

went into the encrypted link out of habit, not expecting to find anything. But then his face lit up. He even let out a small whoop of joy.

It said:

<OK now. We'll be going to the safe house shortly.>

He wrote:

<Great

news.

Drive

carefully.>

Then he could not resist

adding:

<Who are we actually after?

>

She answered at once:

<You'll soon work it out, smartarse!>

“O.K.”

was

an

exaggeration. Salander was

better, but still in bad shape.

For half of yesterday, in her apartment, she had been

barely conscious and only

managed with the greatest

difficulty to drag herself out of bed to see that August had something to eat and drink and make sure he had pencils, crayons and paper. But as she approached him now she

could see even from a

distance that he had drawn nothing.

There was paper scattered

all over the coffee table in front of him, but no drawings.

Instead she saw rows of
scribbles.

More

absent-

mindedly

than

out

of

curiosity she tried to make out what they were – he had written

numbers,

endless

series of numbers, and even if at first they made no sense to

her,

she

was

intrigued.

Suddenly she gave a whistle.

“Oh

my

God,”

she

muttered.

They were staggeringly

large numbers which formed a familiar pattern alongside the numbers next to them. As

she looked through the papers and came across the simple sequence 641, 647, 653 and 659, there was no longer any doubt: they were sexy prime

quadruplets, sexy in the sense that they differed from each other by six.

There were also twin
primes, and every other
imaginable combination of
prime numbers. She could not
help but smile. “Awesome.”

But

August

neither

responded nor looked up at her. He just kept kneeling by the coffee table, as if he wanted nothing more than to

go on writing his numbers. It occurred to her that she had read something about savants and prime numbers, but she put it out of her mind. She was far too unwell for any kind of advanced thinking.

Instead she went into the bathroom and took two more Vibramycin antibiotics which had been lying around in her apartment for years.

She packed her pistol and her computer, a few changes of clothes and to be on the safe side she put on a wig and a pair of dark

glasses. When she was ready she asked the boy to get up. He did not respond, just held his pencil in a tight grip. For a moment she stood in front of him, stumped. Then she said

sternly, “Get up!” and he did.

They put on their outer layers, took the lift down to the garage and set off for the safe house on Ingarö. Her left shoulder was tightly strapped and it ached, so she steered with her right hand. The top of her chest was hurting, she had a fever and had to stop a couple of times at the side of the road to rest. When finally they got to the beach and the jetty by Stora Barnvik on

Ingarö, and followed the directions

to

climb

the

wooden steps up the slope to the house, she collapsed

exhausted on the first bed she saw. She was shivering and freezing cold.

Soon

after,

breathing

laboriously, she got up and sat at the kitchen table with her laptop, and tried once more to crack the file she had downloaded from

the N.S.A.

But she did not even come close. August sat next to her, looking stiffly at the pile of paper and crayons Berger had

left for him, no longer

interested in prime numbers, still less in drawing pictures.

Perhaps he was in shock.

The man who called himself Jan Holtser was sitting in a room at the Clarion Hotel

Arlanda,

talking

on

the

telephone with his daughter.

As he had expected, she did not believe him.

“Are you scared of me?”

she said. “Are you afraid I’m going to cross-examine you?”

“No, Olga, absolutely not,”

he said. “It’s just that ...”

He could not find the

words. He knew Olga could tell he was hiding something, and ended the conversation

sooner than he wanted to.

Bogdanov was sitting next to him on the hotel bed, swearing.

He

had

been

through Balder's computer at least a hundred times and found "fuck all", as he put it.

“Not a single fucking thing!”

“I stole a computer with
nothing on it,” Holtser said.

“Right.”

“So what was the professor
using it for?”

“For

something

very

important, clearly. I can see that a large file, presumably connected to other computers, was deleted recently. But I can't recover it. He knew his stuff, that guy."

"Useless," Holtser said.

"Completely

fucking

useless."

"And the Blackphone?"

"There are a couple of calls

I haven't been able to trace,

presumably from the Swedish security

services

or

the

N.D.R.E.

But

there's

something

bothering

me

much more.”

“What’s that?”

“A long conversation the

professor had just before you stormed in – he was talking to someone at the M.I.R.I.,

Machine

Intelligence

Research Institute.”

“What’s the problem with that?”

“The timing – I get the

feeling he was having some sort of crisis. Also this institute works to ensure that intelligent computers don’t become a threat to mankind –

it doesn’t look good. Balder could have given the M.I.R.I.

his research or ...”

“Or what?”

“Or he could have spilled the beans on us, at least what he knew.”

“That would be bad.”

Bogdanov

nodded

and

Holtser

swore

quietly.

Nothing had gone as planned and neither of them was used to failing. But here were two major mistakes in a row, and all because of a child, a retarded child.

That was bad enough. But the worst of it was that Kira was on her way, and it

sounded like she had lost it.

Neither of them was used to that either. On the contrary, they had grown accustomed

to her cool elegance, the air of invincibility it gave their operations. Now she was

furious, completely off the wall, screaming at them that they

were

useless,

incompetent cretins. It was not so much that those shots might have missed Balder's son. It was because of the woman who had appeared out

of nowhere and rescued the boy. That woman sent Kira around the bend.

When Holtser had begun to

describe her – the little he had seen – Kira bombarded him with questions.

Whatever

answer he gave seemed to be

wrong, or at least sent her berserk, yelling that they should have killed her and that this was typical of them, brainless, useless. Neither of them could make sense of her

violent reaction – they had never heard her yell like that before.

In fact there was a lot they

did not know about her.

Holtser would never forget his evening with her in a suite

at Hotel d'Angleterre in Copenhagen – they had had sex for the third or fourth time, and later they had been lying

in

bed

drinking

champagne

and

chatting

about his wars and his

murders, as they so often did.

While stroking her arm he had discovered three scars side by side on her wrist.

“How did you get those,
gorgeous?” he had said, and
got a look of pure loathing in return.

He had never been allowed
to sleep with her again. He took it to be a punishment for having
asked. Kira looked

after the group and gave them a lot of money. But neither he nor
Bogdanov, nor anyone

else in the group, was
allowed to ask about her past.

That was one of the unspoken

rules and none of them would

ever dream of trying. For better or for worse she was their benefactor, mostly for better, they thought, and they went along with her whims, living in constant uncertainty as to whether she would be affectionate or cold, or even give them a brutal, stinging slap.

Bogdanov

closed

the

computer and took a swallow

of his drink. They were trying
to limit their drinking, so that Kira would not use that
against them. But it was
nearly
impossible.

The
frustration
and
adrenalin

drove them to it. Holtser fingered

his

mobile

nervously.

“Didn’t Olga believe you?”

Bogdanov said.

“Not a word. Soon she’ll

see a child’s drawing of me on every billboard.”

“I don’t buy that drawing thing. Probably just wishful thinking on the part of the police.”

“So we’re supposed to kill a child for no reason?”

“It wouldn’t surprise me.

Shouldn’t Kira be here by now?”

“Any time now.”

“Who do you think it

was?”

“Who?”

“The girl who appeared from nowhere.”

“No idea,” Holtser said.

“Not sure Kira knows either.

But she’s worried about
something.”

“We’ll probably end up
having to kill them both.”

“That might be the least of
it.”

August was not feeling well.

That

was

obvious.

Red

patches flared on his throat and he was clenching his

fists. Salander, sitting next to him at the round table,

working

on

her

R.S.A.

encryption, was afraid he was on the verge of some sort of fit. But August only picked up a crayon, a black one.

At the same moment a gust

of wind shook the large

windowpanes in front of them. August hesitated and moved his hand back and

forth across the table. But then he started to draw, a line here

and

a

line

there,

followed by some small

circles,

buttons,

Salander

thought, then a hand, details of a chin, an unbuttoned shirt front. It began to go more quickly and the tension in the boy's back and shoulders

subsided – as if a wound had burst open and begun to heal.

There

was

a

searing,

tortured look in his eyes, and every now and then he

shivered. But there was no doubt that something within him had eased. He picked up some new crayons and started

to draw an oak-coloured

floor, on which appeared

pieces of a puzzle that

seemed

to

represent

a

glittering town at night-time.

It was clear even from the unfinished drawing that it would be anything but a

pleasant one.

The

hand

and

the

unbuttoned shirt front became part of a large man with a protruding belly. He was

standing,

bent

like

a

jackknife, beating a small person on the floor, a person who was not in the drawing

for the simple reason that he was observing the scene, and on the receiving end of the blows.

It was an ugly scene, no doubt about that. But even though the picture revealed an assailant, it did not seem to have anything to do with the murder. Right in the middle, at the epicentre of the

drawing, a furious, sweaty face appeared, every fowl and

bitter furrow captured with precision.

Salander

recognized it. She rarely

watched T.V. or went to the cinema, but she knew it was the face of the actor Lasse Westman, the partner of

August's mother. She leaned forward to the boy and said, with a holy, quivering rage:

“We'll never let him do

that to you again. Never.”

CHAPTER 21

23.xi

Alona Casales knew at once that something was wrong
when she saw Commander Ingram's
lanky
figure
approach Needham's desk.
You could tell from his
hesitant manner that the news was not good.
Ingram usually had a

malicious grin on his face when he stuck a knife in someone's back, but with

Needham it was different.

Even the most senior bosses were scared of Needham – he would raise all hell if anyone tried to mess with him.

Ingram did not like scenes, still less humiliation, and that was what awaited him if he picked a fight with Needham.

While Needham was brash

and explosive, Ingram was a refined upper-class boy with spindly legs and an affected manner. Ingram was a serious

power

player

and

had

influence where it mattered,

be it in Washington or in the world of business. As a

member

of

the

N.S.A.

management, he ranked just below

Admiral

Charles

O'Connor. He might be quick

to smile and adept at handing out compliments, but his

smile never reached his eyes.

He had leverage over

people and was in charge, among

other
things,
of
“monitoring
strategic
technologies”

—

more

cynically known as industrial espionage, that part of the N.S.A.

which
gives
the
American tech industry a
helping
hand
in
global
competition. He was feared as few others were.

But now as he stood in front of Needham in his fancy suit, his body seemed to shrink. Even from thirty metres away, Casales knew exactly what was about to happen: Needham was on the brink of exploding. His pale, exhausted face was going red. Without waiting he got to his feet, his back crooked and bent, his belly sticking out, and he roared in a furious voice, "You sleazy bastard!"

No-one but Needham could

call Jonny Ingram a “sleazy bastard”, and Casales loved him for it.

August started on a new drawing.

He sketched a few lines.

He was pressing so hard on the paper that the black

crayon broke and, just like the last time, he drew rapidly, one detail here and another one there, disparate bits

which

ultimately

came

together and formed a whole.

It was the same room, but there was a different puzzle

on the floor, easier to make out: it represented a red sports car racing by a sea of

shouting spectators in a stand.

Above the puzzle not one but

two men could be seen

standing.

One of them was Westman

again. This time he was
wearing a T-shirt and shorts and
he
had
bloodshot,
squinting eyes. He looked
unsteady and drunk, but no
less furious. He was drooling.
Yet he was not the more

frightening figure in the

drawing. That was the other man, whose watery eyes

shone with pure sadism. He too was unshaven and drunk, and he had thin, almost non-existent lips. He seemed to be kicking

August,

although

again the boy could not be seen in the picture, his very

absence

making

him

extremely present.

“Who’s the other one?”

Salander said.

August said nothing. But

his shoulders shook, and his legs twisted into a knot under the table.

“Who’s the other one?”

Salander said again, in a more forceful tone, and August

wrote on the drawing in a shaky, childish hand:

R O G E R

Roger – the name meant

nothing to Salander.

A couple of hours later in Fort Meade, once his hacker boys had cleaned up after themselves and shuffled off, Needham walked over to

Casales. The odd thing was, he no longer looked at all

angry or upset. He was radiant with defiance and

carrying a notebook. One of his braces had slipped off his shoulder.

“Hey, bud,” she said. “Tell me, what’s going on?”

“I got some vacation time,”

he

said.

“I’m

off

to

Stockholm.”

“Of all places. Isn’t it cold this time of year?”

“Freezing,

by

all

accounts.”

“So you’re not really going

there on vacation.”

“Strictly between us?”

“Go on.”

“Ingram ordered us to halt our investigation. The hacker goes free, and we’re supposed to be satisfied with stopping up a few leaks. Then the whole thing gets swept under

the carpet.”

“How the hell can he lay down something like that?”

“They

don’t

want

to

awaken any sleeping dogs, he

says, and run the risk of anyone finding out about the attack.

It

would

be

devastating if it ever got out.

Just think of all the malicious glee, and all the people whose heads would roll, starting with yours truly.”

“He threatened *you*?”

“Did he ever! Went on about how I would be

humiliated

publicly,

even

sued.”

“You don’t seem worried.”

“I’m going to break him.”

“How? Our glamour boy

has

powerful

connections

everywhere, you know that.”

“I have a few of my own.

Besides, Ingram isn't the only one with dirt on people. That damn hacker was gracious

enough to link and match our computer files and show us some of our own dirty

laundry.”

“That’s a bit ironic, isn’t it?”

“It takes a crook to know one. At first the data didn’t look all that spectacular, not compared to the other stuff we’re doing. But when we

started to get into it ...”

“Yes?”

“It turned out to be dynamite.”

“In what way?”

“Ingram’s

closest

colleagues not only *collect* trade secrets to help our own major companies. Sometimes

they also *sell* the information for a lot of money. And that money,

Alona,

doesn't

always find its way into the coffers of the organization

..."

"But

into

their

own

pockets.”

“Exactly. I already have

enough evidence on that to put two of our top industrial-espionage executives behind bars.”

“Jesus.”

“Unfortunately it’s less

straightforward with Ingram.

I'm convinced he's the brains behind the whole thing.

Otherwise all of this doesn't

add up. But I don't have a smoking gun, not yet, which makes the whole operation

risky.

There's

always

a

chance – though I wouldn't bet on it – that the file the hacker

downloaded

has

something specific on him.

But it's impossible to crack –

a

goddamn

R.S.A.

encryption.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“Tighten the net. Show the world that our very own co-workers are in cahoots with criminal organizations.”

“Like the Spiders.”

“Like the Spiders. And

plenty of other bad guys. It wouldn't surprise me if they were involved in the killing of

your

professor

in

Stockholm. They had a clear interest in seeing him dead.”

“You’ve got to be joking.”

“I’m completely serious.

Your professor knew things that could have blown up in their faces.”

“Holy shit. And you’re off to Stockholm like some

private

detective

to

investigate it all?”

“Not

like

a

private

detective, Alona. I’m going to be official, and while I’m there I’m going to give our

hacker such a pummelling she won’t be able to stand.”

“Wait, Ed. Did I hear you say she?”

“You’d better believe it.

Our hacker's a she!"

August's

drawings

took

Salander back in time. She thought of that fist beating rhythmically and relentlessly on the mattress.

She remembered the thuds and the grunting and the

crying from the bedroom next

door. She remembered the

times at Lundagatan when her
comics and fantasies of
revenge were her only refuge.

But she shook off the
memories. She changed the
dressing on her shoulder.

Then she checked her pistol, made sure that it was loaded.

She went onto the P.G.P. link.

Andrei Zander was asking how they were, and she gave a short reply.

Outside, the storm was shaking the trees and bushes.

She helped herself to some whisky and a piece of chocolate, then went out onto the terrace and from there to the rock slope where she carefully reconnoitred the terrain, noticing a small cleft part way down. She counted her steps and memorized the lie of the land.

By the time she got back, August had made another drawing of Westman and the Roger person. She supposed he needed to get it out of his system. But still he had not drawn anything from the night of the murder. Perhaps the experience was blocked in his mind.

Salander was overcome by a feeling of time running away from them and she cast a worried look at August. For a minute or so she focused on the mind-boggling numbers

he had put down on paper next to the new drawing. She

studied their structure until suddenly

she

spotted

a

sequence which did not fit in with the others.

It was relatively short: 2305843008139952128. She

got it immediately. It was not a prime number, it was – and

here her spirits lifted – a number which, according to a

perfect harmony, is made up of the sum of all its positive divisors. It was, in other words, a perfect number, just as 6 is because it can be divided by 3, 2 and 1 and $3 +$

$2 + 1$ happen to add up to 6.

She smiled. And then she had an exhilarating thought.

“Now you’re going to have to

explain yourself,” Casales

said.

“I will,” Needham said.

“But first, even though I trust you, I need you to give me a solemn promise that you

won’t say any of this to anybody.”

“I promise, you jerk.”

“Good. Here’s the story:

after I yelled at Ingram, mostly for the sake of

appearances, I told him he was right. I even pretended to be grateful to him for putting a stop to our investigation.

We wouldn’t have gotten any

further anyway, I said, and it was partly true. From a

purely technical point of view we were out of options. We'd done everything and then some, but it was pointless.

The hacker put red herrings all over the place and kept leading us into new mazes and labyrinths. One of my guys said that even if we got to the end, against all odds, we wouldn't believe we'd

made it. We'd just kid

ourselves that it was a new trap. We were prepared for just about anything from this

hacker, anything but flaws and weaknesses. So if we

kept going the usual way

we'd had it.”

“You don't tend to go the usual way.”

“No,

I

prefer

the

roundabout way. The truth is, we hadn't given up at all.

We'd been talking to our

hacker contacts out there and our friends in the software companies. We did advanced

searches, surveillance and our own computer breaches. You see, when an attack is as complex as this one, you can always be sure there's been some research up front.

Certain specific questions

have been asked. Certain

specific sites have been

visited and inevitably some of that becomes known to us.

But there was one factor

above all that played into our

hands, Alona: the hacker's skill. It was so incredible that it limited the number of

suspects. Like a criminal

suddenly running a hundred metres in 9.7 seconds at a crime scene – you'd be pretty sure the guy is a certain Mr Bolt or one of his close rivals, right?"

"So it's at that level?"

"Well, there are parts of this attack that just made my

jaw drop, and I've seen a fair amount in my day. That's

why we spent a hell of a lot of time talking to hackers and insiders in this industry and asking them who is capable of something really, really big? Who are the *seriously* big players these days? We had to be pretty smart about how we framed our questions, so that nobody would guess what actually happened. For a long time we got nowhere. It was like shooting in the dark – like calling out into the dead of night. Nobody knew anything, or they claimed they didn't. A few names were mentioned, but none of them felt right. For a while we chased

down

some

Russian, a Jurij Bogdanov –

an ex-druggie and thief who apparently can hack into
anything he damn well likes.

The security companies were already trying to recruit him when
he was living on the street in St Petersburg, hot-wiring cars,
weighing in at forty kilos of skin and bone.

Even the people from the

police

and

intelligence

services wanted him on their side. They lost that battle, needless to say. These days Bogdanov looks clean and

successful and has ballooned

to sixty kilos of skin and bone, but we're pretty sure he's one of the crooks in your organization, Alona. That was another reason he interested us. There had to be a

connection to the Spiders, because of the searches that got carried out, but then ...”

“You couldn't understand

why one of their own would be giving us new leads and associations?”

“Exactly, and so we looked further. After a while another outfit cropped up in the

conversations.”

“Which one?”

“They

call

themselves

Hacker Republic. They have a big reputation out there. A bunch of talents at the top of their game and rigorous about their encryptions. And for good

reason.

We're

constantly trying to infiltrate

these groups, and we're not the only ones. We don't just want to find out what they're up to, we also want to recruit their people. These days

there's big competition for the sharpest hackers."

"Now

that

we've

all

become criminals.”

“Ha,

yes,

maybe.

Whatever, Hacker Republic

has major talent. Lots of the guys we talked to backed that

up. And it wasn't just that.

There were also rumours that

they had something big going

on, and then a hacker with the handle Bob the Dog, who we

think is linked to the gang, was running searches and

asking questions about one of our guys, Richard Fuller. Do you know him?"

"No."

"A manic-depressive self-

righteous prick who's been

bugging me for a while. The archetypal security risk, who gets arrogant and sloppy

when he's in a manic phase.

He's just the kind of person a bunch of hackers *should* be targeting, and you'd need

classified

information

to

know that. His mental-health issues aren't exactly common

knowledge – his own mother hardly knows. But I'm pretty confident that in the end they

didn't get in via Fuller.

We've examined every file

he's received recently and there's nothing there. We've scrutinized him from top to bottom. But I bet Fuller was part of Hacker Republic's

original plan and then they changed strategy. I can't

claim to have any hard

evidence against them, not at all, but my gut feeling is still

that these guys are behind the break-in.”

“You said the hacker was a

girl.”

“Right. Once we’d homed

in on this group we found out as much as possible about them. It wasn’t easy to

separate rumour from myth

from fact. But one thing came up so often that in the end I saw no reason to question it.”

“And what’s that?”

“Hacker Republic’s big star is someone who uses the alias Wasp.”

“Wasp?”

“I won’t bore you with

technical details, but Wasp is something of a legend in

certain circles, one of the reasons being her ability to turn
accepted methods on

their heads. Someone said

you

can

sense

Wasp's

involvement in a hacker

attack the same way you can recognize

Mozart

in

a

melodic loop. Wasp has her own unmistakable style and that was the first thing one of my guys said after he'd

studied the breach: this is different from anything we've come across; it's got a

completely new threshold of originality.”

“A genius, in short.”

“Without a doubt. So we started to search everything we could find about this

Wasp, to try to crack the handle.

No-one

was

particularly surprised when that didn't work. This person wouldn't leave openings. But you know what I did then?"

Needham said proudly.

"Tell me."

"I looked up what the word stood for."

"Beyond

its

literal

meaning, you mean?”

“Right, but not because I or

anyone else thought it would get us anywhere. Like I said, if you can't get there on the main road, you take the side roads; you never know what you might find. It turns out Wasp could mean all sorts of

things. Wasp is a British fighter plane from World War

Two,

a

comedy

by

Aristophanes, a famous short film from 1915, a satirical magazine from nineteenth-century San Francisco and

there's also of course White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, plus a whole lot more. But those references are all a little too sophisticated for a hacker genius; they don't go with the culture. But you know what did fit? The superhero in Marvel Comics: Wasp is one

of the founding members of the Avengers.”

“Like the movie?”

“Exactly, with Thor, Iron

Man, Captain America. In the

original comics she was even

their leader for a while. I have to say, Wasp is a pretty badass superhero, kind of

rock and roll, a rebel who wears black and yellow with insect's wings and short black hair. She's got attitude, the

underdog who hits back and can grow or shrink. All the sources we've been talking to think that's the Wasp we're looking

for.

It

doesn't

necessarily mean the person behind the handle is some Marvel Comics geek. That

handle has been around for a while, so maybe it's a

childhood thing that stuck, or an attempt at irony. Like the fact that I named my cat Peter

Pan even though I never liked that self-righteous asshole who doesn't want to grow up.

Anyway ...”

“Anyway?”

“I couldn't help noticing

that this criminal network our Wasp was looking into also uses names from Marvel

Comics. They sometimes call

themselves

the

Spider

Society, right?"

"Yes, but I think that's just a game, as I see it, thumbing their noses at those of us who monitor them."

“Sure, I get that, but even jokes can give you leads, or cover up something serious.

Do you know what the Spider

Society in the Marvel Comics

does?”

“No.”

“They wage war against

the

‘Sisterhood

of

the

Wasp’.”

“O.K.,

fine,

it’s

an

interesting detail, but I don’t understand how that could be
your lead.”

“Just wait. Will you come downstairs with me to my car? I have to head to the airport quite soon.”

It was not late, but Blomkvist knew that he could not keep going much longer. He had to go home and get a few hours' sleep and then start working again tonight or tomorrow

morning. It might help too if he had a few beers on the way. The lack of sleep was pounding in his forehead and he needed to chase away a few memories and fears.

Perhaps he could get Zander to join him. He looked over at his colleague.

Zander had youth and energy to spare. He was

banging away at his keyboard

as if he had just started work for the day, and every now and then he flicked excitedly through his notes. Yet he had been in the office since 5.00

in the morning. It was now 5.45 in the evening and he had hardly taken a break.

“What do you say, Andrei?

How about we get a beer and

a bite to eat and discuss the story?”

At first Zander did not

seem to understand. Then he raised his head and suddenly no longer looked quite so energetic. He gave a little grimace as he massaged his shoulder.

“What ... well ... maybe,”

he said hesitantly.

“I’ll take that as a yes,”

Blomkvist said. “How about

Folksoperan?”

Folksoperan was a bar and restaurant on Hornsgatan, not far away, which attracted

journalists

and

the

arty

crowd.

“It’s just that ...”

“Just that what?”

1950

“I’ve got this portrait to do, of an art dealer working at Bukowski’s who got onto a train at Malmö Central and was never seen again. Erika

thought it would fit into the mix,” Zander said.

“Jesus, the things she makes you do, that woman.”

“I honestly don’t mind. But I’m having trouble pulling it together. It feels so messy and contrived.”

“Do you want me to have a

look at it?”

“I’d love that, but let me do some more work on it first. I would die of embarrassment

if you saw it in its present state.”

“In that case deal with it later. But come on now,

Andrei, let’s go and at least get something to eat. You can come

back

and

work

afterwards if you must,”

Blomkvist said. He looked

over at Zander.

That memory would stay

with him for a long time.

Zander was wearing a brown

checked jacket and a white shirt buttoned up all the way.

He looked like a film star, at any rate even more like a young Antonio Banderas than

usual.

“I think I’d better stay and keep plugging away,” he said.

“I have something in the

fridge

which

I

can

microwave.”

Blomkvist wondered if he

should pull rank, order him to
come out and have a beer.

Instead he said:

“O.K., we’ll see each other
in the morning. How are they
doing out there meanwhile?

No drawing of the murderer yet?”

“Seems not.”

“We’ll have to find another

solution

tomorrow.

Take

care,” Blomkvist said, getting up

and

putting

on

his

overcoat.

Salander

remembered

something she had read about

savants a long time ago in *Science* magazine. It was an article by Enrico Bombieri, an expert in number theory, referring to an episode in Oliver Sacks' *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* in which a pair of autistic and mentally disabled twins recite staggeringly

high

prime

numbers to each other, as if

they could see them before their eyes in some sort of inner
mathematical
landscape.

What these twins were able
to do and what Salander now

wanted to achieve were two different things. But there was still a
similarity, she thought, and decided to try, however sceptical she
might be. So she brought up the encrypted N.S.A. file and her
program for elliptic-curve factorization. Then she turned to August.
He responded by rocking back and forth.

“Prime numbers. You like
prime numbers,” she said.

August did not look at her,
or stop his rocking.

“I like them too. And

there’s

one

thing

I’m

particularly interested in just now. It's called factorization.

Do you know what that is?"

August stared at the table as he continued rocking and did not look as if he

understood anything at all.

"Prime-number

factorization is when we

rewrite a number as the

product of prime numbers. By

product in this context I mean the result of a multiplication.

Do you follow me?”

August’s expression did

not change, and Salander

wondered if she should just shut up.

“According

to

the

fundamental principles of

arithmetic,

every

whole

number has a unique prime-number

factorization.

It's

pretty cool. We can produce a number as simple as 24 in all sorts of ways, for example by multiplying 12 by 2 or 3 by 8, or 4 by 6.

Yet there's only one way to factorize it with

prime-numbers and that's $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$. Are you with me?

The problem is, even though it's easy to multiply prime numbers to produce large

numbers,

it's

often

impossible to go the other way, from the answer back to

the prime numbers. A really bad person has used this to code a secret message. Do you understand? It's a bit like

mixing a drink: easy to do but harder to unmix again.”

August neither nodded nor

said a word. But at least his body was no longer rocking.

“Shall we see if you’re any

good

at

prime-number

factorization, August? Shall we?”

August did not budge.

“I’ll take that as a yes.

Shall we start with the

number 456?”

August’s eyes were bright but distant, and Salander had the feeling that this idea of hers really was absurd.

It was cold and windy and there were few people out.

But Blomkvist thought the

cold was doing him good – he

was perking up a bit. He thought

of

his

daughter

Pernilla and what she said

about writing “for real”, and of Salander of course, and the boy.
What were they doing right now?

On the way up towards

Hornsgatspuckeln he stared

for a while at a painting hanging in a gallery window which

showed

cheerful,

carefree people at a cocktail party. At that moment it felt, perhaps wrongly, as if it had been ages since he had last

stood like that, drink in hand and without a care in the world. Briefly he longed to be somewhere far away. Then he

shivered, suddenly struck by the feeling that he was being followed. Perhaps it was a consequence of everything he

had been through in the last few days. He turned round, but the only person near him was an enchantingly beautiful woman in a bright red coat

with flowing dark blonde hair. She smiled at him a little uncertainly. He gave her a tentative smile back and was about to continue on his way.

Yet his gaze lingered, as if he were expecting the woman to turn at any moment into something more run-of-the-mill.

Instead she became more dazzling with each passing second, almost like royalty, a star who had accidentally wandered in among ordinary people, a gorgeous spread in a fashion magazine. The fact was that right then, in that first moment of astonishment, Blomkvist would not have

been able to describe her, or provide even one single detail about her appearance.

“Can I help you?” he said.

“No,

no,”

she

said,

apparently shy, and there was

no getting away from it: her hesitancy was beguiling. She was not a woman you would have thought to be shy. She looked as if she

might own the world.

“Well then, have a nice

evening,” he said, and turned again, but he heard her nervously clear her throat.

“Aren’t

you

Mikael

Blomkvist?” she said, even more uncertain now, looking down at the cobbles in the street.

“Yes, I am,” he said, and smiled politely, as he would have done for anybody.

“Well, I just want to say that I’ve always admired you,” she said, raising her head and gazing into his eyes with a long look.

“I’m flattered. But it’s been a long time since I wrote anything decent. Who are you?”

“My name is Rebecka Mattson,” she said. “I’ve been living in Switzerland.”

“And now you’re home for
a visit?”

“Only for a short time,
unfortunately. I miss Sweden.

I even miss November in
Stockholm. But I guess that’s how it is when you’re
homesick, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean?”

“That you miss even the

bad bits.”

“True.”

“Do you know how I cure

it all? I follow the Swedish press. I don’t think I’ve missed a single issue of

Millennium in the last few years,” she said. He looked at her again, and noticed that every piece of clothing, from the black high-heeled shoes

to the checked blue cashmere shawl, was expensive and elegant.

Rebecka Mattson did not

look

like

your

typical

Millennium reader. But there was

no

reason

to

be

prejudiced, even against rich expatriate Swedes.

“Do you work there?” he

said.

“I’m a widow.”

“I see.”

“Sometimes I get so bored.

Were

you

going

somewhere?”

“I was thinking of having a

drink and a bite to eat,” he said, at once regretting his reply. It was too inviting, too predictable. But it was at least true.

“May

I

keep

you

company?” she asked.

“That would be nice,” he

said, sounding unsure. Then

she touched his hand –

unintentionally, at least that is what he wanted to believe.

She still seemed bashful.

They walked slowly up

Hornsgatspuckeln, past a row

of galleries.

“How nice to be strolling here with you,” she said.

“It’s a bit unexpected.”

“So true. It’s not what I was thinking when I woke up
this morning.”

“What were you thinking?”

“That the day would be as dreary as ever.”

“I don’t know if I’ll be such good company,” he said.

“I’m pretty much immersed
in a story.”

“Are you working too
hard?”

“Maybe so.”

“Then you need a little

break,” she said, giving him a bewitching smile, filled with

longing or some sort of promise. At that moment he thought she seemed familiar, as if he had seen that smile before, but in another form, distorted somehow.

“Have we met before?” he

said.

“I don’t think so. Except that I’ve seen you a thousand times in pictures, and on T.V.”

“So you’ve never lived in Stockholm?”

“When I was a little girl.”

“Where did you live then?”

She pointed vaguely up

Hornsgatan.

“Those were good times,”

she said. “Our father took care of us. I often think about him. I miss him.”

“Is he no longer alive?”

“He died much too young.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Thank you. Where are we headed?”

“Well,” he said, “there’s a pub just up Bellmansgatan, the Bishops Arms. I know the

owner. It’s quite a nice

place.”

“I’m sure ...”

Once again she had that

diffident, shy look on her face, and once again her hand happened to brush against his

fingers – this time he wasn't so sure it was accidental.

“Perhaps it isn't fancy

enough?”

“Oh, I'm sure it's fine,”

she said apologetically. “It's just that people tend to stare at me. I've come across so many bastards in pubs.”

“I can believe that.”

“Wouldn’t you ...?”

“What?”

She looked down at the ground again and blushed. At

first he thought he was seeing things. Surely adults don’t blush like that? But Rebecka Mattson from Switzerland,

who

looked

like

seven

million dollars, went red like a little schoolgirl.

“Wouldn’t you like to

invite me to your place

instead, for a glass of wine or

two?” she said. “That would be nicer.”

“Well ...” He hesitated.

He badly needed to sleep, to be in good shape for

tomorrow. Yet he said:

“Of course. I’ve got a

bottle of Barolo in the wine rack,” and for a second he thought something exciting

might be about to happen

after all, as if he were about to embark on an adventure.

But his uncertainty would not abate. At first he could not understand why. He did not normally have a problem with this kind of situation –

he had more success than

most when it came to women

flirting

with

him.

This

particular

encounter

had

developed very quickly, but he was not unused to that either. So it was something

about the woman herself, wasn't it?

Not only was she young

and exceptionally beautiful and should have had better things to do than chase after burned-out,

middle-aged

journalists. It was something in her expression, and in the way she switched between

bold and shy, and the

physical contact. Everything he

had

at

first

found

spontaneous increasingly

seemed to him to be affected.

“How lovely, and I won’t

stay long. I don’t want to spoil your story,” she said.

“I’ll take full responsibility for any spoiled stories,” he said, and tried to smile back.

It was a forced smile and in

that instant he caught a
strange twitch in her eyes, a sudden icy chill which in a second
turned into its very
opposite, full of affection and warmth,
like
an
acting
exercise. He became more
convinced that there was

something wrong. But he had

no idea what, and did not want his suspicions to show, at least not yet. What was going on? He wanted to

understand.

They continued on up

Bellmansgatan – not that he was thinking of taking her

back to his place any longer, but he needed time to figure her out. He looked at her again.

She

really

was

gorgeous. Yet it occurred to him that it was not her beauty which had first captivated him. It was something else, something more elusive. Just then he saw Rebecka Mattson

as a riddle to which he ought to have the answer.

“A nice part of town, this,”

she said.

“It’s not bad.” He looked up towards the Bishops Arms.

Diagonally across from the

pub, just a bit higher up by the

crossroads

with

Tavastgatan, a scrawny, lanky man in a black cap was

standing under a streetlight studying a map. A tourist. He had a brown suitcase in his other

hand

and

white

sneakers and a black leather jacket with its fur collar turned up, and under normal circumstances

Blomkvist

would not have given him a second glance.

But now he observed that

the man's movements were

nervous

and

unnatural.

Perhaps

Blomkvist

was

suspicious to begin with, but the distracted way he was handling the map seemed

more and more contrived.

Now he raised his head and stared straight at Blomkvist and the woman, studying

them for a brief second. Then he looked down at his map again, seeming ill at ease, almost trying to hide his face under the cap. The bowed, almost timid head reminded Blomkvist of something, and again he looked into his

companion's dark eyes.

His look was persistent and intense. She gazed at him with affection, but he did not reciprocate;

instead

he

scrutinized her. Then her

expression froze. Only in that moment did Blomkvist smile.

He

smiled

because

suddenly the penny had
dropped.

CHAPTER 22

23.xi, Evening

Salander got up from the
table. She did not want to
pester August any longer. The boy
was
under

enough

pressure as it was and her idea had been crazy from the start.

One always expects too

much of these poor savants, and what August had done

was already impressive. She went out onto the terrace again and gingerly felt the area around the bullet wound, which was still aching. She

$2^3 \times 3 \times 19$

heard a sound behind her, a hasty scratching on paper, so she turned and went back

inside. When she saw what August had written, she
smiled:

She sat down and said,
without looking at him this time, “O.K.! I’m impressed.

But let’s make this a little
harder.

Have

a

go

at

18,206,927.”

August was hunched over

the

table

and

Salander

thought it might have been unkind to throw an eight-digit figure at him right away. But if they were to stand any chance of getting what she needed they would need to go

much higher than that. She was not surprised to see

August

begin

to

sway

nervously back and forth. But after a few seconds he leaned forward and wrote on his

paper: 9419 × 1933.

“Good.

How

about

971,230,541?”

August wrote: 983 × 991 ×

997.

“That’s great,” Salander

said, and on they went.

Outside the black, cube-like office building in Fort Meade with its reflective glass walls, not far from the big radome with its dish aerials, Casales and Needham were standing

in the packed car park.

Needham was twirling his car

keys and looking beyond the electric fence in the direction of the surrounding woods. He

should be on his way to the airport, he said, he was late

already. But Casales did not want to let him leave. She had her hand on his shoulder and was shaking her head.

“That’s twisted.”

“It’s out there,” he said.

“So every one of the

handles we've picked up for people in the Spider Society –
Thanos, Enchantress, Zemo,
Alkhema, Cyclone and the
rest – what they have in
common is that they're all
...”

“Enemies of Wasp in the
original comic-book series, yes.”

“That's insane.”

“A

psychologist

would

have fun with it.”

“This kind of fixation must

run deep.”

“I get the feeling it’s real hatred,” he said.

“You

will

look

after

yourself over there, won't you?"

"Don't forget I used to be in a gang."

"That's a long time ago,

Ed, and many kilos ago too."

"It's not a question of

weight. What is it they say?

You can take the boy out of the ghetto ..."

“Yes, yes.”

“You can never get rid of it. Besides, I’ll have help from

the

N.D.R.E.

in

Stockholm. They’re itching

as much as I am to put that hacker out of action once and for all.”

“What if Ingram finds

out?”

“That wouldn’t be good.

But, as you can imagine, I’ve been preparing the ground a bit. Even exchanged a word or two with O’Connor.”

“I figured as much. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Yep.”

“Shoot.”

“Ingram’s crew seems to have had full insight into the Swedish

police
investigation.”
“They’ve
been
eavesdropping
on
the
police?”

“Either that or they have a source, maybe an ambitious soul at Säpo. If I put you together with two of my best hackers, you could do some digging.”

“Sounds risky.”

“O.K., forget it.”

“That wasn’t a no.”

“Thanks, Alona. I’ll send
info.”

“Have a good trip,” she
said, as Needham smiled

defiantly and got into his car.

Looking

back,

Blomkvist

could not explain how he had

worked it out. It might have been

something

in

the

Mattson

woman's

face,

something unknown and yet

familiar. The perfect harmony of that face might have

reminded him of its very

opposite, and that together

with

other

hunches

and

misgivings gave him the

answer. True, he was not yet absolutely sure of it. But he had no doubt that something was very wrong.

The man now walking off

with his map and brown

suitcase was the very figure he had seen on the security camera in Saltsjöbaden, and that coincidence was too

improbable not to be of some

significance, so Blomkvist stood there for a few seconds and thought. Then he turned to the woman who called

herself Rebecka Mattson and tried to sound confident:

“Your friend is heading

off.”

“My friend?” she said,

genuinely surprised. “What

friend?”

“Him up there,” he said,

pointing at the man's skeletal
back as he sauntered gawkily down Tavastgatan.

“Are you joking? I don't
know anyone in Stockholm.”

“What do you want from
me?”

“I just want to get to know
you,
Mikael,”

she

said,

fingering her blouse, as if she might undo a button.

“Stop

that!”

he

said

roughly, and was about to lose his temper when she

looked at him with such vulnerable, piteous eyes that he was
thrown. For a moment

he thought he had made a mistake.

“Are you cross with me?”

she said, hurt.

“No, but ...”

“What?”

“I don’t trust you,” he said, more

bluntly

than

he

intended.

She smiled sadly and said,

“I can’t help feeling that you’re not quite yourself

today, are you, Mikael? We’ll have to meet some other time

instead.”

She moved to kiss his

cheek

so

discreetly

and

quickly that he had no time to stop

her.

She

gave

a

flirtatious wave of her fingers and walked away up the hill on high heels, so resolutely

self-assured that he wondered if he should stop her and fire some probing questions. But he could not imagine that anything would come of it.

Instead he decided to tail her.

It was crazy, but he saw no

alternative, so he let her disappear over the brow of the hill and then set off in pursuit. He hurried up to the crossroads, sure that she

could not have gone far. But

there was no sign of her, or of the man either. It was as if the city had swallowed them up.

The street was empty, apart from a black B.M.W. backing into a parking space some way down the street, and a man with a goatee wearing an

old-fashioned Afghan coat

who came walking in his

direction on the opposite

pavement.

Where had they gone?

There were no side streets for them to slip into, no alleys.

Had they ducked into a

doorway? He walked on

down

towards

Torkel

Knutssonsgatan, looking left and right. Nothing. He passed what

had

been

Samir's

Cauldron, once a favourite local of his and Berger's; now called Tabbouli, it served Lebanese food. They might

have stepped inside.

But he could not see how she would have had time to get there; he had been hot on her heels. Where the hell was she? Were she and the man standing somewhere nearby,

watching him? Twice he spun

around, certain that they were right behind him, and once he gave a start because of an icy feeling that someone was

looking at him through a telescopic sight.

When eventually he gave

up and wandered home it felt

as though he had escaped a great danger. He had no idea how close to the truth that feeling was, yet his heart was beating fiercely and his throat was dry. He was not easily scared, but tonight he had been badly frightened by an empty street.

The only thing he did understand was who he

needed to speak to. He had to get hold of Holger Palmgren, Salander's old guardian. But first he would do his civic duty. If the man he had seen was the person from Balder's

security camera, and there was even a minimal chance that he could be found, the police had to be informed. So he rang Bublanski.

It was not at all easy to convince the chief inspector.

It had not been easy to

convince himself. But he still had some residual credibility to fall back on, however

many liberties he had taken with

the

truth

of

late.

Bublanski said that he would send out a unit.

“Why would he be in your

part of town?”

“I have no idea, but it wouldn’t hurt to see if you can find him, would it?”

“I suppose not.”

“The best of luck to you in

that case.”

“It’s damn unsatisfactory

that the Balder boy is still out there somewhere,” Bublanski said reproachfully.

“And

it’s

damn

unsatisfactory that there was

a

leak

in

your

unit,”

Blomkvist said.

“We’ve

identified

our

leak.”

“You

have?

That’s

fantastic.”

“It’s not all that fantastic, I’m afraid. We believe there may have been several leaks, most of which did minimal damage except maybe for the

last.”

“Then you’ll have to make sure you put a stop to it.”

“We’re doing all we can,

but

we're

beginning

to

suspect ..." And then he

paused.

"What?"

"Nothing ."

"O.K., you don't have to

tell me.”

“We live in a sick world, Mikael.”

“We do?”

“A

world

in

which

paranoia is a requirement.”

“You could be right about that.

Good
night,
Chief
Inspector.”

“Good
night,
Mikael.

Don’t do anything silly now.”

“I’ll try not to.”

Blomkvist

crossed

over

Ringvägen and went down

into the Tunnelbana. He took

the red line towards Norsborg and got off at Liljeholmen, where for about a year Holger Palmgren had been living in a small,

modern

apartment.

Palmgren

had

sounded

alarmed

when

he

heard

Blomkvist's voice on the

telephone. But as soon as he had

been

assured

that

Salander was in one piece –

Blomkvist hoped he wasn't

wrong about this – he made him feel welcome.

Palmgren was a lawyer,

long retired, who had been Salander's guardian for many

years, ever since the girl was thirteen and had been locked up in St Stefan's psychiatric clinic in Uppsala. He was elderly and not in the best of health, having suffered two strokes. For some time now he had been using a Zimmer

frame, and had trouble getting around even so. The left side of his face drooped and his left

hand

no

longer

functioned. But his mind was

clear

and

his

long-term

memory was outstanding –

especially on Salander.

No-one

knew

Lisbeth

Salander as he did. Palmgren had succeeded where all the psychiatrists

and

psychologists had failed, or

perhaps had not wanted to succeed. After a childhood from hell, when the girl had lost faith in all adults and in all authority, Palmgren had won her confidence and

persuaded her to open up.

Blomkvist saw it as a minor miracle. Salander was every therapist's nightmare, but she had told Palmgren about the most painful parts of her childhood. That was why

Blomkvist now keyed in the front-door

code

at

Liljeholmstorget 96, took the lift to the fifth floor and rang the doorbell.

“My dear old friend,”

Holger said in the doorway,

“it’s so wonderful to see you.

But you’re looking pale.”

“I haven’t been sleeping

well.”

“Not

surprising,

when

people are shooting at you. I

read about it in the paper. A dreadful story.”

“Appalling.”

“Have there been any

developments?”

“I’ll tell you all about it,”

Blomkvist said, sitting on a yellow sofa with its back to the balcony, waiting for

Palmgren

to

settle

with

difficulty into a wheelchair next to him.

Blomkvist ran through the story in broad outline. When he came to the point of his sudden

inspiration,

or

suspicion,

on

the

cobblestones

in

Bellmansgatan,

he

was

interrupted:

“What are you saying?”

“I think it was Camilla.”

Palmgren looked stunned.

“*That* Camilla?”

“The very same.”

“Jesus,” Palmgren said.

“What happened?”

“She

vanished.

But

afterwards I felt as if my brain were on fire.”

“I can well understand. I was

sure

Camilla

had

disappeared off the face of the earth.”

“And

I

had

almost

forgotten that there were two of them.”

“There were two of them alright, very much so: twin sisters who loathed each

other.”

“I

remember

that,”

Blomkvist said. “But I need to be reminded of as much as
you can tell me, to fill the gaps in the story as I know it.

I’ve been asking myself why on

earth

Salander

got

involved in this story. Why would she, the superhacker, take an interest in a simple data breach?”

“Well,

you

know

the

background, don't you? The mother, Agneta Salander, was a cashier at Konsum Zinken and lived with her twin

daughters on Lundagatan.

They might have had quite a nice life together. There

wasn't much money and

Agneta was very young and had had no opportunity to get

an education. But she was loving

and

caring.

She

wanted to give her girls a good upbringing. It was just

...”

“That the father came to
visit.”

“Yes, the father, Alexander
Zalachenko. He came from

time to time and his visits nearly always ended in the same way.
He assaulted and raped Agneta while the girls

sat in the next room and heard everything. One day

Lisbeth found her mother

unconscious on the floor.”

“And that was the first time
she took revenge?”

“The second time. The first

was

when

she

stabbed

Zalachenko several times in the shoulder.”

“But now she firebombed

his car.”

“Yes. Zalachenko burned like a torch. Lisbeth was committed to St Stefan’s

psychiatric clinic.”

“And her mother was

admitted

to

Äppelviken

nursing home.”

“For Lisbeth that was the most painful part of the story.

Her mother was then twenty-nine, and she was never

herself again. She survived at the nursing home for fourteen

years, with severe brain injuries and suffering a great deal of pain.

Often she could not communicate at all.

Lisbeth went to see her as frequently as she could, and I know she dreamed that her mother

would

one

day

recover so they could talk again and look after each other. But it never happened.

That if anything is the darkest corner of Lisbeth's life. She saw her mother wither away and eventually die."

"It's terrible. But I've never understood Camilla's part in the story."

"That's more complicated,

and in some ways I think one

has to forgive the girl. After all, she too was only a child, and before she was even

aware of it she became a pawn in the game.”

“In what way?”

“They

chose

opposite

camps in the battle, you could say. It’s true that the girls are fraternal twins and not alike in appearance, but they also have

completely different

temperaments. Lisbeth was

born first, Camilla twenty minutes

later.

She

was

apparently a joy to behold, even when she was tiny.

While Lisbeth was an angry creature,

Camilla

had

everyone exclaiming, 'Oh, what a sweet girl!' and it can't have been a coincidence that Zalachenko showed more

forbearance towards her from

the start. I say forbearance because obviously it was

never a question of anything kinder in those first years.

Since Agneta was no more

than a whore to him, it

followed that her children were bastards with no claim

on

his

affections,

little

wretches who just got in the way. And yet ...”

“Yes?”

“And yet even Zalachenko

noticed that one of the

children

was

beautiful.

Sometimes Lisbeth would say

there was a genetic defect in her family and, even though it's doubtful that her claim would stand up to medical scrutiny, it cannot be denied

that Zala fathered some exceptional children. You

came

across

their

half-

brother, Ronald Niedermann, didn't you? He was blonde, enormous and had congenital analgesia, the inability to feel pain, so was therefore an ideal hit man and murderer, while Camilla ... well, in her

case the genetic abnormality was quite simply that she was astoundingly,

ridiculously

lovely to look at, and that just got worse as she grew older. I say worse because I'm pretty sure that it was a misfortune.

The effect may have been

exaggerated by the fact that her twin sister always looked sour. Grown-ups were liable to frown when they saw her.

But then they would notice Camilla, and light up and go soft in the head. Can you

imagine what an affect that must have had on her?”

“It must have been tough to

get passed over.”

“I wasn’t thinking of

Lisbeth,

and

I

don't

remember

seeing

any

evidence that she resented the situation. If it had just been a question

of

beauty,

she

probably would have felt her sister was welcome to it. No, I'm talking about Camilla.

Can you imagine what it must do to a child who doesn't have much in the way of

empathy to be told all the time how divine she is?"

"It goes to her head."

"It gives her a sense of power. When she smiles, we melt. When she doesn't, we feel

excluded,

and

do

absolutely anything to see her beam again. Camilla learned early on to exploit that. She

became expert at it, a mistress of manipulation. She had

large, expressive doe eyes.”

“She still does.”

“Lisbeth told me how

Camilla would sit for hours in front of the mirror, practising her look. Her eyes were a fantastic weapon. They could both bewitch

you and freeze you out, make children and adults alike feel special one day and rejected the next. It

was an evil gift and, as you might guess, she soon became

very

popular

at

school.

Everyone wanted to be with her and she took advantage of it in every conceivable way.

She made sure that her

classmates gave her small

presents

daily:

marbles,

sweets, small change, pearls, brooches. And those who

didn't, or generally didn't behave as she wanted, she

wouldn't even look at the next day. Anyone who had

ever

found

themselves

basking in her radiance knew

how painful that was. Her classmates did everything

they could to be in her good graces. They fawned over

her. With one exception, of course.”

“Her sister.”

“That’s

right,

and

so

Camilla turned them against

Lisbeth. She got some fierce bullying going – they pushed Lisbeth’s head into the toilet and called her a freak and a weirdo and all sorts of names.

This went on until one day they found out who they were picking on. But that’s another story, and one you’re familiar with.”

“Lisbeth doesn’t turn the other cheek.”

“No

indeed.

But

the

interesting thing in this story from a psychological point of view is that Camilla learned how

to

dominate

and

manipulate her surroundings from an early age. She

worked out how to control everybody, apart from two significant people in her life, Lisbeth and her father, and that exasperated her. She put a vast amount of energy into winning those fights as well, and she needed totally different strategies for each of them. She could never win Lisbeth over, and pretty soon I think she gave up. In her eyes, Lisbeth was simply

strange, just a surly, stropky girl. Her father, on the other hand ...”

“He was evil through and

through.”

“He was evil, but he was also the family’s centre of gravity. He was the one

around

whom

everything

revolved, even if he was

rarely there. He was the

absent father. In a normal family such a figure can take on a quasi-mystical status for a child, but in this case it was much more than that.”

“In what way?”

“I suppose I mean that Camilla and Zalachenko were an unfortunate combination.

Although

Camilla

hardly

understood it herself, she was only interested in one thing, even then: power. And her father, well, you can say many things about him, but he was not short of power.

Plenty of people can testify to that, not least that wretched lot at Säpo. No matter how

firmly they tried to put their foot down, they still ended up huddled like a flock of

frightened sheep when they came eyeball to eyeball with him. There was an ugly,

imposing

self-assurance

about Zalachenko which was merely amplified by the fact that he was untouchable. It made no difference how

many times he was reported to the social welfare agency –

the Security Police always protected him. This is what persuaded Lisbeth to take

matters into her own hands.

But for Camilla, things were completely different.”

“She wanted to be like

him.”

“Yes, I think so. Her father

was her ideal – she wanted the same aura of immunity and strength. But most of all, perhaps, she wanted to be acknowledged by him. To be seen as a worthy daughter.”

“She must have known how terribly he mistreated her mother.”

“Of course she knew. Yet still she took her father’s side.

One could say she chose to side with strength and power.

Apparently even as a little girl she often said that she despised weak people.”

“She despised her mother too, do you think?”

“Unfortunately

I

think

you’re right. Lisbeth once told me something which I’ve never been able to forget.”

“What’s that?”

“I’ve never told anyone.”

“Isn’t it about time then?”

“Well, maybe, but in that case I need a strong drink.

How about a good brandy?”

“That wouldn’t be such a bad idea. But you stay right where you are, I’ll get some glasses

and

the

bottle,”

Blomkvist said, going to the mahogany drinks cabinet in the corner by the kitchen door.

He was digging around

among the bottles when his iPhone rang. It was Zander, or at least his name was on the

display.

But

when

Blomkvist answered no-one was there; it must have been a pocket call, he thought. He poured out two glasses of Rémy Martin and sat down

again next to Palmgren.

“So tell me,” he said.

“I don’t really know where

to begin. But one fine

summer’s

day,

as

I

understood it, Camilla and Lisbeth were both sitting in

their bedroom. The door was locked.”

CHAPTER 23

23.xi, Evening

August's

body

stiffened

again. He could no longer

find

the

answers.

The

numbers were too big and

instead of picking up his pencil he clenched his fists so that the backs of his hands whitened. He banged his head

against the tabletop.

Salander should have tried to comfort him, or at least prevent him from hurting

himself. But she was not

entirely conscious of what was happening. Her mind was

on her encrypted file. She realized she was not going to get any further by this route either.

It
was
hardly
surprising
—
how
could
August
succeed

where

supercomputers had failed?

Her expectations had been

absurdly high from the start and what he had achieved

was impressive enough. But still she felt disappointed.

She went out into the darkness to survey the barren, untamed
landscape around

her. Below the steep rock slope lay the beach and a snow-
covered field with a

deserted dance pavilion.

On a lovely summer's day

the

place

was

probably

teeming with people. Now it was empty. The boats had

been pulled up on land and there was not a sign of life;

no lights were shining in the houses on the other side of the water.

Salander liked it.

At least she liked it as a hiding place at the end of November.

If someone arrived by car she was unlikely to pick up the sound of the engine. The only possible place to park was down by the beach, and to get to the house you had to climb up the wooden steps

over the steep rock slope.

Under the cover of darkness, someone might be able to

sneak up on them. But she would sleep tonight. She

needed it. Her wound was

still giving her pain – maybe that was why she had got her

hopes up about August,

against the odds. But when she went back into the house, she realized that there was something else besides.

“Normally

Lisbeth

isn't

someone who bothers about

the weather or what's going on beyond her immediate

focus,” Palmgren said. “She blocks out everything she

considers unimportant. But
on this occasion she did
mention that the sun was
shining on Lundagatan and in
Skinnarviksparken. She could
hear children laughing. On the
other
side
of

the

windowpane

people

were

happy – perhaps that was

what she was trying to say.

She wanted to point out the contrast.

Ordinary

people

were having ice cream and playing with kites and balls.

Camilla and Lisbeth sat

locked in their bedroom and could

hear

their

father

assaulting their mother. I believe this was just before Lisbeth took her revenge on

Zalachenko, but I'm not sure about the sequence of events.

There were many rapes, and they

followed

the

same

pattern. Zala would appear in the afternoon or evening, very drunk. Sometimes he would

ruffle Camilla's hair and say things like, 'How can such a pretty girl have such a

loathsome sister?' Then he would lock his daughters into their room and settle down in

the kitchen to have more to drink. He drank his vodka neat, and often he would sit quietly at first, smacking his lips like a hungry animal.

Then he would mumble

something like, 'And how's my little whore today?' –

sounding almost affectionate.

But

Agneta

would

do

something wrong, or rather Zalachenko would decide that

she had done something

wrong, and then the first blow came, usually a slap followed by, 'I thought my little whore was going to behave herself today.' Then he would shove her into the bedroom and beat her. After a while slaps would turn to punches. Lisbeth

could tell from the sounds.

She could tell exactly what sort of blows they were, and even where they landed. She felt it as clearly as if she

herself were the victim of this savagery. After the punches came the kicks. Zala kicked and

shoved

her

mother

against the wall and shouted

'bitch'

and

'tramp'

and

'whore', and that aroused

him. He was turned on by her suffering. Only when Agneta was black and blue and bleeding did he rape her, and when he climaxed he would yell even fouler insults. Then it would be quiet for a while.

All that could be heard was Agneta's choked sobbing and Zala's own heavy breathing.

Then he would get up and have another drink and mutter and swear and spit on the floor. Sometimes he unlocked the door to the children's room, and say something like,

'Mummy's behaving herself
again now.' And he would
leave, slamming the door
behind him. That was the usual pattern. But on this particular day
something new
happened."

"What?"

"The girls' bedroom was
quite small. However hard

they tried to get away from each other, the beds were still close and, while the abuse went on, each one usually sat on her own mattress, facing the other. They hardly ever

said anything, and usually avoided eye contact. On this day Lisbeth was staring

through

the

window

at

Lundagatan – that’s probably why she talked about the

sunlight and the children out there. But then she looked at her sister, and that's when she saw it."

"She saw what?"

"Camilla's

right

hand,

beating against her mattress.

It could have been a sign of nervous

or

compulsive

behaviour.

That's

what

Lisbeth thought at first. But then she noticed that the hand was beating in time to the blows from the bedroom, and

at that she looked up at Camilla's face. Her sister's eyes were glowing with

excitement, and the eeriest thing was: Camilla looked

just like Zala himself and she

was

smiling.

She

was

suppressing a smirk, and in that instant Lisbeth realized that Camilla was not only trying to ingratiate herself with her father. She was also right behind his violence. She was cheering him on.”

“That’s sick.”

“But that’s how it was. Do

you know what Lisbeth did?

She remained perfectly calm.

She sat down next to Camilla

and took her hand almost tenderly. Perhaps Camilla

thought her sister was looking for

some

comfort

or

closeness. Stranger things

have happened. Then Lisbeth rolled up her sister's shirt sleeve and dug her fingernails into Camilla's wrist – down to the bone – gouging open a

terrible

wound.

Blood

streamed

onto

the

bed.

Lisbeth dragged Camilla to

the floor and swore she would kill both her and her father if the beatings and the rapes did not stop.”

“Jesus!”

“You can imagine the

hatred between the sisters.

Both Agneta and the social services were so worried that something even more serious would happen that they were kept apart. For a while they arranged a home elsewhere

for Camilla. But sooner or later they would have clashed again. In the end, as you know, things did not turn out like that. I believe the

sisters only saw each other once
after Lisbeth was locked up –
several years later, when a disaster was narrowly averted
– but I know none of the details.

I

haven't

heard

anything of Camilla for a long time now. The last

people to have had contact with her are the foster family with whom she lived in

Uppsala,

people

called

Dahlgren. I can get you the number.

But

ever

since

Camilla was eighteen or

nineteen and she packed a bag and left the country she hasn't been heard from.

That's why I was astonished when you said that you had met her. Not even Lisbeth,

with her famous ability to track people down, has been able to find her."

"So she *has* tried?"

"Oh yes. As far as I know,

the last time was when her father's estate was to be apportioned."

“I had no idea.”

“Lisbeth mentioned it in

passing. She didn’t want a single penny from that will –

to her it was blood money –

but she could tell that there was something strange about it. There were assets of four million kronor: the farm in Gosseberga, some securities and

also

a

run-down

industrial site in Norrtälje, a cottage

somewhere,

and

various other bits and pieces.

Not insignificant by any

means, and yet ...”

“He should have been

worth much more.”

“Yes, Lisbeth was aware that he ran a vast criminal empire. Four million would have been small change in that context.”

“So you’re saying that she may

have

wondered

if

Camilla inherited the lion’s share.”

“I think that’s what she’s been trying to find out. The mere thought that her father’s fortune was going on to do

harm after his death was torture to her. But she got nowhere.”

“Camilla had obviously
concealed her new identity well.”

“I assume so.”

“Do you have any reason
to think Camilla might have taken
over
her
father’s
trafficking business?”

“Maybe, maybe not. She
may have struck out into
something
altogether
different.”

“Such as?”

Palmgren closed his eyes
and took a long sip of his brandy.

“I can’t be sure of this, Mikael. But when you told me about Professor Balder, I had a thought. Do you have any idea why Lisbeth is so good with computers? Do

you know how it all started?”

“I have no idea.”

“Then I’ll tell you. I

wonder if the key to your story doesn’t lie there.”

When Salander came in from

the terrace and saw August huddled in a stiff and

unnatural position by the

round table, she realized that the boy reminded her of herself as a child.

That is exactly how she had felt at Lundagatan, until one day it became clear to her that she had to grow up far too soon, to take revenge on her father. It was a burden no child should have to bear. But it had at least been the beginning of a real life, a more dignified life.

No

bastard should be allowed to do what Zalachenko had done

with impunity. She went to

August and said solemnly, as if giving an important order,

“You’re going to go to bed now. When you wake up I

want you to do the drawing that will nail your father’s killer. Do you get that?” The boy nodded and shuffled into

his bedroom while Salander opened her laptop and started to look for information about Lasse Westman and his circle

of friends.

“I don’t think Zalachenko himself was much use with computers,” Palmgren said.

“He wasn’t of that generation.

But perhaps his dirty business grew to such a scale that he had to use a computer

program to keep his accounts, and to keep them away from his accomplices. One day he came to Lundagatan with an I.B.M. machine which he

installed on the desk next to

the window. Nobody in the family had seen a computer before. Zalachenko promised that if anyone so much as touched the machine he

would flay them alive. For all I know that was telling, from a purely psychological point of view. It increased the temptation.”

“Forbidden fruit.”

“Lisbeth

was

around

eleven at the time. It was

before she tore into Camilla’s right arm, and before she went for her father with

knives and petrol bombs. You

could say it was just before she became the Lisbeth we know today. She lacked

stimulation. She had no

friends to speak of, partly because Camilla had made

sure

that

nobody

came

anywhere near her at school, but partly because she really

was different. I don't know if she realized it herself yet. Her teachers and those around her didn't. But she was an extremely gifted child. Her talent alone set her apart.

School was deadly boring for

her. Everything was obvious and easy. She needed only to take a quick look at things to understand them, and during lessons

she

sat

there

daydreaming. I do believe,

however, that by then she had managed to find some things in her free time which

interested her – advanced

maths books, that sort of thing. But basically she was bored stiff. She spent a lot of time reading her Marvel

comics, which were way

below her intellectual level but possibly fulfilled another, therapeutic function.”

“In what sense?”

“To be honest I’m reluctant to try to play the shrink with Lisbeth. She would hate it if she could hear me. But those comics are full of superheroes fighting against supervillains, taking matters into their own hands to exact revenge and see to it that justice is done.

For all I know, that may have been the perfect sort of

reading

material.

Perhaps

those stories, with their black-

and-white view of the world, helped her to gain some

clarity.”

“You

mean

that

she

understood she had to grow up and become a superhero herself.”

“In some way, maybe, in

her own little world. At the time she didn’t know that Zalachenko had been a Soviet

spy, and that his secrets had given him a unique position in Swedish society. She can have had no idea either that there was a special section within Säpo which protected him. But like Camilla she sensed that her father had some sort of immunity. One day a man in a grey overcoat appeared at the apartment and hinted that their father must come to no harm. Lisbeth realized early on that there was no point in reporting Zalachenko to the police or the social services. That would only result in yet another man in a grey overcoat turning up on their doorstep.

“Powerlessness,

Mikael,

can be a devastating force, and before Lisbeth was old enough to do something

about it she needed a place of strength, a refuge. She found that

in

the

world

of

superheroes. I know better than most how important literature can be, whether it's comic books or fine old novels, and I know that

Lisbeth

grew

particularly

attached to a young heroine called Janet van Dyne.”

“Van Dyne?”

“That's right, a girl whose father was a rich scientist.

The father is murdered – by aliens, if I remember right –
and in order to take her revenge Janet van Dyne gets in touch
with one of her father’s old colleagues, and in his
laboratory
acquires
superpowers. She becomes
the Wasp, someone you can’t
push around, either literally or figuratively.”
“I didn’t know that. So

that's where she gets her handle from?"

"Not just the handle. I knew nothing about all that sort of stuff, obviously – I was an old dinosaur who got the Phantom mixed up with Mandrake the Magician – but

the first time I saw a picture of the Wasp, it gave me a start. There was so much of Lisbeth in her. There still is, in a way. I think she picked up a lot of her style from that character. I don't want to

make too much of it, but I do know she thought a great deal about

the

transformation

Janet van Dyne underwent

when she became the Wasp.

Somehow she understood that

she herself had to undergo the same drastic metamorphosis: from child and victim to

someone who could fight

back against a highly trained and

ruthless

intelligence

agent.

“Thoughts

like

these

occupied her day and night and so the Wasp became an important figure for her

during

her

period

of

transition,

a

source

of

inspiration.

And

Camilla

found out about it. That girl had an uncanny ability to nose

out

other

people's

weaknesses – she used her tentacles to feel for their sensitive points and would

then strike exactly there. So she came to make fun of the Wasp in whichever way she could. She even found out who her Marvel enemies

were and began to call herself by their names, Thanos and all the others.”

“Did you say Thanos?”

Blomkvist

said,

suddenly

alert.

“I think that’s what he was

called, a destroyer who once

fell in love with Death itself.

Death had appeared to him in

the shape of a woman, and after that he wanted to prove himself worthy of her, or something like that. Camilla became a fan of his so as to provoke Lisbeth. She even

called her gang of friends the Spider Society – in one of the comics that group are the sworn

enemies

of

the

Sisterhood of the Wasp.”

“Really?” Blomkvist said, his mind racing.

“Yes, I suppose it was

childish, but that didn’t make it innocent. There was such hostility between the sisters even then that those names took on a nasty

significance.”

“Do you think that’s still relevant?”

“The names, you mean?”

“I suppose so.”

Blomkvist was not sure what he meant, but he had a vague feeling that he had lit upon something important.

“I don’t know,” Palmgren

said. “They’re grown women now, but we mustn’t forget that those were decisive times in

their

lives,

when

everything changed. Looking back, it's perfectly possible that small details could turn out

to

be

of

fateful

significance. It wasn't just that Lisbeth lost a mother and was then locked up. Camilla's existence too was smashed to

pieces. She lost her home, and the father she admired suffered severe burns. As you know, after the petrol bomb Zalachenko

was

never

himself again. Camilla was put in a foster home miles from

the

world

whose

undisputed leading light she

had been. It must have been bitterly hurtful for her too. I don't for one second doubt that she's hated Lisbeth with a murderous fury ever since."

"It certainly looks like it,"

Blomkvist said.

Palmgren took another sip

of brandy. "The sisters were already effectively in a state of out-and-out war, and

somehow I think they both knew that everything was

about to blow up to change their lives for ever. I think they were even preparing for it."

“But in different ways.”

“Oh yes. Lisbeth had a

brilliant mind, and infernal plans and strategies were

constantly ticking away in her head. But she was alone.

Camilla was not so bright, not in the conventional sense –

she never had a head for

studies, and was incapable of understanding

abstract

reasoning – but she knew

how to manipulate people to do her bidding, so, unlike Lisbeth, she was never alone.

If Camilla ever discovered that Lisbeth was good at

something which could be a threat to her, she never tried to acquire the same skill, for the simple reason she knew

she couldn't compete with her sister.”

“So what did she do

instead?”

“Instead she would track

down somebody – or better still more than one person –

who could do whatever it

was, and strike back with their help. She always had minions. But
forgive me, I'm

getting ahead of myself.”

“Yes,

tell

me

what

happened with Zalachenko's

computer?”

“Lisbeth was short of

stimulation, as I said. And she would lie awake at night, worrying about her mother.

Agneta bled badly after the rapes, but wouldn't go to a doctor. She probably felt

ashamed. Periodically she

sank into deep depressions and no longer had the

strength to go to work or look after

the

girls.

Camilla

despised her even more.

'Mamma is weak,' she'd say.

As I told you, in her world, to be weak was worse than

anything else. Lisbeth, on the other hand, saw a person she loved – the only person she had ever loved – fall victim to a dreadful injustice. She was a child in so many ways, but she

was

also

becoming

convinced that she was the only person in the world who

could save her mother from being beaten to death. So she got up in the middle of one night – carefully, of course, so as not to wake Camilla –

and saw the computer on the desk

by

the

window

overlooking Lundagatan.

“At that time she didn’t

even know how to switch on a computer. But she worked it

out. The computer seemed to be whispering to her: ‘Unlock my secrets.’ She didn’t get far, not at first. A password was needed. Since her father was known as Zala, she tried that, and Zala666 and similar combinations, and everything else she could think of. But nothing worked. I believe this went on for two or three nights, and if she slept at all

then it was at school or at home in the afternoon.

“Then

one

night

she

remembered something her

father had written in German on a piece of paper in the kitchen –
Was mich nicht umbringt,

macht

mich

stärker. What doesn't kill me makes me stronger. At the time it
meant nothing to her.

But she realized that the phrase was important to her

father, so she tried it. But that didn't work either. There were too many letters. So she tried Nietzsche, the author of the quote, and there she was, suddenly she was in. A whole world opened up to her. Later she would describe it as a moment which changed her for ever. She thrived once she overcame that barrier. She explored what was intended to stay hidden.”

“And Zalachenko never knew of this?”

“It seems not, and she

understood nothing at first. It was all in Russian. There were various lists, and some numbers – accounts of the revenues from

his trafficking operations. To this day I have no idea how much she

worked out then and how

much she found out later. She came to understand that her

mother was not the only one made to suffer by her father.

He was destroying other

women's lives too, and that made her wild with rage. That is what turned her into the Lisbeth we know today, the one who hates men who ...”

“... hate women.”

“Precisely. But it also

made her stronger. She saw that there was no turning back

– she had to stop her father.

She went on with her searches on other computers, including at school, where she would sneak into the

staffroom, and sometimes she

pretended to be sleeping over with the friends she didn’t have while in fact she stayed overnight at school and sat at the computers until morning.

She

started

to

learn

everything about hacking and

programming, and I imagine

that it was the same as when other child prodigies discover their niche – she was in thrall.

She felt that she was born for this. Many of her contacts in the digital world began to take an interest in her even then, the way the older

generation

has

always

engaged with younger talents, whether to encourage or
crush them. Many people out there were irritated by her

unorthodox

ways,

her

completely new approach.

But others were impressed, and

she

made

friends,

including Plague – you know

about him. She got her first real friends by way of the computer and above all, for the first time in her life, she felt free. She could fly

through cyberspace, just like the Wasp. There was nothing to tie her down.”

“Did Camilla realize how accomplished

she’d

become?”

“She certainly had her

suspicious. I don’t know, I really don’t want to speculate, but sometimes I think of

Camilla as Lisbeth’s dark

side, her shadow figure.”

“The evil twin.”

“A bit, though I don’t like to call people evil, especially not young women. If you

want to dig into it yourself I suggest you get in touch with
Margareta

Dahlgren,

Camilla’s foster mother after the havoc at Lundagatan.

Margareta lives in Stockholm

now, in Solna, I think. She’s a widow

and

has

had

a

desperately sad life.”

“In what way?”

“Well, that may also be of interest. Her husband Kjell, a computer

programmer

at

Ericsson, hanged himself a short time before Camilla left them. A year later their

nineteen-year-old

daughter

also committed suicide by

jumping from a Finland ferry

– at least that's what the inquest concluded. The girl had emotional problems – she

struggled with her self-esteem

–

but

Margareta

never

believed that version, and she even hired a private detective.

Margareta is obsessed by Camilla, and to be honest I've always had a bit of a problem with her, I'm embarrassed to say.

Margareta got in touch with me straight after you published your Zalachenko

story. As you know that's when

I

had

just

been

discharged

from

the

rehabilitation clinic. I was mentally and physically at the end

of

my

tether

and

Margareta talked endlessly.

She was fixated. The sight of her number on my telephone display would exhaust me,

and I went to some efforts to avoid her. But now when I think about it I understand her more. I think she would be happy to talk to you, Mikael.”

“Can you let me have her details?”

“I’ll get them for you. Just

wait

a

moment.”

When

Palmgren

came

back

moments later he said, “So you’re sure that Lisbeth and the boy are safely tucked away somewhere?”

“I’m sure,” Blomkvist said.

At least I hope I am, he thought. He stood up and embraced Palmgren.

Out on Liljeholmstorget
the storm tore into him again.

He pulled his coat close
around him and thought of
Salander and her sister, and for some reason also of
Andrei Zander.

He decided to call him to find out how he was getting on with his story on the art dealer. But Zander never picked up.

CHAPTER 24

23.xi, Evening

Zander had called Blomkvist because he had changed his mind. Of course he wanted to go out for a beer. How could he not have taken him up on the offer? Blomkvist was his idol and the very reason he had gone in for journalism.

But once he dialled the

number he felt embarrassed and

hung

up.

Maybe

Blomkvist

had

found

something

better

to

do.

Zander did not like disturbing

people unnecessarily, and least of all Blomkvist.

Instead he worked on. But however hard he tried, he got nowhere.

The words just

would not come out right and

after about an hour he

decided to take a walk, and so he tidied his desk and

checked once again that he had deleted every word on the encrypted link. Then he said goodbye to Emil Grandén, the only other person left in the office.

Grandén was thirty-six and

had worked at both T.V.4's

“Cold Facts” and *Svenska Morgon-Posten*. Last year he had been awarded the Stora Journalist

prize

for

Investigative Reporter of the Year. But Zander thought –

even though he tried not to –
that Grandén was conceited and overbearing, at least
towards a young temp like him.

“Going out for a bit,”

Zander said.

Grandén looked at him as

if there was something he had forgotten to say. Then he uttered in
a bored tone,

“O.K.”

Zander felt miserable. It

may

only

have

been

Grandén's arrogant attitude, but it was more likely

because of the article about the art dealer. Why was he finding

it

so

difficult?

Presumably because all he

wanted to do was help

Blomkvist with the Balder

story. Everything else felt secondary. But he was also spineless, wasn't he? Why

had he not let Blomkvist take a look at what he had written?

No-one could raise the

level

of

a

story

like

Blomkvist could, with just a few light pen strokes or

deletions.

Never

mind.

Tomorrow he would see the story with fresh eyes and then
Blomkvist could read it,

however bad it might be.

Zander closed the door to the office

and

walked

out

towards the lift. Further down the stairs a drama was

unfolding. At first he could not make out what was going

on, but there was a scrawny, hollow-eyed figure molesting a beautiful young woman.

Zander froze – he had always

loathed violence, ever since his parents had been killed in Sarajevo. He hated fights. But his self-respect was at stake.

It was one thing to run away for your own sake, but quite another to leave a fellow human being in danger, and

so he rushed down the stairs yelling, “Stop, let her go!”

At first that seemed like a fatal mistake – the hollow-eyed man pulled out a knife and muttered some threat in English. Zander’s legs nearly gave way, yet he managed to

muster the last remnants of his courage and spat back, like something from a B-movie, “Hey, get lost! If you don’t, you’ll regret it.” After

a few seconds of posturing, the man took off with his tail between his legs. Zander and the woman were left alone in

the stairwell, and that too was like a scene from a film.

At first the woman was

shaken and shy. She spoke so

softly that Zander had to lean in close to hear what she was saying, and it took a while before he understood what

had happened. The woman

had been living in a marriage from hell, she said, and even though she was now divorced

and living with a protected identity her ex-husband had managed to track her down and send some stooge to

harass her.

“That’s the second time

that foul man has thrown

himself at me today,” she said.

“Why were you up here?”

“I tried to get away and ran in, but it didn’t help. I can’t thank you enough.”

“It was nothing.”

“I’m so fed up with nasty men,” she said.

“I’m a nice man,” he said, perhaps a little too quickly, and that made him feel

pathetic. He was not in the least bit surprised that the woman did not answer but

looked down at the stairs in embarrassment.

He felt ashamed of such a cheap reply. But then, just as he thought he had been

rejected, she raised her head and gave him a careful smile.

“I think you really might be. My name’s Linda.”

“I’m Andrei.”

“Nice to meet you, Andrei,

and thank you again.”

“Thank you too.”

“What for?”

“For ...”

He

didn't

finish

his

sentence. He could feel his heart beating, his mouth was dry. He looked down the

staircase.

“Yes, Andrei?” she said.

“Would you like me to

walk you home?”

He regretted saying that

too.

He was afraid it would be misinterpreted. But instead she gave him another of her enchanting, hesitant smiles, and said that she would feel safe with him by her side, so they went out into the street and down towards Slussen.

She told him how she had been living more or less

locked up in a big house in Djursholm. He said that he understood – he had written a

series of articles on violence against women.

“Are you a journalist?” she

said.

“I work at *Millennium*.”

“Wow,” she said. “Is that for real? I’m a huge fan of that magazine.”

“It’s done a lot of good things,” he said shyly.

“It really has,” she said. “A while ago I read a wonderful article about an Iraqi who had

been wounded in the war and got sacked from his job as a cleaner at some restaurant in the

city.

He

was

left

completely destitute. Today he's the owner of a whole chain of restaurants. I cried when I read it; it was so beautifully

written

and

inspiring.”

“I wrote that piece,” he

said.

“Are you joking?” she said.

“It was fantastic.”

Zander was not exactly
spoiled when it came to
praise for his journalistic efforts,
especially
from
unknown women. Whenever

Millennium was mentioned, people wanted to talk about Mikael

Blomkvist,

and

Zander did not object to that.

But secretly he dreamed of recognition for himself too,

and now this beautiful Linda had praised him without even

meaning to.

It made him so happy and proud that he plucked up the courage to suggest a drink at Papagallo, since they were just passing. To his delight she said, “What a good idea!”

so

they

went

into

the

restaurant,

Zander's

heart

pounding. He tried to avoid looking into her eyes.

Those eyes had knocked him off his feet and he could not believe this was really happening. They sat down at a table not far from the bar and Linda tentatively put out her hand. As he took it he smiled

and

mumbled

something, hardly aware of what he was saying.

He looked down at his

mobile

—

Grandén

was

calling. To his own surprise

he ignored it and turned off his ringer. For once the

magazine would have to wait.

He just wanted to gaze into Linda's face, to drown in it.

She was so beautiful that it felt like a punch to the stomach, yet she seemed so fragile, like a wounded bird.

“I can't imagine why

anyone would want to hurt you,” he said.

“It happens all the time.”

Perhaps

he

could

understand it after all. A woman like her probably

attracted psychopaths. No-

one else would dare ask her out. Most men would just

shrivel up and feel inferior.

“It’s so nice to be sitting here with you,” he said.

“It’s so nice to be sitting here with *you*,” she retorted, gently stroking his hand.

They each ordered a glass of

red wine and started to talk, they had so much to say, and

he didn’t notice his mobile vibrating in his pocket, not once but twice, which is how

he came to ignore a call from Blomkvist for the first time in his life.

Soon afterwards she took

his hand and led him out into the night. He did not ask where they were going. He was prepared to follow her

anywhere. She was the most wonderful creature he had

ever met, and from time to time she gave him a smile that made every paving stone, every breath, sound out a promise

that

something

wonderful and overwhelming

was happening. *You live an entire life for the sake of a walk like this*, he thought, barely noticing the cold and the city around him.

He was intoxicated by her company and what might
await him. But maybe – he wasn't sure – there was a hint of
suspicion too. At first he dismissed these thoughts, his usual
scepticism at any form of happiness. And yet he
could
not
help
asking
himself: *Is this too good to be true?*
He studied Linda with a

new focus, and noticed that

not everything about her was attractive. As they walked past Katarinahissen he even thought he noticed something

hard in her eyes. He looked anxiously down at the choppy

waters.

“Where

are

we

going?”

“I have a friend with a
small apartment in Mårten
Trotzigs gränd,” she said.

“She

lets

me

use

it

sometimes. We could have

another drink there.” That made him smile as if it were the most wonderful idea he had ever heard.

Yet he felt more and more confused. Not long ago he had been looking after her, and now she had taken the initiative. When a quick

glance at his mobile told him that Blomkvist had rung

twice, he felt he had to call back

immediately.

Come

what may, he could not let the magazine down.

“I’d like that,” he said.

“But first I have to make a call. I’m in the middle of a story.”

“No, Andrei,” she said, in a

surprisingly

firm

tone.

“You’re not calling anyone.

Tonight it’s just you and me.”

They got to Järntorget. In spite of the storm there were quite a few people around and

Linda stared at the ground, as if she did not want to be noticed. He looked over to the right at Österlånggatan and the statue of Evert Taube.

The troubadour was standing there immobile, holding a sheet of music in his right hand, looking up at the sky in dark glasses. Should he suggest that they meet the following day?

“Maybe ...” he started.

He got no further, because she pulled him to her and kissed him with a force which emptied his mind. Then she stepped up the pace again.

She held his hand and pulled him

to

the

left

into

Västerlånggatan, then right into a dark alley. Was that someone behind them? No,

no, the footsteps and voices he could hear came from

further away. It was just him

and Linda, wasn't it? They passed a window with a red frame and black shutters and came to a grey door which Linda had some trouble

opening.

The

key

was

shaking in her hand and he wondered at that. Was she still afraid of her ex-husband and his goon?

They climbed a dark stone stairway.

Their

footsteps

echoed and there was a faint

smell of something rotten. On one of the steps past the third floor he saw a playing card, the queen of spades, and he did not like that, but he could not understand why, it was probably

some

silly

superstition. He tried to

ignore it, and think about how great it was that they had met.

Linda was breathing heavily.

Her right hand was clenched.

A man's laughter could be

heard in the alley. Not laughing at him, surely? He was just agitated. But it felt as if they were climbing and climbing and not getting

anywhere. Could the house

really be so tall? No, here they were. The friend lived in the attic apartment.

The name on the door was Orlov and again Linda took out her bunch of keys. This

time her hand was not shaking.

Blomkvist was sitting in an apartment with old-fashioned furniture on Prostvågen in Solna, next to a large

churchyard. Just as Palmgren had anticipated, Margareta

Dahlgren agreed to see him at once, and even though she had sounded manic over the

telephone she turned out to be an elegant lady in her sixties.

She

was

wearing

a

fashionable fawn jumper and neatly pressed black trousers.

Perhaps she had had time to dress up for him. She was in high-heeled shoes and had it not been for her restless eyes he would have thought her to

be a woman at peace with herself, despite everything.

“You want to hear about Camilla,” she said.

“Especially about her life more recently – if you know anything about it,” he said.

“I remember when she came to us,” she said, as if she had not been listening.

“My husband Kjell thought we could make a contribution to society at the same time as adding to our little family.

We had only one child, you see, our poor Moa. She was fourteen then, and quite

lonely. We thought it would do her good if we took in a foster daughter of roughly the same age.”

“Did you know what had happened in the Salander family?”

“We didn’t have all the details, but we knew that it had been awful and traumatic and the mother was sick and the

father

had

suffered

serious burns. We were

deeply moved and were

expecting to meet a girl who had fallen apart, someone

who would need an incredible

amount of care and affection.

But do you know what

arrived?”

“Tell me.”

“The most adorable girl

we’d ever seen. It wasn’t just that she was pretty. My

goodness, you should have heard her talk. She was so wise and mature, and she told such heart-rending stories

about how her mentally ill sister had terrorized the

family. Yes, of course I now know how far from the truth that was. But how could we have doubted her then? Her eyes

were

bright

with

conviction, and when we

said, 'How dreadful, poor

you,' she answered, 'It wasn't easy, but I still love my sister; she's just sick and now she's getting treatment.' It sounded so grown-up and full of

empathy, and for a while it almost felt like she was the one taking care of us. Our whole family lit up, as if something glamorous had

come into our lives and made

everything bigger and more beautiful, and we blossomed.

And Moa blossomed most of all. She began to take care of her appearance, and quite

soon

she

became

more

popular at school. There was nothing I wouldn't have done

for Camilla right then. And Kjell, my husband, what can I say? He was a new person.

He was smiling and laughing all the time, and we began to make love again, if you'll forgive my being so frank.

Perhaps I should have started to worry even then. But it felt like everything had finally fallen into place for our family. For a while we were all happy, as everybody is who meets Camilla. They're happy to start with. Then ...

after some time with her you don't want to live any more."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It's horrific."

"So what happened?"

"A poison began to spread among us. Camilla slowly

took control of our family.

Looking back, it's impossible to say when the party ended and the nightmare began. It had happened so gradually

and imperceptibly that we

woke up one day and realized

everything was ruined: our trust, our sense of security, the very foundations of our life together. Moa's self-

confidence plummeted. She lay awake at night weeping, saying she was ugly and

horrible and didn't deserve to live. Only later did we find out that her savings account had been cleaned out. I still don't

know

how

that

happened. But I'm convinced

Camilla

blackmailed

her.

Blackmail came as naturally to her as breathing. She

collected

compromising

information on people. For a long time I thought she was keeping a diary, but actually it was a catalogue of all the dirt she'd collected about people close to her. And Kjell

... the bastard ... you know, I

believed him when he said that he'd started having

problems sleeping and needed

to use the bed in the basement guest room. But that was an excuse to be with Camilla.

Starting

when

she

was

sixteen, she would sneak in there at night and have

perverted sex with him. I say perverted because I got wind of what was going on when I

asked about the cuts on

Kjell's chest. He didn't say anything then, of course. Just gave me some unconvincing

explanation and somehow I

managed to suppress my

suspicious. But do you know

what they did? In the end Kjell came clean: Camilla

tied him up and cut him with a knife. He said she enjoyed it. Sometimes I even hoped it was true, strange though that may sound, but I hoped that she got something out of it and didn't only want to

torture him, to destroy his life."

"Did she blackmail him

too?"

“Oh yes, but I don’t have the full story. He was so humiliated by Camilla that he wasn’t willing to tell me the truth, even when all was lost.

Kjell had been the rock in our family. If we lost our way while out driving, if there was a flood, if any of us fell ill, he was the calm, sensible one.

‘It’ll all be alright,’ he would say in his wonderful voice – I still fantasize about it. But

after a few years with Camilla in the house he was a wreck.

Hardly dared to cross the road, looked a hundred times to make sure it was safe. And he lost all motivation at work, he just sat with his head hanging. One of his closest colleagues, Mats Hedlund,

rang

and

told

me

in

confidence that an inquiry had been set up to investigate whether

Kjell

had

been

selling company secrets. It sounded crazy. Kjell was the most honest man I've ever known. Plus if he'd sold

anything, where was the

money? We had less than

ever. His bank account was stripped bare, same with our joint account."

"Forgive my asking, but

how did he die?"

"He hanged himself –

without

a

word

of

explanation. I came home from work one day and found

him

swinging

from

the

ceiling in the guest room, yes, the same room in which

Camilla had had her fun with

him. I was a well-paid C.F.O.

at the time, and chances are I would have had a great career to look forward to. But after that, Moe's and my world

collapsed. I won't go into it any further. You want to

know what happened to Camilla. But there was no end to the misery. Moe

started cutting herself and practically stopped eating.

One day she asked me if I thought she was scum. 'My God, darling,' I replied, 'how can you say something like that?' Then she told me it was Camilla. That Camilla had

claimed every single person who had ever met Moa

thought she was repulsive. I sought all the help I could:
psychologists, doctors, wise friends, Prozac. But to no avail.

One

gloriously

beautiful spring day, when the rest of Sweden was

celebrating some ridiculous triumph in the Eurovision

Song Contest, Moa jumped

from a ferry, and my life ended with hers – that's how it felt. I no
longer had the will

to live and spent a long time in hospital being treated for depression. But then ... I

don't know ... somehow the

paralysis and grief turned to rage, and I felt that I needed to understand. What had

actually happened to our

family? What sort of evil had seeped in? I started to make enquiries about Camilla, not because I wanted to see her again,

not

under

any

circumstances. But I wanted to understand her, the same way a parent of a murder victim wants to understand the murderer.”

“What did you discover?”

“Nothing to begin with.

She had covered her tracks –

it was like chasing a shadow, a phantom. I don’t know how

many tens of thousands of kronor I spent on private detectives

and

other

unreliable

people

who

promised to help me. I was getting nowhere, and it was driving me crazy. I became fixated. I hardly slept, and none of my friends could bear to be with me any more. It was a terrible time. People thought I was being obsessive and stubborn, maybe they still do – I don't know what

Holger Palmgren told you.

But then ...”

“Go on.”

“Your story on Zalachenko

was published. Naturally the name meant nothing to me, but I started to put two and two together. I read about his Swedish identity, Karl Axel Bodin,

and

about

his

connection with Svavelsjö

Motorcycle Club, and then I remembered all the dreadful evenings towards the end,

after Camilla had turned her

back on us. At the time I was often woken up by the noise of motorbikes, and I could see those leather waistcoats with that awful emblem from

my bedroom window. It

didn't surprise me that she mixed with those sorts of people. I no longer had any illusions about her. But I had no idea that this was the world she came from – and that she was expecting to take

over her father's business interests.”

“And did she?”

“Oh yes. In her own dirty world she fought for the

rights of women – at least for her own rights – and I know that it meant a lot to many of the girls in the club, most of all to Kajsa Falk.”

“Who was she?”

“A sassy, lovely looking

girl, her boyfriend was one of

the leaders. She spent a lot of time at our home during that last year, and I remember liking her. She had big blue eyes with a slight squint, and a compassionate, vulnerable side

behind

her

tough

exterior. After reading your story I looked her up again.

She didn't say a word about Camilla, though she was by no

means

unpleasant.

I

noticed that her style had

changed: the biker girl had become a businesswoman.

But she didn't talk about it. I thought I'd hit another dead end."

"But it wasn't?"

"No. About a year ago

Kajsa looked me up of her own accord, and by then she had changed again. There was

nothing reserved or cool

about her. This time she was hounded and nervous. Not

long after that she was found dead, shot at Stora Mossens sports centre in Bromma.

When we met she told me
there had been a dispute over the
inheritance
after
Zalachenko's
death.

Camilla's twin sister, Lisbeth, came away more or less
empty-handed – apparently

she didn't even want the little that she got – while the majority of the assets fell to

Zalachenko's two surviving sons in Berlin, and some to Camilla. She inherited part of the trafficking business you wrote about in your report, and that made my heart bleed.

I doubt Camilla cared about those women, or felt any sort of compassion for them. But still, she didn't want to have anything to do with those activities. She said to Kajsa that only losers bother with

that sort of filth. She had a completely different, modern vision of

what

the

organization should be doing, and after hard negotiation she got one of her half-brothers to buy her out. Then she

disappeared to Moscow with her capital and some of the employees who wanted to

follow her, Kajsa Falk among

them.”

“Do you know what sort of business she was setting up?”

“Kajsa never got enough of

an insight to understand it, but we had our suspicions. I think it was to do with those trade secrets at Ericsson. By now

I'm

almost

certain

Camilla really did get Kjell to steal and sell on something valuable,

presumably

by

blackmailing him. I've also found out that in her first

years with us she asked some computer geeks at school to hack into my computer.

According to Kajsa, she was more or less obsessed with hacking. Not that she learned anything about it herself, not at all, but she was forever talking about the money one could make by accessing

bank accounts and hacking

servers

and

stealing

information. She must have

developed a business along those lines.”

“That

sounds

very

possible.”

“It was probably at a very high level. Camilla would

never settle for anything less.

According to Kajsa, she soon

found her way into influential circles

in

Moscow,

and

among other things became

the mistress of some rich, powerful member of the

Duma, and with him she began to forge connections with a strange crew of top engineers and criminals. She wound them round her little finger, and she knew exactly where the weak point in the domestic economy was.”

“And what was that?”

“The fact that Russia is little more than a petrol station with a flag on top. They export oil and natural gas, but manufacture nothing worth mentioning. Russia needs advanced technology.”

“She wanted to give them that?”

“That, at least, is what she pretended. But obviously she had her own agenda. I know that Kajsa was impressed by the way she built alliances with people and got herself political

protection.

She

probably would have been

loyal to Camilla for ever if she hadn't become scared.”

“What was she scared of?”

“Kajsa got to know a

former elite soldier – a major, I believe – and just lost her bearings.

According

to

confidential information that Camilla had access to via her lover, the man had carried out a few shady operations for the Russian government. Among

other things he had killed a

well-known

journalist,

I

presume you've heard of her,

Irina Azarova. She'd taken a line against the government in various reports and books."

"Oh yes, truly a heroine. A horrible story."

"Absolutely.

Something

went wrong in the planning.

Azarova was supposed to

meet a critic of the regime in an apartment on a backstreet in a suburb south-east of

Moscow, and according to the plan the major was supposed to shoot her as she came out.

But no-one knew that the

journalist's

sister

had

developed pneumonia, and

Irina had to look after two nieces aged eight and ten. As she and the girls walked out of the front entrance the major shot all three of them in the face. After that he fell into disgrace – not that

anybody

was

particularly

bothered about the children, but

public

opinion

was

getting out of hand and there was a risk that the whole operation

would

be

uncovered and turned against the government. I think the major was afraid he'd be

made a scapegoat. He was

also dealing with a load of personal problems at the

same time. His wife took off,

he was left alone with a teenage

daughter

and

I

believe there was even a

possibility

of

his

being

evicted from his apartment.

From Camilla's perspective

that was a perfect set-up: a ruthless person whom she

could use, and who found

himself

in

a

vulnerable

situation.”

“So she got him on board.”

“Yes, they met. Kajsa was there too, and the strange thing

was

that

she

immediately took a liking to this man. He wasn't at all what she'd been expecting, nothing like the people she knew at Svavelsjö M.C., who

were also killers. The man was very fit, very strong, and had a brutal look about him, but he was also cultivated and polite, she said, somehow

vulnerable

and

sensitive.

Kajsa could tell that he felt really terrible about shooting those children. He was a

murderer, a man whose

speciality had been torture during the war in Chechnya, but he still had his moral boundaries, she said, and

that's why she was so upset when Camilla got her claws into him – almost literally.

She dragged her nails across

his chest and hissed like a cat,

'I want you to kill for me.'

Her words were charged with
sexual tension, and with the skill
of
the
devil
she
awakened the man's sadism.

The more gruesome his
descriptions of his murders, the more excited she became.

I'm not sure I understood it all, but it scared Kajsa to death. Not the murderer

himself, but Camilla. Her

beauty and allure managed to bring out the predator in him.”

“You never reported this to

the police?”

“I asked Kajsa over and

over. I told her she needed protection. She said she

already had it and she forbade me to talk to the police. I was stupid enough to listen to her.

After her death I told the investigators what I'd heard,
but I doubt they believed me
– presumably not. It was
nothing but hearsay about a man without a name in
another country. Camilla was nowhere to be found in any records,
and
I
never

discovered anything about her new identity. And certainly poor Kajsa's murder is still unsolved."

"I do understand how
painful this must still be,"

Blomkvist said.

"You do?"

"I think so," he said, and was

about

to

rest

a

sympathetic hand on her arm.

He was brought up short by

his mobile buzzing in his pocket. He hoped it was

Zander. But it was Stefan Molde. It took Blomkvist a few seconds to identify him as the person at the N.D.R.E.

who had been in touch with Linus Brandell.

“What’s this about?” he

said.

“A meeting with a senior

civil servant who’s on his way to Sweden. He wants to see you as early as possible tomorrow morning at the

Grand Hôtel.”

Blomkvist

made

an

apologetic gesture in Fru

Dahlgren's direction.

"I have a tight schedule,"

he said, "So if I'm to meet anybody, at the very least I want

a

name

and

an

explanation."

"The man's name is Edwin

Needham, and it's about
someone using the handle
Wasp, who is suspected of serious crimes.”
Blomkvist felt a wave of
panic. “O.K.,” he said. “What time?”
“Five o'clock tomorrow morning would work.”
“You've got to be joking!”
“Regrettably
there's

nothing to joke about in all this. I suggest that you're punctual. Mr Needham will

see you in his room. You'll have to leave your mobile at reception, and you'll be

searched."

Blomkvist got to his feet and

took

his

leave

of

Margareta Dahlgren.

PART III

ASYMMETRIC

PROBLEMS

24.xi – 3.xii

Sometimes it is easier to put together than to put asunder.

Nowadays computers can

easily multiply prime numbers with millions of digits. Yet it is extremely

complicated

to

reverse the process. Numbers with only a few hundred digits present huge problems.

Encryption algorithms like R.S.A. take advantage of the difficulties involved in prime-number factorization. Prime numbers

have

become

secrecy's best friends.

CHAPTER 25

24.xi, Early Morning

It had not taken long for Salander to identify the Roger whom August had been drawing. She had seen a younger version of the man on a website showing former actors from Revolutionsteatern in Vasastan. He was called

Roger Winter. He had had a couple of major film roles at the beginning of his career, but lately had fetched up in a backwater, and was now less well

known

than

his

wheelchair-bound brother

Tobias,

an

outspoken

professor of biology who was
said these days to have
distanced himself altogether from Roger.

Salander

wrote

down

Roger Winter's address and then

hacked

into

the

supercomputer N.S.F. M.R.I.

She also opened the program with which she was trying to construct a dynamic system

for finding the elliptic curves which were most likely to do

the job, and with as few iterations as possible. But whatever she tried, she was unable to get any closer to a solution. The N.S.A. file

remained impenetrable. In the end she went and looked in on August. She swore. The boy was awake, sitting up in bed writing something on a piece of paper, and as she

came closer she could see that he was doing more prime-number factorizations.

“It’s no good. It’s not

getting us anywhere,” she

muttered, and when August

began to rock to and fro hysterically once again she told him to pull himself

together and go back to sleep.

It was late and she decided

that she too should rest for a while. She took the bed next

to his, but it was impossible to sleep. August tossed and turned and whimpered, and in

the end Salander decided to say something, to try to settle him. The best she could think of was, “Do you know about elliptic curves?”

Of course she got no

answer. That did not deter her from giving as simple and clear an explanation as she could.

$$y = x^3 - x + 4$$

“Do you get it?” she said.

August did not reply.

“O.K., then,” she went on.

“Take the number 3,034,267, for example. I know you can easily find its prime-number factors. But it can also be done using elliptic curves.

Let’s for example take curve

and point $P =$

(1.2) on that curve.”

She wrote the equation on a piece of paper on the

bedside table. But August did not seem to be following at all. She thought about those autistic twins she had read up on.

They

had

some

mysterious way of identifying large prime numbers, yet

could not solve the simplest equations. Perhaps August

was like that too. Perhaps he was more of a calculating machine than a genuine

mathematical talent, and in

any case it didn't matter right now. Her bullet wound was aching again and she needed some sleep. She needed to drive

out

all

her

old

childhood demons which had come to life again because of the boy.

It was past midnight by the time Blomkvist got home

and, even though he was

exhausted and had to get up at the crack of dawn, he sat down at his computer and

Googled Edwin Needham.

There were quite a few Edwin

Needhams in the world,

including a successful rugby player who had made an

extraordinary

comeback

having had leukaemia.

There was one Edwin
Needham who seemed to be
an
expert
on
water

purification, and another who was good at getting himself into
society photographs and looking daft. But none of them
seemed

right

for

someone who could have

been involved in cracking

Wasp's identity and accusing her of criminal activity. There was an Edwin Needham who

was a computer engineer with

a Ph.D. from M.I.T., and that was at least the right line of

business, but not even he seemed to fit. He was now a senior executive at Safeline, a leading business in computer virus

protection, and that company

would

certainly

have an interest in hackers.

But the statements made by this Ed, as he was known, were all about market share and new products. Nothing he

said rated higher than the usual clichéd sales talk, not

even when he got the chance to talk about his leisure pursuits: bowling and fly

fishing. He loved nature, he said, he loved the competitive aspect

...

The

most

threatening thing he seemed capable of doing was boring people to death.

There was a picture of him,

grinning and bare-chested,

holding up a large salmon, the sort of snap which are a

dime a dozen in fishing circles. It was as dull as everything else, and yet

gradually Blomkvist began to

wonder whether the dullness might not be the whole point.

He read through the material again and this time it struck him as something concocted, a facade. Slowly but surely he came

to

the

opposite

conclusion: this was the man.

You

could

smell

the

intelligence services a mile off, couldn't you? It felt like N.S.A. or C.I.A. Once again he looked at the photograph with the salmon, and this time he thought he saw something very different.

He saw a tough guy putting

on

an

act.

There
was
something unwavering about
the way he stood and his mocking grin into the camera, at least
that is what Blomkvist
imagined,
and
again
he

thought of Salander. He

wondered if he ought to tell her about this meeting. But there was no reason to worry her now, especially since he did

not

actually

know

anything,

so

instead

he

decided to go to bed. He needed to sleep for a few hours and have a clear head when he met Needham in the

morning.

As

he

slowly

brushed

his

teeth

and

undressed and climbed into bed, he realized he was more tired than he could have

imagined and fell asleep in no time. He dreamed that he was being dragged under and

almost drowned in the river Needham had been standing in. Afterwards he had a vague image of himself crawling along the riverbed surrounded by

flopping,

thrashing

salmon. But he cannot have slept for long. He woke with a start
and the growing

conviction

that

he

had

overlooked something. His

mobile was lying on the

bedside table and his thoughts turned to Zander. The young man must have been on his mind all along.

Linda had double-locked the door. There was nothing odd about that – a woman in her situation had to take all possible precautions. It still made

Zander

feel

uncomfortable, but he put that down to the apartment, or so he tried to convince himself.

It was not at all what he had been expecting. Could this really be the home of one of her girlfriends?

The bed was broad but not especially long, and both the headboard and the footboard were made of shiny steel

lattice-work. The bedspread

was black, which made him think of a bier, and he

disliked the pictures on the walls

—

mostly

framed

photographs of men with
weapons. There was a sterile, chilly feel to the whole place.
On the other hand he was probably just nervous and
exaggerating everything, or looking for an excuse to get away. A
man always wants to
escape the thing he loves –
hadn't Oscar Wilde said
something like that? He
looked at Linda. Never before had

he

seen

such

an

extraordinarily

beautiful

woman, and now she was

coming towards him in her

tight

blue

dress

which

accentuated her figure. As if she had been reading his mind she said, "Would you rather go home, Andrei?"

"I do have quite a lot on my plate."

"I understand," she said,

kissing him. "Then you must of course go and get on with your work."

“Maybe that would be
best,” he muttered as she
pressed herself against him, kissing him with such force that he
had no defence.
He responded to her kiss
and put his hands on her hips, and she gave him a shove.
She pushed him so hard that he
staggered
and

fell

backwards onto the bed, and for a moment he was scared.

But then he looked at her. She was smiling as tenderly now as before and he thought: this

was nothing more than a bit of rough play. She really wanted him, didn't she? She wanted to make love with

him there and then, and he let her

straddle

his

body,

unbutton his shirt, and draw her

fingernails

over

his

stomach while her eyes shone

with an intense glow and her large breasts heaved beneath her
dress. Her mouth was

open. A trickle of saliva ran

down her chin and she whispered

something

he

could not at first hear. “Now, Andrei,” she whispered again.

“Now!”

“Now?”

he

repeated

uncertainly, and felt her

tearing off his trousers. She was more brazen than he had

expected, more accomplished and wildly lascivious than anybody he had met.

“Close your eyes and lie absolutely still,” she said.

He obeyed and could hear

her fiddling with something, he was not sure what. Then heard a click and felt metal around

his

wrists,

and

realized

he

had

been

handcuffed. He was about to protest, he did not really go in for that sort of thing, but it all happened

so

fast.

With

lightning speed, as if she had

done it many times, she locked his hands to the headboard. Then she bound his feet with rope and pulled tight.

“Gently,” he said.

“Don’t worry,” but then

she gave him a look he did not like and said something in a solemn voice. He must have

misheard. “*What?*” he said.

“I’m going to cut you with

a knife, Andrei,” she said,

and fixed a broad piece of tape across his mouth.

Blomkvist was trying to tell himself not to worry. Why would

anything

have

happened to Zander? No-one

– apart from Berger and

himself – knew that he was involved in protecting the whereabouts of Salander and the boy. They had been

extremely careful with that piece of information, more careful than with any other part of the story. And yet ...

why had there been no word from him?

Zander was not someone

who ignored his mobile. On the contrary, he normally picked up on the first ring whenever Blomkvist called.

But now there was no way of

getting hold of him, and that

was strange, wasn't it? Or maybe ... again Blomkvist

tried to convince himself that Zander was busy working and had lost track of time, or in the worst case had dropped his mobile.

That

was

probably all it was. But still

... after all these years

Camilla had appeared out of nowhere. Something must be going on, and what was it Bublanski had said?

*“We live in a world in which
paranoia
is
a
requirement.”*

Blomkvist reached for the
telephone on the bedside
table and called Zander again.

He got no answer this time either, so decided to wake their new staff member, Emil

Grandén, who lived near

Zander in the Röda bergen area of Vasastan. Grandén

sounded less than enthusiastic

but promised to go over to Zander's right away to see if he was there. Twenty minutes

later he rang back. He had been banging on Zander's

door for a while, he said, and he definitely wasn't at home.

Blomkvist got dressed and

left his apartment, hurrying through a deserted and storm-lashed Södermalm district up to the magazine offices on Götgatan. With any luck, he

thought, Zander would be lying asleep on the sofa. It would not be the first time he had nodded off at work and not heard the telephone. That would

be

the

simple

explanation. But Blomkvist

felt more and more uneasy.

When he opened the door and

turned off the alarm he

shivered, as if expecting to find a scene of devastation, but after a search of the

premises he found no trace of anything untoward. All the information on his encrypted email program had been

carefully deleted, just as they had agreed. It all looked as it should, but there was no

Zander lying on the office sofa, which was looking as shabby and empty as ever.

For a short while Blomkvist sat there, lost in thought.

Then he rang Grandén again.

“Emil,” he said, “I’m sorry to harass you like this in the middle of the night. But this whole story has made me paranoid.”

“I can understand that.”

“I couldn’t help hearing that you sounded a bit stressed when I was talking about Andrei.

Is

there

anything you haven't told

me?"

"Nothing you don't already know," Grandén said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I've spoken to

the Data Inspection Authority too."

"What do you mean, you

too?”

“You mean you haven’t—”

“No!” Blomkvist cut him

short and heard Grandén’s

breathing at the other end of the line become laboured.

There had been a terrible mistake.

“Out with it, Emil, and

fast,” he said.

“So ...”

“Yes?”

“I had a call from a Lina Robertsson

at

the

Data

Inspection Authority. She

said that you’d spoken and she agreed to raise the level of security on your computer, given

the

circumstances.

Apparently

the

recommendations she'd given

you were wrong and she was worried the protection would be insufficient. She said she wanted to get hold of the person who'd arranged the

encryption for you asap.”

“And what did you say?”

“That I knew nothing about

it, except that I'd seen Andrei doing something at your computer.”

“So you said she should get in touch with Andrei.”

“I happened to be out at the

time and told her that Andrei was probably still in the office. She could ring him there, I said. That was all.”

“Jesus, Emil.”

“But she sounded really—”

“I don't care how she

sounded. I just hope you told Andrei about the call.”

“Maybe not right away.

I’m pretty snowed under at the moment, like all of us.”

“But you told him later.”

“Well, he left the office before I got a chance to say anything.”

“So

you

called

him

instead.”

“Absolutely, several times.

But ...”

“Yes?”

“He didn’t answer.”

“O.K.,” Blomkvist said, his voice ice cold.

He hung up and dialled

Bublanski’s number. He had to try twice before the chief inspector

came

to

the

telephone. Blomkvist had no choice but to tell him the whole

story

–

without

discussing

Salander

and

August's location.

Then he called Berger.

Salander had fallen asleep, but she was still ready for action. She was still in her clothes, with her leather

jacket and her boots on. She kept

waking

up,

either

because of the howling storm

or

because

August

was

moaning even in his sleep.

But each time she dropped off again, or at least dozed, and had short, strangely realistic dreams.

Now she was dreaming about her father beating her mother, and even then she could feel that old, fierce rage from her childhood. She felt it so keenly that it woke her up again. It was 3.45 and those scraps of paper on

which she and August had

written their numbers were still lying on the bedside table.

Outside, snow was

falling. But the storm seemed

to have calmed and nothing unusual could be heard, just the wind howling and rustling through the trees.

Yet she felt uneasy, and at first she thought it was the dream lying like a fine mesh over the room. Then she

shuddered. The bed next to her was empty – August was gone.

She shot out of bed without making a sound,

grabbed her Beretta from the

bag on the floor and crept into the large room next to the terrace.

The next moment she

breathed a sigh of relief.

August was sitting at the table, busy with something.

Without wanting to disturb him she leaned over his

shoulder and saw that he was

not

writing

new

prime-

number

factorizations,

or

drawing fresh scenes of

abuse. He was sketching chess squares reflected in the mirrors of a wardrobe, and above them could be made

out a threatening figure with his hand outstretched. The killer was taking shape.

Salander smiled, and then she withdrew.

Back in the bedroom she sat on the bed, removed her pullover and the bandage and inspected the bullet wound. It didn't look good, and she still felt weak. She swallowed another couple of antibiotic pills and tried to rest. She might even have gone back to sleep for a few moments. She was aware of a vague sensation that she had seen both Zala and Camilla in her dream, and the next second she became aware of a

presence, though she had no idea what. A bird flapped its wings outside. She could hear August's laboured breathing in the kitchen. She was just about to get up when a scream pierced the air.

By the time Blomkvist left the office in the early morning hours to take a taxi to the Grand Hôtel, he still had no news of Zander. He tried

again

to

persuade

himself that he had been overreacting,

that

any

moment now his colleague

would be calling from some friend's place. But the worry would not go away. He was vaguely aware that it had started snowing again, and that a woman's shoe had been

left lying on the pavement.

He took out his Samsung and

called

Salander

on

the

Redphone app.

Salander did not pick up, and that did not make him any calmer. He tried once more and sent a text from the Threema app: <Camilla's after you. Leave now!> Then he caught sight of a taxi coming down from Hökens gata and noticed the driver give a start when he saw him. At that moment Blomkvist looked

dangerously determined. It

did not help that he failed to

respond

to

the

driver's

attempts to chat. He just sat back in the darkness, his eyes bright with worry.

Stockholm was more or

less deserted. The storm had abated but there were still white-crested waves on the water.

Blomkvist

looked

across to the Grand Hôtel on the other side and wondered if he should forget about the meeting with Mr Needham

and drive straight out to Salander instead, or at least arrange for a police car to go there. No, he couldn't do that without warning her. Another

leak would be disastrous. He opened the Threema app

again and tapped in:

<Shall I get help?>

No answer. Of course there

was no answer. He paid the fare and climbed out of the taxi, lost in thought. By the

time he was pushing through the revolving doors of the hotel it was 4.20 in the morning – he was forty

minutes early. He had never been forty minutes early for anything. But he was burning

inside and, before going to the reception desk to hand in his mobiles, he called Berger.

He told her to try to get hold of Salander and to keep in touch with the police.

“If you hear anything, call the Grand Hôtel and ask for Mr Needham’s room.”

“And who’s he?”

“Someone who wants to
meet me.”

“At this time?”

Needham was in room 654.

The door opened and there stood a man reeking of sweat
and rage. There was about as

much resemblance to the figure
in
the
fishing
photograph as there would be
between a hungover dictator and
his
stylized
statue.

Needham had a drink in his hand
and
looked
grim,
dishevelled and a little bit like a bulldog.
“Mr Needham,” Blomkvist
said.
“Ed,” Needham said. “I’m
sorry to haul you over here at

this ungodly hour, but it's urgent.”

“So

it

would

seem,”

Blomkvist said drily.

“Do you have any idea

what I want to talk to you about?”

Blomkvist shook his head

and sat down on a sofa. There was a bottle of gin and some small bottles of Schweppes tonic on the desk next to it.

“No indeed, why would you?” Needham said. “On the

other hand it’s impossible to know with guys like you. I’ve checked you out. You should know that I hate to flatter people – it leaves a bad taste in my mouth – but you’re pretty outstanding in your profession, aren’t you?”

Blomkvist gave a forced

smile. “Can we just get to the point?” he said.

“Just relax. I’ll be crystal clear. I assume you know where I work.”

“Not exactly,” he said

truthfully.

“In

Puzzle

Palace,

SIG.INT. City. I work for the world’s spittoon.”

“The N.S.A.”

“Damn right. Do you have

any idea how fucking insane you have to be to mess with

us, Mikael Blomkvist? Do you?”

“I have a pretty good idea,”

he said.

“And do you know where I
think your girlfriend really belongs?”

“No.”

“She belongs behind bars.

For life!”

Blomkvist gave what he

hoped was a calm, composed little smile. But in fact his mind was spinning. Did Salander hack the N.S.A.?

The mere thought terrified him. Not only was she in hiding, with killers on the hunt for her. Was she also going to have the entire U.S.

intelligence

shock

troops

descend on her? It sounded

... well, how did it sound? It sounded totally off the wall.

One of Salander's abiding

characteristics was that she

never did anything without first carefully analysing the potential consequences. She did not follow impulses or whims and therefore he could

not imagine she would take such an idiotic risk if there was the slightest chance of being found out. Sometimes she put herself in danger, that was true, but there was

always a balance between

costs and benefits. He refused

to believe that she had got herself into the N.S.A.'s

systems, only to allow herself to be outwitted by the splenetic bulldog standing in front of him.

“I think you’re jumping to conclusions,” he said.

“Dream on, dude. But you

heard me use the word

‘really’ just then. Some word, hey? Can be used in all sorts of ways. I don’t really drink

in the mornings, and yet here I am with a glass in my hand, ha ha! What I’m trying to say is that you might be able to save your girlfriend’s skin if you promise to help me with one or two things.”

“I’m listening,” he said.

“Peachy. Let me begin by

asking for a guarantee that you’ll not quote me as your source.”

Blomkvist looked at him in surprise. He had not expected that.

“Are you some kind of

whistleblower?”

“God help me, no. I’m a

loyal old bloodhound.”

“But you’re not acting

officially on behalf of the N.S.A.”

“You could say that right now I have my own agenda.

Sort of doing my own thing.

Well, how about it?”

“I won’t quote you.”

“Great. I also want to make

sure we agree that what I’m going to tell you now will stay between us. You might be wondering why the hell I’m telling a fantastic story to an investigative journalist, only to have him keep his trap shut.”

“Good question.”

“I have my reasons. And I trust you – don’t ask me why.

I’m betting that you want to protect your girlfriend, and you think the real story is elsewhere. Maybe I’ll even help you with that, if you’re prepared to cooperate.”

“That remains to be seen,”

Blomkvist said stiffly.

“Well, a few days ago we had a data breach on our intranet, our NSANet. You know about that, don’t you?”

“More or less.”

“NSANet was created after

9/11, to improve coordination between our own intelligence services on the one hand and those

in

other

English-

speaking countries – known as the Five Eyes. It’s a closed system, with its own routers, portals and bridges, and it’s completely separate from the

rest of the Internet. We administer

our

signals

intelligence from there via satellite and fibre-optic cables and that's also where we have our big databases and store classified

analyses

and

reports – from Moray-rated documents,

the

least

sensitive, all the way up to Umbra Ultra Top Secret,

which even the President of the

United

States

isn't

allowed to see. The system is run out of Texas, which by the way is idiotic. But it's still my baby. Let me tell you, Mikael, I worked my ass off to create it. Hammered away at it day and night so that no fucker could misuse it, never mind hack it. Every single little anomaly sets alarm bells ringing, plus there's a whole staff of independent experts monitoring the system. These

days you can't do a goddamn thing on the web without
leaving footprints. At least that's the theory. Everything is logged
and analysed. You shouldn't be able to touch a single
key
without
it
triggering a notification. But
...”
“Somebody did.”

“Yes, and maybe I could
have made my peace with it.

There are always weak spots,
we can always do better.

Weak spots keep us on our toes. But it wasn't just the fact that she managed to get in. It was how she did it. She forced our server and created an advanced bridge, and got into the intranet via one of our systems administrators.

That alone was a damn
masterpiece. But that wasn't all, not by a long chalk: then

the bitch turned herself into a ghost user.”

“A what?”

“A ghost. She flew around in there without anyone noticing.”

“And your alarm bells didn’t go off?”

“That

damn

genius

introduced a Trojan unlike anything else we knew,

because otherwise our system

would have identified it right

away. The malware then kept upgrading her status. She got more and more access and

soaked up highly classified passwords and codes and

started to link and match records and databases, and suddenly – bingo!”

“Bingo what?”

“She found what she was

looking for, and then she stopped

wanting

to

be

invisible – now she wanted to

show us what she'd found, and only then did my alarm bells go off: exactly when she wanted them to.”

“And what did she find?”

“She found our hypocrisy,

Mikael, our double-dealing, and that's why I'm sitting here with you and not on my fat ass in Maryland, sending the Marines after her. She was like a thief breaking into a house just to point out that

it was already full of stolen goods, and the minute we

found that out she became truly

dangerous

—

so

dangerous that some of our senior people wanted to let her off.”

“But not you.”

“Not me. I wanted to tie her to a lamp post and flay her alive. But I had no choice except to give up my pursuit, and that, Mikael, seriously

pissed me off. I may look calm now, but you should have seen me ... Jesus!”

“You were hopping mad.”

“Damn right I was, and that’s why I’ve had you come here at this godforsaken hour.

I need to get hold of Wasp before she flees the country.”

“Why would she run?”

“Because she’s gone from
one crazy thing to the next, hasn’t she?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think you do.”

“And what makes you
think she’s your hacker in the first place?”

“That, Mikael, is what I’m going to lay on you now.”

But he got no further.

The room telephone rang and

Needham picked up right

away.

It

was

reception

looking

for

Mikael

Blomkvist,

and

Needham

handed him the receiver. He soon

gathered

that

the

journalist had been given

some alarming news, so it was no surprise when the Swede muttered a confused apology and ran out of the room. But Needham would not let him get away that easily, and so he grabbed his coat and chased after him.

Blomkvist

was

racing

down the corridor like a

sprinter. Needham did not
know what was going on, but
if it had something to do with the Wasp/Balder story, he
wanted to be there. He had some trouble keeping up – the
journalist was in too much of a hurry to wait for the lift and instead
hurtled down the
stairs. By the time Needham reached the ground floor,
panting,
Blomkvist
had

already retrieved his mobiles and was engrossed in another conversation while he ran on towards the revolving doors and out into the street.

“What’s
happening?”

Needham

said

as

the

journalist ended his call and was trying to hail a taxi on the street.

“Problems!”

Blomkvist

said.

“I can drive you.”

“Like hell you can. You’ve
been drinking.”

“At least we can take my car.”

Blomkvist slowed his pace

and turned to Needham.

“What is it you want?”

“I want us to help each other.”

“You’ll have to catch your hacker on your own.”

“I no longer have the authority to catch anybody.”

“O.K., so where’s the car?”

As they ran to Needham’s

rental car parked over by the Nationalmuseum, Blomkvist

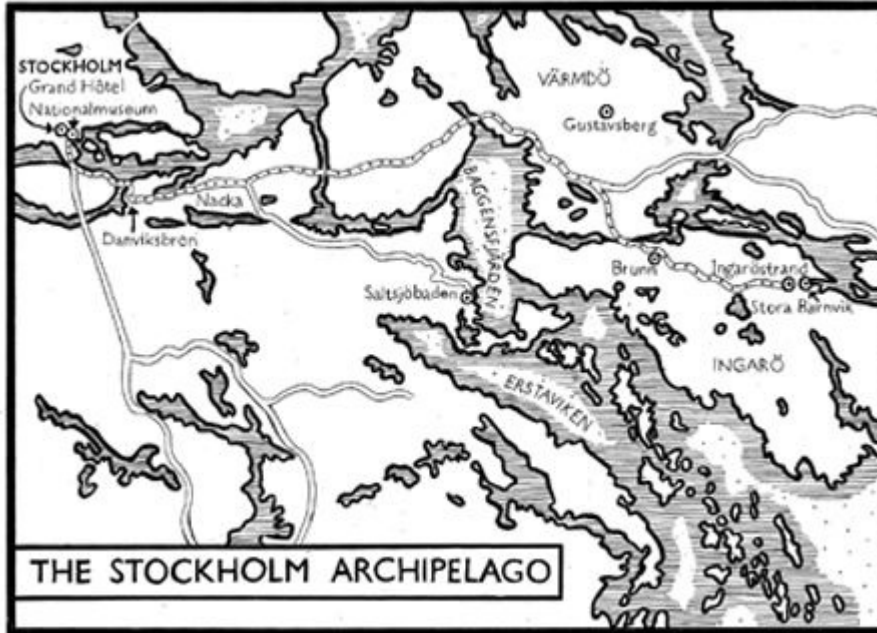
hurriedly explained that they were heading out to the

Stockholm

archipelago,

towards Ingarö. He would get

directions on the way and was not planning to observe any speed limits.



CHAPTER 26

24.xi, Morning

August screamed, and in the same instant Salander heard

footsteps,

rapid

footsteps

along the side of the house.

She grabbed her pistol and jumped to her feet. She felt terrible, but ignored it.

As she rushed over to the doorway she saw a large man

appear on the terrace. For a moment she thought she had a split-second advantage, but the figure did not stop to open the glass doors. He charged straight through them with his

weapon drawn and shot at the boy.

Salander returned fire, or perhaps she had already done

so, she did not know. She was not even conscious of the moment in which she started running towards the man. She

only knew that she crashed into him with numbing force and now lay on top of him right by the round table where the boy had been sitting

moments before. Without a second's

hesitation

she

headbutted the man.

The contact was so violent that her head rang, and she swayed as she got to her feet.

The room was spinning and there was blood on her shirt.

Had she been hit again? She had no time to think. Where was August? No-one at the table,

only

pencils

and

drawings, crayons, prime-

number calculations. Where the hell was he? She heard a
whimpering

by

the

refrigerator and, yes, there he was, sitting and shaking, his knees
drawn up to his chest.

He must have had time to throw himself to the floor.

Salander was about to rush

over to him when she heard new, worrying sounds from outside, voices and branches snapping.

Others

were

approaching, there was no time to lose. They had to be away from here. In a blinding flash

she

visualized

the

surrounding terrain and raced over to August. “Come on!”

she said. August did not

budge. Salander picked him up in one swift movement, her face twisted in pain.

Every movement hurt. But

they had to get away and August must have understood

that too because he wriggled out of her grasp. So she sprang over to the table, grabbed her computer and

August’s coat, and made for the terrace, past the man on the floor who raised himself groggily and tried to catch hold of August’s leg as he ran alongside her.

Salander considered killing
him. Instead she kicked him hard in the throat and
stomach and threw away his weapon. Then she ran across the
terrace with August and down towards the steep rocky
slope. But suddenly she
thought of the drawing. She had not seen how far the boy had got
with it. Should she go back? No, the others would be here any
moment. They
had to get away. But still ...
the drawing was also a

weapon, and the cause of all

this madness. She left August with her computer on the rock ledge she had identified the night

before.

She

then

launched herself back up the slope and into the house and looked on the table. At first she could not see it. Drawings of that bastard Westman were

everywhere, and rows of

prime numbers.

But there – there it was, and above the chess squares

and the mirrors there was now a pale figure with a sharply defined scar on his forehead, which Salander by now recognized only too

well. It was the same man who was lying on the floor in front of her, moaning. She whipped out her mobile, took

a photograph and sent it to Bublanski and Modig. She

had even scribbled a line at the top of the paper. But a

second later she realized that was a mistake.

They were surrounded.

Salander had sent the same word to his Samsung as she had to Berger: <CRISIS>. It hardly

left

room

for

misunderstanding,

not

coming

from

Salander.

However Blomkvist looked at

it, it could only mean that she

and

August

had

been

discovered, and at worst they were under attack even now.

He floored the accelerator as he passed Stadsgårdskajen

and

emerged

onto

the

Värmdö road.

He was driving a brand-

new Audi A8, with Needham

sitting next to him. Needham looked grim, and every now and then tapped something

into his mobile. Blomkvist
was not sure why he had allowed him to come along –
maybe he wanted to discover what
the
man
had
on
Salander, or no, there was something
else

as

well.

Maybe Needham could even
be useful. In any case he could
hardly
make
the
situation any worse. The
police had by now been

alerted, but he doubted they would be able to assemble a unit quickly enough – especially as they were sceptical about the lack of information.

Berger had been the focal point, trying to keep them all in contact with each other, and she was the only one who

knew the way. He needed all the help he could get.

He

was

approaching

Danviksbron. Needham said

something, he did not hear what. His thoughts were elsewhere. He thought of Zander – what had they done to him? Why the hell had he not come out for a beer? Blomkvist tried his number again.

He

tried

calling

Salander too. But nobody

answered.

“Do you want me to tell
you what we have on your hacker?” Needham said.

“Yes ... why not?”

But they did not get anywhere this time either.

Blomkvist’s

mobile

rang.

Bublanski.

“I hope you realize that

you and I are going to have a lot to talk about later, and you can count on there being legal consequences.”

“I hear you.”

“But for now I’m calling to
give you some information.

We

know

that

Lisbeth

Salander was alive at 4.22.

Was that before or after she texted you?”

“Before, it must have been before.”

“O.K.”

“How can you be so

specific about the time?”

“She sent us something

extremely

interesting.

A

drawing. I have to say,

Mikael, it exceeded our

hopes.”

“So she got the boy to draw.”

“Oh yes. I have no idea

what technical issues might arise in terms of admissibility of evidence, if any, or what objections a clever defence lawyer might raise. But as far as I’m concerned there’s no doubt this is the murderer.

It's incredibly vivid, with that extraordinary

mathematical

precision

again.

In

fact

there's also an equation written at the bottom of the page, I have no idea if it's relevant to the case. But I sent the drawing to Interpol. If the man is anywhere in their

database, he's toast.”

“Are you going to send it to the press as well?”

“We’re debating that.”

“When will you be at the scene?”

“As soon as possible ...

hold on a second!”

Blomkvist

could

hear

another telephone ringing in the background, and for a minute or so Bublanski was gone on another call. When he returned, he said briefly:

“We’ve had reports of
gunfire out there. It doesn’t sound good.”

Blomkvist took a deep
breath.

“Any
news
on

Andrei?" he said.

"We've traced his mobile

signal to a base station in Gamla Stan, but no further.

We've had no signal at all for a while now, as if the mobile has been smashed or just

stopped working."

Blomkvist

drove

even

faster; fortunately the roads were empty at that hour. At first he said very little to Needham, just a brief account

of what was going on, but in the end he could not hold back. He needed something

else to think about.

“So what is it you think you’ve found out?”

“About Wasp? For a long

time, zip. We were convinced

that we’d reached the end of the line,” Needham said.

“We’d left no stone unturned, and still got nowhere. In a way it made sense.”

“How so?”

“A hacker capable of a

breach like that should also be able to cover all tracks. I realized

pretty

soon

we

wouldn’t get anywhere by

conventional means. So I

skipped

all

the

forensic

bullshit and went straight for the big question: who had the chops to pull this off? That question was our best hope.

There's hardly anyone out

there with that level of ability. In that sense, you could say that the hacker's skill worked against them.

Plus, we had analysed the rootkit itself, and that ...”

Needham looked down at his mobile.

“Yes?”

“It had artistic qualities.

Personal style, you might say.

Now we just had to find its author, and so we started to send posts to the hacker community, and very soon there was one name, one

handle, which came up time after time. Can you guess which one?”

“Maybe.”

“It was Wasp. Sure, there were other names, but Wasp stood out. I ended up hearing so much mythical bullshit

about this person that I was dying to crack their identity,

and we went right back in time. We read every word

Wasp had written online,

studied every operation that had Wasp’s signature on it.

Soon we were certain that Wasp was a woman, and we guessed

that

she

was

Swedish. Several of the early posts

were

written

in

Swedish, which isn't much to

go on. But since there was a Swedish connection in the

organization she

was

tracking, and Frans Balder was Swedish, it was at least a good place to start. I got in touch with the N.D.R.E., and they searched their records, and then in fact ...”

“What?”

“They had a breakthrough.

Many years earlier they’d

investigated

a

hacker

operation that used that very handle, Wasp. It was so long ago that Wasp wasn't yet even particularly good at encryption.”

“What happened?”

“Wasp had been looking for data on individuals who'd defected from other

countries'

intelligence

services, and that was enough to trigger the N.D.R.E.'s

warning

system.

Their

investigation led them to a psychiatric clinic for children

in Uppsala, to a computer belonging

to

the

head

physician there, a man named

Teleborian. Apparently he'd done some work for the
Swedish Security Police, so he was above suspicion.

Instead

the

N.D.R.E.

concentrated on some mental-

health nurses who were
targeted because they were ...

well, to be blunt about it, immigrants. It was such a
stupid, blinkered strategy.

Anyway, nothing came of it.”

“I can imagine.”

“So I asked a guy at the N.D.R.E. to send over all the old material,
and we sifted through it with a completely different mindset. You
know, you don’t have to be big and fat and shave in the mornings
to be a good hacker. I’ve met twelve- and thirteen-year-olds who
are crazy good. It was

obvious to me that we should look at every child in the clinic at the time. I had three of my guys investigate each one of them, inside and out, and do you know what we

found? One of the children was the daughter of former spy

and

arch-villain

Zalachenko, who was known

to our colleagues at the

C.I.A., and then everything got really interesting. As you

probably know, there are some overlaps between the

network the hacker was
investigating
and
Zalachenko's
old
crime
syndicate.”
“That doesn't necessarily
mean it was Wasp who

hacked you.”

“Of course not. But we

took a closer look at this girl, and what can I say? She has an interesting background,

doesn't

she?

A

lot

of

information about her in the public

record

has

been

mysteriously deleted, but we still found more than enough and ... I don't know, I may be wrong, but I get the feeling we're on the right track.

Mikael, you don't know shit about me. But I know what it's like for a kid to see extreme violence at close

quarters. And I know what

it's like when society doesn't lift a finger to punish the guilty party. It hurts like hell, and I'm not at all surprised that

most

children

who

experience it go under. They turn into destructive bastards themselves.”

“Yes, unfortunately.”

“But just a few grow to be as strong as bears, Mikael, and they stand up and fight

back. Wasp was one of those, wasn't she?"

Blomkvist

nodded

pensively and pressed down on the accelerator a little more.

"They locked her up and

kept trying to break her. But she kept coming back, and do

you know what I think?"

"No."

"She got stronger each

time. She became positively
lethal. She hasn't forgotten a single thing that happened.
It's all etched into her, isn't it? And maybe that's at the bottom
of
this
whole
goddamn mess.”
“What is it you want?”
Blomkvist said bluntly.

“I want what Wasp wants.

I want to set some things right.”

“Plus get your hands on the
hacker.”

“I want to meet her and give her a piece of my mind and plug every last damn hole in our security. But above all I want to get my own back on

certain people who wouldn't let me finish my job because Wasp exposed them. I have reason to believe you're

going to help me with that.”

“Why so?”

“Because you’re a fine reporter. Fine reporters don’t want dirty secrets to go on being dirty secrets.”

“And Wasp?”

“Wasp is going to get a chance to do her worst.

You’re going to help me with that too.”

“Or else?”

“Or else I’ll find a way of putting

her

inside,

and

making her life hell again, I swear.”

“But for now all you want to do is talk to her?”

“No fucker is going to be allowed to hack into my

system again, so I need to understand exactly how she did it. I want you to give her that message. I'm prepared to let your girlfriend go free if she'll sit down with me and explain."

"I'll tell her. Let's just hope ..."

"That she's still alive,"

Needham said. They turned

left at high speed in the direction of Ingaröstrand.

It was rare for Holtser to get things so wrong.

He had this romantic

delusion that you could tell from a distance if a man was likely to succeed in close combat. That was why he had

not been surprised when Kira's attempted seduction of Blomkvist had failed. Orlov and Bogdanov had been

completely confident. But

Holtzer had had his doubts even though he had only seen

the journalist for one giddy second

in

Saltsjöbaden.

Blomkvist looked like a

problem. He looked like a man who could not be fooled
or broken so easily.

With the younger journalist it was different. He looked like the
archetypal weakling, yet nothing could have been further from the
truth. Zander had resisted for longer than anyone Holtser had
ever

tortured. Despite excruciating pain he had refused to break.

His eyes shone with a grim determination which seemed

buttressed

by

a

higher

principle, and at one point

Holtser thought they would have to give up, that Zander would rather endure any

suffering than talk. It was not until Kira solemnly promised that

both

Berger

and

Blomkvist from *Millennium* would be made to suffer as well that Zander finally caved in.

By then it was 3.30 in the morning. Holtser knew that he would always remember

the

moment.

Snow

was

falling on the skylights. The young man's face was dried out and hollow-eyed. Blood had splashed up from his

chest and flecked his mouth and cheeks. His lips, which for a long time had been covered with tape, were split and oozing. He was a wreck, but still you could tell that he was a beautiful young man.

Holtser thought of Olga –

how would she have felt

about

him?

Wasn't

this

journalist just the kind of educated man she liked,

someone who fights injustice, takes the side of beggars and outcasts? He thought about that, and about other things in his own life. After that he made the sign of the cross, the Russian cross, where one way leads to heaven and the

other to hell, and then he glanced over at Kira. She was lovelier than ever.

Her eyes burned with light.

She was sitting on a stool by the bed wearing an elegant blue dress – which had

largely

escaped

the

bloodstains

—

and

said

something in Swedish to

Zander,

something

which

sounded soft and tender. Then she took him by the hand. He gripped hers in return. He had nowhere else to turn for comfort. The wind howled outside in the alley. Kira nodded and smiled at Holtser.

Snowflakes

fell

on

the

window ledge.

Afterwards they were sitting together in a Land Rover on the way out to Ingarö. Holtser felt empty, and was not happy

with the way things were going. But there was no

getting away from the fact that his own mistake had led them there, so he sat quietly, listening to Kira. She was strangely excited and spoke with searing hatred of the woman they were about to

confront. Holtser did not

think it was a good sign, and if he could have brought

himself to do so he would

have urged her to turn back and get the hell out of the country.

But he said nothing as the snow fell and they drove on in

the

darkness.

Kira's

sparkling,

cold

eyes

frightened him, but he pushed away the thought. He had to give her credit at least – she had been amazingly quick to put two and two together.

Not only had she worked out who had hurtled in to save the boy on Sveavägen.

She had also guessed who

would know where the boy

and

the

woman

had

disappeared

to,

and

the

person she came up with was

none

other

than

Mikael

Blomkvist. They were baffled

by her reasoning. Why would

a reputable Swedish journalist harbour

a

person

who

appeared from nowhere and abducted a child from a crime scene? But the more they

examined the theory, the

more it held together. Not only did the woman – whose name was Lisbeth Salander –

have close ties to the reporter, but something also happened at the *Millennium* offices.

After

the

murder

in

Saltsjöbaden, Bogdanov had

hacked

into

Blomkvist's

computer to try to find out why Balder had summoned

him to his home in the middle of the night. Getting access to his email had been easy

enough. But that had now

stopped. When was the last time it had been impossible for

Bogdanov

to

read

someone's emails? Never, so far as Holtser was aware.

Blomkvist

had

suddenly

become much more careful –

right after the woman and the boy

disappeared

from

Sveavägen.

That in itself was no

guarantee that the journalist knew where they now were.

But as time went on there were more indications that the theory might be right, and in any case Kira did not seem to need cast-iron evidence.

She

wanted

to

go

for

Blomkvist. Or, if not him,
then someone else at the magazine.

More

than

anything she was obsessive in her determination to track down
the woman and the

child.

Maybe Holtser could not

understand the subtleties of Kira's motives. But it was for his
benefit that they were going to do away with the boy. Kira chose to

take

significant risks for Holtser,

and he was grateful, he really was, even though now in the car he felt uneasy.

He tried to draw strength from thinking about Olga.

Whatever happened, she must

not wake up and see a

drawing of her father on all the front pages. He tried to reassure himself that the

hardest part was behind them.

Assuming Zander had given them the right location, the job should be straightforward.

They were three heavily armed men, four if you counted

Bogdanov,

who

spent most of the time staring at his computer as usual.

The team consisted of

Holtser, Bogdanov, Orlov and

Dennis Wilton, a gangster

who had been a member of Svavelsjö M.C. but who now worked for Kira. Four men against one woman who was

probably asleep, and was also protecting

a

child.

It

shouldn't be a problem, not at all. But Kira was almost

manic:

“Don't

underestimate

Salander!”

She said it so many times that even Bogdanov, who

always

agreed

with

everything she said, began to get
irritated.

Of

course

Holtser had seen how fit and

fast and fearless the woman had been on Sveavägen. But the
way Kira described her, she must be some kind of superwoman.

It

was

ridiculous. Holtser had never met a woman who could
remotely be a match for him

– or even for Orlov – in combat. Still, he promised to be careful. First he would go up and check out the terrain and prepare a strategy. They

would not be drawn into a trap. He stressed this many times over, and when finally they arrived at an inlet next to a rocky slope and a jetty, he took command. He told the others to get ready in the shelter of the car while he went ahead to identify the house.

Holtser liked early mornings.

He liked the silence and the feeling of transition in the air.

Now he was leaning forward as he walked, and listening. It was reassuringly dark – no lights were on. He left the jetty behind him and came to

a wooden fence with a rickety gate,

right

next

to

an

overgrown prickly bush. He opened the gate and started to climb up the steep wooden

steps holding the handrail on the right, and soon he was able to make out the house above.

It lay hidden behind pine trees and aspens and was only a dark outline, with a terrace on the south side. On the terrace were some glass doors which they would have no

trouble breaking through. At first sight he saw no serious difficulty. He was moving

almost soundlessly and for a moment

he

considered

finishing off the job himself.

Maybe it was even his moral responsibility, and it should be no more difficult than other jobs he had done. On the contrary.

There were no policemen

this time, no guards, nor any sign of an alarm system.

True, he did not have his assault rifle with him, but

then there was no need for it.

The rifle was excessive, the result

of

Kira's

heated

imagination. He had his

pistol, his Remington, and that was more than enough.

Suddenly – without his usual careful planning – he started moving along the side of the house, up to the terrace and the glass doors.

Then he stiffened, without at first knowing why – it

could have been a sound, a movement, a danger he had only half sensed. He looked up at the rectangular window above him, but from his

position he could not see into it. He kept still, now less and less sure of himself. Could it be the wrong house?

He resolved to get closer and peer in, and then ... he was

transfixed

in

the

darkness. He was being

observed. Those eyes which once before had looked at him were now staring glassily in his direction. That was when he should have reacted.

He should have sprinted

around to the terrace, gone straight in and shot the boy.

But again he hesitated. He could not bring himself to draw his weapon. Faced with that look, he was lost.

The boy let out a shrill scream which seemed to set the window vibrating, and

only then did Holtser tear himself out of his paralysis and race up onto the terrace.

Without

a

moment's

reflection he hurtled straight through the glass doors and fired with what he thought was great precision, but he never found out

whether he hit his target.

An explosive shadow-like figure came at him with such

speed that he hardly had time to brace himself. He knew that he fired another shot and that someone shot back. In the next instant he slammed onto the floor with his full weight, a young woman

tumbling over him with a

rage in her eyes that was beyond anything he had ever seen. He reacted instinctively

and tried to shoot again. But the woman was like a wild animal. She threw her head back and ... Crack!

When he came to he had a taste of blood in his mouth and his pullover was sticky and wet. He must have been hit. Just then the boy and the woman passed him, and he

tried to grab hold of the boy's leg. At least he thought he did. But suddenly he was gasping for breath.

He no longer understood

what was going on. Except that he was beaten, but by whom? By a woman? That

insight became a part of his pain as he lay on the floor amidst glass and his own

blood, breathing heavily, his eyes shut. He hoped it would

be over soon. When he

opened his eyes again he was

surprised to see the woman still there. Had she not just left? No, she was standing by the table, he could see her thin boyish legs. He tried his utmost to get up. He looked for his weapon, and at the same time heard voices

through the broken window, and then he moved once more

to attack the woman.

But before he could do

anything the woman exploded

into motion and stormed out.

From the terrace she threw herself headlong into the trees. Shots resounded in the dark and he muttered to himself, "Kill the bastards."

But it was all he could do to get to his feet and he cast a dull glance at the table in front of him.

There was a mass of

crayons and paper which he looked at without really

taking it all in. Then it was as if a claw had taken hold of his heart. He saw an evil demon with a pale face raising his hand to kill. It

took a second or so for him to realize that the demon was himself, and he shuddered.

Yet he could not take his eyes off the image. Only then did he notice something

scribbled at the top:

Mailed to police 4.22.

CHAPTER 27

24.xi, Morning

When Aram Barzani of the

Rapid Response Unit made

his

way

into

Gabriella

Grane's house at 4.52 he saw

a large man dressed in black spreadeagled on the floor

next to the round table.

He approached cautiously.

The house seemed to have

been abandoned. But he was not taking any risks. There were recent reports of a fierce gunfight up at the house and he could hear the excited voices of his colleagues

outside on the steep rock slope.

“Here!”

they

shouted.

“Here!”

Barzani did not understand what was going on, and for a moment he hesitated. Should he go to them? He decided to

see first what condition the man on the floor was in.

There was broken glass and blood all around, and the table was strewn with torn-up

pieces of paper and crushed crayons. The man on the

ground was crossing himself feebly. He was mumbling

something. Probably a prayer.

It sounded Russian; Barzani caught the word "Olga". He told the man that a medical team was on its way.

"They were sisters," the

man said in English.

But it sounded so confused
that Barzani attached no
importance to it. Instead he searched through the man's clothes,
made sure that he was unarmed, and thought he
had probably been shot in the stomach. His pullover was
soaked in blood, and he
looked
alarmingly
pale.

Barzani asked what had

happened. He got no reply, not at first. Then the man gasped out another strange sentence.

“My soul was captured in a drawing,”

he

said,

and

seemed to be about to lose consciousness.

Aram stayed for a few

minutes to watch him, but when he heard from the

ambulance crew he left the man and went down to the rocky slope. He wanted to discover what his colleagues had been shouting about. The

snow was still falling and it

was icy underfoot. Down by the water voices could be heard and the sound of more cars arriving. It was still dark and hard to see and there were many uneven rocks and straggly pines. The landscape was dramatic and steep. It could not have been easy to fight in this terrain and Barzani was gripped with

foreboding. He noticed that it had become strangely quiet.

But his colleagues were not far
away
behind
an
overgrown aspen. He felt
afraid – unusual for him –
when he saw them staring
down at the ground. What
had they seen? Was the

autistic boy dead?

He walked over slowly,

thinking about his own boys, six and nine now. They were crazy about football – did nothing else, talked about

nothing

else.

Björn

and

Anders. He and Dilvan had given them Swedish names

because they had thought it would make their lives easier.

What kind of people come

out here to kill a child? He was gripped by a sudden fury.

But in the next moment he breathed a sigh of relief.

There was no boy there,

but two men lying on the ground, apparently both shot

in the stomach. One of them –

a brutal-looking type with pockmarked

skin

and

a

stubby boxer's nose – tried to get up, but was easily pushed down again.

His

face

betrayed his humiliation and his right hand was shaking with pain or rage. The other man, who was wearing a

leather jacket and had his hair in a ponytail, seemed in

worse shape. He lay still and
stared in shock at the dark sky.

“No sign of the child?”

Barzani said.

“Nothing,” his colleague

Klas Lang said.

“And the woman?”

“No sign.”

Barzani was not sure if this

was good news and he asked a few more questions. But no-one knew what had happened.

The only certainty was that

two

automatic

weapons,

Barrett REC7s, had been

found thirty or forty metres away, close to the jetty. They were assumed to belong to the men, but when asked how

they had ended up there, the man with the pockmarked

face

spat

out

an

incomprehensible answer.

Barzani and his colleagues spent the next fifteen minutes combing the terrain. All they

could find were further signs of combat. More and more

people began to arrive on the scene:

ambulance

crew,

Detective Sergeant Modig,

two or three crime scene

technicians, a succession of regular policemen and the

journalist Mikael Blomkvist, who was accompanied by a

massive American with a

crew cut who immediately

commanded

everyone's

respect. At 5.25 they were informed that a witness was waiting to be interviewed

down by the seashore and

parking

area.

The

man

wanted to be addressed as K.G. He was actually called Karl-Gustav Matzon. He had fairly recently bought a new-build on the

other side of the water. According to Lang, he

needed to be taken with a

pinch of salt: "The old boy has a very vivid imagination."

Modig and Holmberg were

standing in the parking area, trying to make sense of what had happened. The picture so

far was fragmented and they were hoping that the witness K.G. Matzon would bring a measure of clarity to the night.

But when they saw him coming towards them along

the shoreline, that seemed less and less likely. K.G.

Matzon was resplendent in a Tyrolean hat, green checked trousers and a red Canada Goose jacket and he was

sporting an absurd twirly

moustache. He looked as if he were trying to be funny.

“K.G. Matzon?” Modig

said.

“The very same,” he said, and without any prompting –

maybe he realized that his credibility needed a boost –

he explained that he ran True Crimes, a publishing house which produced books on

notable crimes.

“Excellent. But right now

we’d like a factual account –

not some sales pitch for a forthcoming book,” Modig

said, to be on the safe side.

Matzon said that, of course, he understood.

He

was

after

all

a

“respectable person”. He had woken up at a ridiculous

hour, he said, and lain there listening to “the silence and the calm”. But just before 4.30 he heard something

which

he

immediately

recognized as a pistol shot, so he quickly got dressed and went onto his terrace – which

had a view of the beach, the rock promontory and the parking area where they were now standing.

“What did you see?”

“Nothing. It was eerily quiet. Then the air exploded.

It sounded as if a war had broken out.”

“You heard more shots?”

“There were cracks of

gunfire from the promontory on the other side of the inlet

and I stared across, stunned, and then ... did I mention I was a birdwatcher?"

"No, you didn't."

"Well,

it's

made

my

eyesight very good, you see.

I've got eagle eyes. I'm used to pinpointing tiny details far off, and I'm sure that's why I noticed a small dot on the rock ledge up there, do you see it? The edge of it sort of

cuts into the rock slope like a pocket.”

Modig looked up at the

slope and nodded.

“At first I couldn't tell what

it

was,”

Matzon

continued.

“But

then

I

realized it was a child – a boy, I think. He was sitting up there in a crouch and trembling, at least that’s how it seemed to me, and then

suddenly ... my God, I’ll never forget it.”

“What?”

“Someone came racing

down from above, a woman, and she leaped into the air and landed so violently on the rock ledge that she all but fell off it, and after that they sat there together, she and the boy, and just waited, and waited for the inevitable, and then ...”

“Yes?”

“Two

men

appeared

holding assault rifles and shot and shot, and as I’m sure you can imagine, I just threw myself to the ground. I was scared I’d get hit.

But I couldn't help looking up at them all the same. You see, from where I was the boy and

the girl were clearly visible.

But they were invisible to the men standing at the top, at

least for the moment. It was obvious to me that it was only a matter of time before they were discovered and there

was no escape. As soon as they left the rock ledge the men would see them and kill them. It was a hopeless

situation.”

“But we've found neither

the boy nor the woman up there,” Modig said.

“That’s just it! The men got closer and closer – they only needed to lean forward to see the woman and the child. In the end they could probably have heard them

breathing. But then ...”

“Yes?’

“You’re not going to

believe this. That man from the Rapid Response Unit

definitely didn’t.”

“Well, go ahead and tell me, and we can worry later about

whether

it's

believable.”

“When the men stopped to

listen, maybe they sensed

they were very close, the woman leaped to her feet and

shot them. Bang, bang! Then she rushed forward and threw

their weapons away. It was like an action film, and after that she ran, or rather rolled,

almost fell down the slope with the boy to a B.M.W.

standing here in the parking area. Just before they got into the car I saw that the woman was holding something – it looked like a computer bag.”

“Did they drive away in the
B.M.W.?”

“At a fearful speed. I have no idea where they went.”

“Of course not.”

“But that’s not all.”

“What do you mean?”

“There was another car
there – a Range Rover, I think, black, a new model.”

“And what happened to
that one?”

“I was busy ringing the
emergency services, but just as I was about to hang up I saw two
more people coming
down from the wooden steps over there, a tall thin man and a
woman. I didn’t get a good

look at them from that distance. But I can still tell you two things about that woman.”

“Yes?”

“She was a twelve-pointer, and she was angry.”

“Twelve-pointer meaning
beautiful?”

“Or at least glamorous,
classy. You could see it a mile off. But boy was she furious. Just
before they got
into the Range Rover she slapped the man, and the

weird thing is: he hardly reacted. He just nodded as if he thought he deserved it.

Then he got behind the wheel

and they were gone.”

Modig noted everything

down, realizing that she had to get out a nationwide search bulletin for both the Range Rover

and

the

B.M.W.

without delay.

Gabriella Grane was drinking a cappuccino in her kitchen on Villagatan and thinking that she was holding it

together,

all

things

considered. But she was

probably in shock.

Helena Kraft wanted to see

her at 8.00 in the office at Säpo. Grane guessed that she wouldn't just get the sack.

There would be judicial

consequences

too,

which

would pretty much ruin her prospects of finding another job. At thirty-three, her career was over.

And that was by no means the worst of it. She had known that she was flouting the law and had taken a

conscious risk. But she had done it because she believed it was the best way to protect Frans Balder's son. Now,

after the shoot-out at her

summer

place,

no-one

seemed to know where the

boy was. He might be injured, or even dead. Grane was

racked

by

the

most

devastating feelings of guilt: first the father and now the son.

She got up and looked at the clock. It was 7.15 and she needed to get going to give herself time to clean out her desk before the meeting with

Kraft. She made up her mind to behave with dignity, to not make any excuses or beg to be allowed to stay. Her

Blackphone rang, but she

couldn't

be

bothered

to

answer. Instead she put on her boots and her Prada coat and an extravagant red scarf.

If she was going under, she might just as well go with a bit of panache. She stood in front of the hall mirror and

touched up her make-up, wryly giving herself the

victory sign, as Nixon had when he resigned. Then her Blackphone rang again and

this

time

she

answered

reluctantly. It was Casales at the N.S.A.

“I’ve just heard,” she said.

Of course she had.

“How are you feeling?”

“What do you think?”

“Like the worst person in the whole world?”

“Pretty much.”

“Who’ll never get another
job?”

“Spot on, Alona.”

“In that case, let me tell you, you’ve nothing to be ashamed of.
You did the right thing.”

“Are you trying to be
funny?”

“Doesn’t seem like the moment for jokes, sweetheart.
You have a mole on your
team.”

Gabriella took a deep
breath. “Who is it?”

“Nielsen.”

Gabriella froze. “Do you

have proof?”

“Oh yes, I’ll send it all over in a few minutes.”

“Why

would

Nielsen

betray us?”

“I guess he didn’t see it as a betrayal.”

“What on earth did he see it as if not betrayal?”

“Collaborating with Big

Brother maybe, doing his
duty by the leading nation in the free world? What do I know?"

"So
he
gave
you
information."

"He helped us to help
ourselves, actually. He gave

us information about your server and your encryption.

It's not as outrageous as it sounds. Let's face it, we listen in on everything from the neighbours' gossip to the prime minister's telephone

calls.”

“But

this

time

the

information was leaked a

stage further.”

“In this case it seeped out like we were a funnel. I

know, Gabriella, that you didn’t exactly stick to the rulebook. But I’m absolutely convinced that you were in the right, and I’ll make sure that your superiors get to hear it. You could see that there was something rotten in your organization, so you couldn’t act within it, yet you were determined not to shirk your responsibility.”

“But it went wrong.”

“Sometimes

things

go

wrong, no matter how careful
you are.”

“Thanks, Alona, it’s nice
of you to say so. But if anything has happened to
August Balder, I will never forgive myself.”

“Gabriella, the boy is O.K.

He’s cruising around in a car somewhere
with

Miss

Salander, in case someone's still chasing them."

Grane could not take it in.

"What do you mean?"

"That he's unhurt, babe,

and that thanks to him his father's murderer has been caught and identified."

"You're saying August is

alive?"

"That's right."

“How do you know?”

“Let’s just say I have a very well-placed source.”

“Alona ...”

“Yes?”

“If what you say is true, you’ve given me back my
life.”

After hanging up, Grane

rang Kraft and insisted that Mårten Nielsen be present at their meeting. Reluctantly, Kraft agreed.

It was 7.30 in the morning when

Needham

and

Blomkvist made their way down the steps from Grane's summer house to the Audi in the parking area by the beach.

Snow lay over the landscape and neither of them said a word. At 5.30 Blomkvist had got a text message from

Salander, as brisk and to the point as ever.

<August unhurt. We'll keep our heads down a while

longer.>

Again Salander had not mentioned her own state of health.

But

it

was

an

incredible relief to hear about the

boy.

Afterwards

Blomkvist

had

been

questioned

at

length

by

Modig and Holmberg and he told them every detail of what he and the magazine had been

doing over the past few days.

They were not friendly or well disposed towards him,
yet he got the feeling that somehow they understood.

Now, an hour later, he was walking past the jetty. Up the slope a deer scampered into the forest. Blomkvist settled into the driving seat and waited for Needham, who

came loping along in his

wake. The American's back

was giving him trouble.

On the way to Brunn they found themselves in traffic.

For several minutes nothing moved

and

Blomkvist

thought of Zander, who was constantly on his mind. They had still not had any sign of life from him.

“Can you get something

noisy

on

the

radio?”

Needham said.

Blomkvist tuned into 107.1

and got James Brown belting out what a sex machine he was.

“Give me your phones,”

Needham said.

He stacked them next to

the speakers at the back of the car. He clearly meant to talk about something sensitive,

and Blomkvist had nothing

against that – he had to write his story and needed all the facts he could get. But he also knew better than most that there's no such thing as a leak without an agenda. Although

Blomkvist felt a certain affinity with Needham and

even appreciated his grumpy charm, he did not trust him for one second.

“Let's hear it,” he said.

“You could put it this

way,” Needham began. “We

know that in business and industry

there's

always

someone taking advantage of inside information.”

“Agreed.”

“For a while we were pretty much spared that in the world of intelligence, for the simple

reason

that

we

guarded different kinds of secrets. The dynamite was elsewhere. But since the end of the Cold War, all that has changed.

Surveillance

in

general has become more widespread. These days we control huge amounts of valuable material.”

“And there are people taking advantage of this, you say.”

“Well, that’s basically the whole point of it. Corporate espionage

helps

keep

companies informed about

the strengths and weaknesses of the competition. It’s a grey area. Something that was seen as criminal or unethical

decades ago is now standard operating

procedure.

We

haven't been much better at the N.S.A., in fact maybe we're even ...”

“The worst?”

“Just take it easy, let me finish,” Needham said. “I'd say we have a certain moral code. But we're a large

organization with tens of

thousands of employees and inevitably there are rotten apples – even one or two very highly placed rotten apples I

was thinking of handing you.”

“Out of the kindness of
your
heart,
of
course,”

Blomkvist said with a touch of sarcasm.

“O.K., maybe not entirely.

But listen. When senior
management at our place

crosses the line and gets into criminal activities, what do you think happens?”

“Nothing very nice.”

“As you know, there’s a corrupt

unit

at

Solifon,

headed up by a man called Zigmund Eckerwald, whose

job it is to find out what the competing tech companies

are up to. They not only steal the technology but also sell what they steal. That's bad for Solifon and maybe even for the whole Nasdaq."

"And for you too."

"That's right. It turns out that our two most senior

executives

in

industrial

espionage – their names are Jacob Barclay and Brian

Abbot – get help from

Eckerwald and his gang. In exchange the N.S.A. helps Eckerwald with large-scale communications monitoring. Solifon identifies where the big innovations are happening, and our idiots pluck out the drawings and the technical details.” “I assume the money this

brings in doesn't always end up in the state coffers.”

“It's worse than that,

buddy. If you do this sort of thing as a state employee, you make

yourself

very

vulnerable,

especially

because Eckerwald and his

gang are also helping major criminals. To be fair, at first

they probably didn't know their clients were major criminals.”

“But that's what they were?”

“Damn right. And they took advantage too. I could only dream of recruiting hackers at their level of expertise, and the

very

essence of their business is to exploit information, so you can

imagine:

once

they

realized what our guys at the N.S.A. were up to, they knew

they were sitting on a

goldmine.”

“So they were in a position

to blackmail.”

“Talk about having the

upper hand. Our guys haven’t

just been stealing from large corporations. They’ve also

plundered

small

family

businesses

and

solo

entrepreneurs

who

are

struggling to survive. It wouldn't look too good if everything came out. So as a result the N.S.A. is forced to help not just Eckerwald and Solifon,

but

also

the

criminals.”

“You mean the Spiders?”

“You got it. Maybe for a while everyone stays happy.

It’s big business and the money’s rolling in. But then a little genius pops up in the

middle of the action, a certain Professor Balder, and he’s just as good at ferreting around as he is at doing everything else. So he finds out about this scheme, or at least part of it. Then of course everyone’s scared shitless and decides that something has to be done. I’m not entirely clear on how these decisions got made. I’m guessing our guys hoped legal threats

would be enough. But when you're in bed with a bunch of criminals ... The Spiders

prefer violence, so they draw our guys into the plan at a late stage, just to bind them in even more tightly."

"Jesus."

"I would never have gotten

to know any of this if we hadn't

been

hacked,"

Needham said.

“Another reason to leave the hacker in peace.”

“Which is exactly what I’m

going to do, so long as she tells me how she did it.”

“I don’t know how much

your promises are worth, but there’s another thing I’ve been

wondering

about,”

Blomkvist said.

“Shoot.”

“You mentioned two guys,
Barclay and Abbot. Are you
sure it stops with them?
Who’s their boss?”

“I can’t give you his name unfortunately. It’s classified.”

“I suppose I’ll have to live
with that.”

“You will,” Needham said

inflexibly. At that moment Blomkvist noticed that traffic was starting to flow again.

CHAPTER 28

24.xi, Afternoon

Professor

Edelman

was

standing in the car park at the

Karolinska

Institute

wondering what in heaven's name he had let himself in for. He was embarking on an

arrangement which would

mean his having to cancel a whole series of meetings,

lectures and conferences.

Even so he felt strangely elated. He had been entranced not just by the boy but also by the

young

woman

who

looked as if she had come

straight from a street brawl, but who drove a brand new B.M.W.
and spoke with

chilling authority. He had barely been aware of what he

was doing when he said,

“Yes, sure, why not?” to her questions, although it was obviously
both foolish and rash. The only grain of

independence he had shown

was to have declined all

offers of compensation.

He was going to pay his own

travel

and

hotel

expenses, he said. He must have felt guilty. But he was moved to take the boy under his

wing,

his

scientific

curiosity was piqued. A

savant who both drew with photographic exactitude and could perform prime-number

factorization

—

how

absolutely riveting. To his own surprise he even decided

to skip the Nobel Prize dinner. The young woman

had made him take leave

altogether of his senses.

Hanna Balder was sitting in the kitchen on Torsgatan,

smoking. It felt as if she had done little else apart from sit there and puff away with a heavy feeling in her stomach.

She had been given an

unusual amount of support, but she had also been getting an

unusual

amount

of

physical

abuse.

Lasse

Westman could not handle

her anxiety. It detracted from his own martyrdom.

He was always flying into a rage and yelling, “Can’t you even keep track of your own brat?” Often he lashed out with his fists or threw her across the apartment like a

rag doll. Now he would probably go crazy too – she had spilled coffee all over the *Dagens*

Nyheter

culture

section,

and

Lasse

was

already worked up because of

a theatre review in it which he had found too sympathetic
to actors he did not like.

“What the hell have you
done?”

“I’m

sorry,”

she

said

quickly. “I’ll wipe it up.”

She could tell from the set of his mouth that that would not satisfy him, he would hit her before he even knew it himself, and she was so well prepared for his slap that she did not say one word or even

move her head. She could

feel the tears welling up and her heart pounding. But

actually that had nothing to do with the blow. That

morning she had received a

call which was so perplexing that she hardly understood it: August had been found, had disappeared again and was

“probably”

unharmmed

—

“probably”. It was impossible for Hanna to know if she should be more worried, or less.

The hours had gone by

with

no

further

news.

Suddenly she got to her feet, no longer caring whether she would get another beating or not. She went into the living room and heard Lasse panting behind her. August's drawing paper was still lying on the floor and an ambulance was wailing outside. She heard footsteps in the stairwell. Was someone on their way here?

The doorbell rang.

“Don't open. It'll be some bloody journalist,”

Lasse

snapped.

Hanna did not want to open either. Still, she could not very well ignore it, could she? Perhaps the police

wanted to interview her

again, or maybe, maybe they had more information now,

good news or bad news.

As she went to the door she

thought

of

Frans.

She

remembered how he had

stood there saying that he had come

for

August.

She

remembered his eyes and the fact that he had shaved off his beard, and her own longing for her old life, before Lasse Westman – a time when the telephone rang and the job offers came flooding in, and fear had not yet set its claws into her. She opened the door with the safety chain on and at first she saw nothing; just the lift door, and the reddish-brown walls. Then a shock

ran through her, and for a moment she could not believe

it. But it really was August!

His hair was a tangled mess and his clothes were filthy.

He was wearing a pair of trainers much too big for him, and yet: he looked at her with the

same

serious,

impenetrable expression as

ever. She would not have

expected him to turn up on his own, but when she undid

the safety chain she still gave a start. Next to August stood a cool young woman in a

leather jacket, with scratch marks on her face and earth in her hair, glaring down at the floor. She had a large suitcase in her hand.

“I’ve come to give you
back your son,” she said
without looking up.

“Oh my God,” Hanna said.

“My God!”

That was all she managed to say, and for a few seconds she was completely at a loss as she stood there in the doorway. Then her shoulders began to shake. She sank to her knees and, forgetting the fact that August hated to be hugged, she threw her arms around him murmuring, “My

boy, my boy ...” until the tears came. The odd thing was: August not only let her

do it, he also seemed on the verge of saying something –

as if he had learned to talk on top of everything. But before he had the chance, Lasse was

standing behind her.

“What the hell ... Well,

look

who’s

here!”

he

growled, as if he wanted to carry on with their fight.

But then he got a grip on himself. It was an impressive piece of acting, in a way. In

the space of a second he began to radiate the presence which used to make women

swoon.

“And we get the kid

delivered

to

our

front

doorstep,” he said to the woman on the landing. “How convenient. Is he O.K.?”

“He’s O.K.,” the woman

said in a strange monotone, and without asking walked into the apartment with the suitcase and her muddy boots.

“By all means, just come

right on in,” Lasse said in an acid tone.

“I’m here to help you pack,

Lasse.”

This was such a strange

reply

that

Hanna

was

convinced she had misheard, and Lasse did not seem to understand either. He just

stood there looking stupid, his mouth wide open.

“What did you say?”

“You’re moving out.”

“Is this some kind of
joke?”

“Not at all. You’re leaving this house now, right now, and
you’re
not
coming

anywhere near August ever

again. You've seen him for the last time.”

“You must be off your rocker!”

“Actually

I'm

being

unusually generous. I was

planning on throwing you

down the stairs there. But I brought a suitcase with me.

Thought I'd let you pack
some shirts and pants.”

“What kind of a freak are you?” Lasse shouted, both
bewildered

and

beside

himself with rage, and he

bore down on the woman with the full weight of his hostility,

and

Hanna

wondered if he was going to take a swipe at her as well.

But

something

stopped

him. Maybe it was the

woman's eyes, or possibly the mere fact that she did not react like anyone else would have done. Instead of backing off or looking frightened she only smiled at him, and took

a few crumpled pieces of paper from an inside pocket and handed them to Lasse.

“If ever you and your

friend Roger should find

yourselves missing August,

you can always look at this and remember,” she said.

Lasse turned over the

papers, confused. Then he

screwed up his face in horror and Hanna took a quick look herself. They were drawings

and the top one was of ...

Lasse. Lasse swinging his

fists and looking profoundly evil. Later she would hardly be able to explain it. It was not just that she understood what had been going on when

August had been alone at

home with Lasse and Roger.

She also saw her own life more clearly and soberly than she had for years.

Lasse had looked at her with exactly that twisted, livid face hundreds of times, most recently a minute ago.

She knew this was something

no-one should have to endure, neither she nor August, and she shrank back. At least she thought she did, because the woman looked at her with a new focus. Hanna eyed her uneasily. They seemed on

some level to understand each

other.

“Am I right, Hanna, he’s

got to go?” the woman said.

The

question

was

potentially lethal, and Hanna looked down at August's
oversize shoes.

“What are those shoes he's
wearing?”

“Mine.”

“Why?”

“We left in a hurry this morning.”

“And what have you been doing?”

“Hiding.”

“I don’t understand ...” she

began, but got no further.

Lasse grabbed hold of her violently. “Why don’t you tell this psychopath that the only one who’s leaving is her?” he roared.

Hanna cowered, but then

...

It

may

have

been

something to do with the

expression on Lasse's face, or the

sense

of

something

implacable in the young

woman's bearing. But then ...

Hanna heard herself say,

“You're leaving, Lasse! And don't ever come back!”

It was as if someone else were speaking in her place.

And after that things moved quickly. Lasse raised his hand to strike her, but no blow came, not from him. The

young woman reacted with lightning speed, and hit him in the face two, three times like a trained boxer, felling him with a kick to the leg.

“What the hell!” was all he

was able to say.

He crashed to the floor,

and the young woman stood over him. As Hanna took

August into his bedroom she realized for how long and how desperately she had

wished Lasse Westman out of her life.

Bublanski longed to see

Rabbi Goldman.

He also longed for some of

Modig's orange chocolate,

for his new Dux bed and for springtime. But right now it was his job to get some order into this investigation. It was true that, on one level, he was

satisfied. August Balder was said to be unharmed and on his way home to his mother.

Thanks to the boy himself and to Lisbeth Salander his father's

killer

had

been

arrested, even though it was not yet established that he would survive his injuries. He was in intensive care at

Danderyd hospital. He was

called Boris Latvinov but had for some time been using the

name Jan Holtser. He was a major and former elite soldier from the Soviet army, and his name had cropped up in the past

in

several

murder

investigations, but he had never been convicted. He had

his own business in the

security industry, and was both a Finnish and Russian citizen, and a resident of Helsinki; no doubt someone

had doctored his government records.

The other two people who

had been found at the summer

house on Ingarö had been

identified

by

their

fingerprints; Dennis Wilton, an

old

gangster

from

Svavelsjö M.C. who had done

time for both aggravated

robbery and grievous bodily harm; and Vladimir Orlov, a Russian
with a criminal

record

in

Germany

for

procuring, whose two wives had died in unexplained

circumstances. None of the men had yet said a word

about what happened, or

about anything at all. Nor did Bublanski hold out much

hope that this would change.

Men like that tend to hold their

peace

in

police

interviews. But then those were the rules of the game.

What

Bublanski

was

unhappy about, though, was the feeling that these three men were no more than foot soldiers and that there was a leadership above them linked to the upper echelons of

society in both Russia and in the U.S.A. He had no

problem with a journalist

knowing more about his

investigation than he did. In that respect he was not proud.

He just wanted to move ahead, and was grateful for all information, whatever its source.

But

Blomkvist's

discerning approach to the case had pointed up their own shortcomings and reminded

Bublanski of the leak in the investigation and the dangers to which the boy had been exposed because of them. On

this score his anger would never subside, and perhaps

that explains why he was so irritated at the head of Säpo's eager efforts to get hold of him – and Kraft was not the only one. The I.T. people at the National Criminal Police were after him too, and so were

Chief

Prosecutor

Richard

Ekström

and

a

Stanford professor by the

name of Steven Warburton

from

the

Machine

Intelligence

Research

Institute who wanted to talk about “a significant risk”, as Amanda Flod put it.

That bothered Bublanski,

along with a thousand other things.

And

there

was

someone knocking at his

door. It was Modig, who

looked tired and was wearing

no

make-up,

revealing

something different about her face.

“All three prisoners are having surgery,” she said.

“It’ll be a while before we can question them again.”

“Try to question them, you
mean.”

“I did manage to have a
brief word with Latvinov. He
was conscious for a while before his operation.”

“Did he say anything?”

“Just that he wanted to talk
to a priest.”

“How come all lunatics and murderers are religious these days?”

“While all sensible old

chief inspectors doubt the existence of their God, you mean?”

“Now, now.”

“Latvinov

also

seemed

dejected, and that’s a good sign, I think,” Modig said.

“When I showed him the

drawing he just waved it

away

with

a

resigned

expression.”

“So he didn’t try to claim it was a fabrication?”

“He just closed his eyes

and started to talk about his priest.”

“Have you discovered what
this
American
professor
wants, the one who keeps
calling?”

“What ...? No ... he'll talk
only to you. I think it's about
Balder's research.”

“And Zander, the young
journalist?”

“That’s what I came to talk
about. It doesn’t look good.”

“What do we know?”

“That he worked late and
was
spotted
disappearing

down past Katarinahissen

accompanied by a beautiful woman with strawberry- or

dark-blonde

hair

and

expensive clothes.”

“I’d not heard that.”

“They were seen by a man

called Ken Eklund, a baker at Skansen. He lives in the

Millennium building. He said they looked as if they were in love, or at least Zander did.”

“You think it could have

been

some

sort

of

honeytrap?”

“It’s possible.”

“And this woman, might
she be the same one who was
seen at Ingarö?”

“We’re looking into that.

But I don’t like the idea that they seemed to be heading towards
Gamla Stan. Not

only because we picked up Zander’s

mobile

phone

signals there. That revolting specimen Orlov, who just
spits at me whenever I try to question
him,
has
an
apartment on Mårten Trotzigs
gränd.”

“Have we been there?”

“Not yet. We’ve only just discovered the address. The apartment was registered in the name of one of his companies.”

“Let’s hope there’s nothing unpleasant waiting for us there.”

Westman was lying on the floor in the entrance hall on

Torsgatan, wondering how he could be so terrified. She was just a chick, a pierced punk chick who hardly came up to his chest. He

should be able to throw her out like some little rat. Yet he was as if paralysed and it had nothing to do with the way the girl fought, he thought, still less with the fact that her foot was planted on his stomach. It was something about her look

or her whole being that he could not put his finger on.

For a few minutes he lay there like an idiot and

listened.

“I’m just reminded,” she

said, “that there’s something really wrong in my family.

We seem to be capable of pretty much anything. Of the most unimaginable cruelties.

It may be a genetic defect.

Personally I've got this thing

against

men

who

harm

children and women, and that

makes me dangerous. When I

saw August's drawings of

you and your friend Roger, I wanted to hurt you, badly.

But I think August has been through enough, so there's a slight chance that you and your friend might get off more lightly."

"I'm—" Westman began.

"Quiet," she said. "This isn't a negotiation; it's not even a conversation. I'm just setting out the terms, that's all. Legally there are no problems. Frans was wise

enough

to

register

the

apartment in August's name.

But for the rest, this is how it's going to be: you have precisely four minutes to

pack your things and get out.

If you or Roger ever come

back here or contact August in any way, I'll make you suffer so much that you'll be incapable of doing anything nice again, for the rest of your lives. In the meantime, I'll be preparing to report you to the police with full details of the abuse

you've

subjected

August to. As you know, we have more than the drawings to

go

on.

We

have

testimonies

from

psychologists and experts. I'll also

be

contacting

the

evening papers to tell them that I have material which
substantiates the image of you

that

emerged

in

connection with your assault on

Renata

Kapusinski.

Remind me, Lasse, what was it that you did? Bite her cheek through and kick her in the head?”

“So you’re going to go to the press.”

“I’m going to go to the

press. I’m going to cause you and

your

friend

every

conceivable disgrace. But

maybe – I'm saying maybe –

you can hope to escape the worst of the humiliation so long as you're never again seen near Hanna and August, and if you never again harm a woman. As a matter of fact I

couldn't give a shit about you. Once you leave, and if you live like a shy and timid little monk, you may be

alright. I have my doubts – as we all know, the rate of re-offending for violence against women is high, and basically you're a bastard, but with a bit of luck, who knows ...?

Have you got it?”

“I’ve got it,” he said,

hating himself for saying so.

He saw no way out, he could only agree and do as he was told, and so he got up and went into the bedroom and swiftly packed some

clothes. Then he took his coat and his mobile and left. He had nowhere to go.

He had never felt more

pathetic in his life. Outside an unpleasant sleety rain lashed into him.

Salander heard the front door slam and footsteps receding down the stone stairs. She looked at August. He was

standing still with his arms straight down by his sides, staring at her intently. That troubled her. A moment ago she had been in control of things, but now she was

uncertain, and what on earth was the matter with Hanna Balder?

Hanna seemed about to burst into tears, and August

... on top of everything else he started shaking his head and muttering. Salander just wanted to get out of there, but she stayed. Her work was not

yet complete. Out of her

pocket she took two plane tickets, a hotel voucher and a thick bundle of notes, both kronor and euros.

“I’d just like, from the bottom of my heart—” Hanna began.

“Quiet,” Salander cut in.

“Here are some plane tickets to Munich. Departure is at 7.15 this evening so you’ve got to hurry. I’ve organized transport to take you directly to Schloss Elmau. It’s a nice hotel not far from Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

You’ll

be

staying in a large room on the

top floor, in the name of Müller, and you'll be there for three months to start with.

I've been in touch with

Professor

Edelman

and

explained

to

him

the

importance

of

absolute

confidentiality.

He'll

be

making regular visits and

seeing to it that August gets good care. Edelman will also arrange for suitable schooling.”

“Are you serious?”

“I’m deadly serious. The police now have August’s drawing and the murderer has

been arrested. But the people behind all this are still at large, and it's impossible to know what they might be

planning. You have to leave this apartment at once. I'm busy with a few other things, but I've arranged for a driver to take you to Arlanda. He's a

bit weird-looking, maybe, but he's O.K. You can call him Plague. Have you got all

that?"

"Yes, but—"

"Forget the buts. Just

listen: you mustn't use your credit card or your own

mobile during the whole of your time away, Hanna. I've fixed an encrypted mobile for you, a Blackphone, in case there's an emergency. My

number

is

already

programmed in. I'll pick up all the costs of the hotel.

You'll

get

a

hundred

thousand kronor in cash, for unforeseen expenses. Any

questions?”

“It sounds crazy.”

“Not to me.”

“But how can you afford

all this?”

“I can afford it.”

“How can we ...?” Hanna looked

completely

bewildered, as if she were not sure what to believe. Then she began to cry.

“How can we ever thank
you?” she struggled to say.

“*Thank?*”

Salander repeated the word
as if it were something
incomprehensible.

When

Hanna came towards her with

outstretched arms she backed

away, and with her eyes fixed on the hallway floor she said:

“Pull yourself together!

Get a grip on yourself and stop taking whatever it is you’re on,
pills or anything else. That’s how you can

thank me.”

“I will ...”

“And if anyone gets it into

their head that August needs to be put in some home or institution, I want you to fight

back as hard and as ruthlessly as you can. Aim for their weakest point. Be a warrior.”

“A warrior?”

“Exactly. Don’t let anyone

...”

Salander stopped herself.

They were not perhaps the greatest words of farewell, but they would have to do.

She

turned

and

walked

towards the front door. She did not get far. August started to mutter again, and this time they could make out what the boy was saying.

“Not go, not go ...”

Salander had no good

answer to that either. She just said, “You’ll be O.K.” and then added, as if talking to herself, “Thanks for the

scream this morning.” There was silence for a moment, and Salander wondered if she

should say more. But instead

she turned and slipped out of the door.

Hanna called after her, “I can’t tell you what this means to me!”

But

Salander

heard

nothing. She was already

running down the steps to her car.

When

she

reached

Västerbron, Blomkvist called on the Redphone app to say that the N.S.A. had tracked her down.

”Tell them hi and that I’m on their tracks too,” she said.

Then she drove to Roger

Winter’s house and scared

him half to death. After that she drove back to her place and set to work with the encrypted N.S.A. file, without coming any closer to a solution.

Needham and Blomkvist had worked a long day in the hotel room at the Grand.

Needham had a fantastic

story for Blomkvist, who

would be able to write the scoop *Millennium* so badly needed, but his feeling of unease did not abate. It was not just because Zander was still missing. There was

something about Needham

that did not add up. Why had

he turned up in the first place, and why was he putting so much energy into helping out

a small Swedish magazine,

far from all the centres of power in the U.S.? Blomkvist

had

undertaken

not

to

disclose the hacker breach, and had half promised to try to persuade Salander to talk to Needham. But that hardly seemed enough.

Needham behaved as if he was taking enormous risks.

The curtains were drawn and their mobiles were lying at a safe distance. There was a feeling of paranoia in the room.

Confidential

documents were laid out on the bed. Blomkvist was permitted to read them, but not to quote from or copy them. And every now and then Needham interrupted his account to discuss various aspects of the right to protect journalistic sources. He was obsessively thorough about ensuring that the leak could not be traced back to him, and sometimes he listened

nervously for footsteps in the corridor

or

looked

out

through a gap in the curtains to check that no-one was out there watching the hotel, and yet ... Blomkvist could not

help feeling that most of it was play-acting.

He became more and more

convinced

that

Needham

knew exactly what he was

doing and was not even

especially

worried

about

someone listening in. It

occurred to Blomkvist that Needham was playing a part which had the backing of his superiors – maybe he himself

had also been given a role in

this play which he did not yet understand.

Therefore he paid close

attention not just to what Needham said, but also to what he did not, and he

considered what he might be trying to achieve by going public.

There

was

undoubtedly a certain amount

of

anger

there.

Some

“bastards” in a department called Protection of Strategic

Technologies had prevented Needham from nailing the

hacker who had got into his system, just because they

didn't want to be exposed with their pants round their ankles, and that infuriated him, he said. Blomkvist had no reason not to believe him, still less to doubt that

Needham genuinely did want to exterminate these people, to “crush them, grind them to pulp under my boots”.

There were other aspects of the story he was not quite so comfortable with.

Occasionally it felt as if Needham was wrestling with some kind of self-censorship.

From time to time Blomkvist went down to the lobby just to think, or to call Berger or Salander.

Berger

always

answered on the first ring

and, even though they were both enthusiastic about the story, Zander's disappearance haunted their conversations.

Salander did not pick up all

day, until eventually he got hold of her at 5.20. She sounded

distracted,

and

informed him that the boy was now safe with his mother.

“And how are *you*?” he said.

“O.K.”

“Not hurt?”

“Nothing new at least.”

Blomkvist took a deep breath. “Have you hacked

into the N.S.A.'s intranet, Lisbeth?"

"Have you been talking to Ed the Ned?"

"No comment."

He would say nothing,

even

to

Salander.

The

protection of sources was

even more important to him than loyalty to her.

“Ed isn’t so dumb after

all,” she said.

“So you have.”

“Possibly.”

Blomkvist felt the urge to ask her what the hell she thought

she

was

doing.

Instead, as calmly as he

could, he said:

“They’re prepared to let

you off if you’ll agree to meet

them and tell them how you did it.”

“Tell them from me that

I’m on to them as well.”

“What’s that supposed to

mean?”

“That I’ve got more than
they think.”

“O.K. But would you
consider meeting ...”

“Ed?”

How the hell did she know,
Blomkvist thought. Needham
had wanted to be the one to reveal himself to her.

“Ed,” he said.

“A cocky bugger.”

“Pretty cocky. But would

you consider meeting him if we provide guarantees that you won’t be arrested?”

“There

are

no

such

guarantees.”

“I could get in touch with my sister Annika and ask her to represent you.”

“I’ve got better things to do,” she said, as if she did not want to talk about it any more. He could not stop

himself from saying, “This story we’re working on ...

I’m not sure I understand all of it.”

“What’s the difficulty?”

Salander said.

“First of all, I don’t

understand why Camilla has surfaced after all these years.”

“I suppose she has just been biding her time.”

“How do you mean?”

“She

probably

always

knew she would be back to get her revenge for what I did to her and Zala. But she wanted to wait until she had built up her strength on every level.

Nothing

is

more

important to Camilla than to be strong, and I suppose she suddenly saw an opportunity,

a chance to kill two birds with one stone. At least that's my guess. Why don't you ask

her next time you have a drink together?"

"Have you spoken to

Holger?"

"I've been busy."

“And yet she failed. You
got away, thank God.”

“I made it.”

“But aren’t you worried
that she could be back at any
moment?”

“It has occurred to me.”

“O.K., good. And you do
know that Camilla and I did nothing more than walk a

short

way

down

Hornsgatan?”

Salander did not answer.

“I know you, Mikael,” was

all she said. “And now that you’ve met Ed, I guess I’ll have to protect myself from him too.”

Blomkvist

smiled

to

himself.

“Yes,” he said. “You’re

probably right. Let’s not trust him any more than we

absolutely have to. I don’t want to become his useful idiot.”

“Doesn’t sound like a role for you, Mikael.”

“No, and that’s why I’d

love to know what you

discovered

when

you

accessed their intranet.”

“A

whole

load

of

compromising shit.”

“About Eckerwald and the
Spiders’ relationship with the N.S.A.?”

“That and a bit more
besides.”

“Which you were planning
to tell me about.”

“I might do, if you behave yourself,” she said with a
teasing tone, and that only made him feel happy.

Then he chuckled, because

at that moment he realized precisely what Ed Needham
was trying to do.

It hit him so forcefully that he had a hard time keeping up his act
when he returned to the hotel room, and he went on

working

with

the

American until 10.00 that

night.

CHAPTER 29

25.xi, Morning

Vladimir Orlov's apartment

on Mårten Trotzigs gränd was

neat and tidy. The bed was made and the sheets were

clean. The laundry basket in the bathroom was empty. Yet

there

were

signs

that

something was not quite

right. Neighbours reported

that some removal men had been there, and a close

inspection

revealed

bloodstains on the floor and on the wall above the

headboard. The blood was

compared to traces of saliva in Zander's apartment and a match confirmed.

But the men now in

custody – the two who were still

capable

of

communicating – claimed to have

no

knowledge

of

bloodstains or of Zander, so Bublanski and his team concentrated on getting more information on the woman who had been seen with him.

By now the media had published

columns

and

columns not only about the drama on Ingarö but also

about

Andrei

Zander's

disappearance. Both evening newspapers

and

Svenska

Morgon-Posten and *Metro* had

carried

prominent

photographs of the journalist, and

there

was

already

speculation that he might

have been murdered. Usually

that would jog people's memories and prompt them to

remember

anything

suspicious, but now it was almost the exact opposite.

Such witness accounts as

came in and were thought to be credible were peculiarly vague, and everyone who

came forward – except for Mikael Blomkvist and the

baker from Skansen – took it upon themselves to remark

that they did not suppose the woman guilty of any crime.

She had apparently made an overwhelmingly

good

impression on everyone who had

encountered

her.

A

bartender

called

Sören

Karlsten, who had served the woman

and

Zander

in

Papagallo on Götgatan, even went on and on boasting that he was such a good judge of character and claimed to be

absolutely certain that this woman “would never hurt a soul”.

“She

was

class

personified.”

She

was

just

about

everything personified, if one were to believe the witnesses, and
from what Bublanski

could see it would be

virtually

impossible

to

produce an identikit picture of her. The witness accounts all depicted her in different terms, as if they were projecting their image of an ideal woman onto her, and so far they had no photographs from any surveillance camera.

It was

almost

laughable. Blomkvist said

that the woman was without a

shadow of doubt Camilla

Salander,

twin

sister

of

Lisbeth. But go back in the records for many years and

there was no trace of her. It was as if she had ceased to exist. If Camilla Salander were still alive, then it was under a new identity.

Bublanski especially did

not like it that there had been two unexplained deaths in the foster family she had left behind.

The

police

investigations at the time were deficient, full of loose threads and question marks

which

had

never

been

followed up.

Bublanski had read the

reports, ashamed that out of some bizarre respect for the family's

tragedy

his

colleagues had even failed to get to the bottom of the glaring problem that both the father and the daughter had emptied their bank accounts just before their deaths, or that in the very week that he

had been found hanged the father had started a letter to her which began:

“Camilla, why is it so important to you to destroy my life?”

This person who seemed to

have

enchanted

all

the

witnesses was shrouded in

ominous darkness.

It was now 8.00 in the morning and there were a

hundred

other

things

Bublanski should have been attending to, so he reacted with both irritation and guilt when he heard that he had a visitor. She was a woman

who had been interviewed by

Modig but who now insisted on meeting him. Afterwards he wondered if he had been especially receptive just then,

maybe because all he was expecting

was

further

problems. The woman in the doorway had a regal bearing but was not tall. She had dark, intense eyes which gave her a slightly

melancholy

look. She was dressed in a grey coat and a red dress that looked a bit like a sari.

“My name is Farah Sharif,”

she said. “I’m a professor of computer sciences, and I was a close friend of Frans Balder.”

“Yes,

of

course,”

Bublanski

said,

suddenly

embarrassed. “Take a seat, please. My apologies for the mess.”

“I’ve seen much worse.”

“Is that so? Well. To what do I owe this honour?”

“I was far too naive when I

spoke to your colleague.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I have more information now. I’ve had a long conversation

with

Professor Warburton.”

“That’s right. He’s been

looking for me too. But it’s been so chaotic I haven’t had time to call him back.”

“Steven is a professor of cybernetics at Stanford and a leading researcher in the field of technological singularity.

These days he works at the

Machine

Intelligence

Research Institute, whose aim is to ensure that Artificial Intelligence is a positive help to mankind rather than the opposite.”

“Well, that sounds good,”

Bublanski

said.

He

felt

uncomfortable whenever this topic came up.

“Steven lives somewhat in

a world of his own. He found

out what happened to Frans

only yesterday, and that’s why he didn’t call sooner.

But he told me that he had spoken to Frans as recently as Monday.”

“What

did

they

talk

about?”

“His research. You know,

Frans had been so secretive ever since he went off to the States. I was close to him, but not even I knew anything

about what he was doing. I

was arrogant enough to think I understood some of it at least, but now it turns out I was wrong.”

“In what way?”

“Frans had not only taken his old A.I. program a step further, he had also developed fresh algorithms and new

topographical material for

quantum computers.”

“I’m not sure I follow.”

“Quantum computers are computers based on quantum mechanics. They are many

thousand times faster in

certain

areas

than
conventional computers. The great advantage with quantum
computers
is
that
the
fundamental
constituent
quantum bits – qubits – can superposition themselves.”

“You’ll have to take me

slowly through that.”

“Not only can they take the binary positions one or zero as do traditional computers, they can also be both zero and one at the same time. At present quantum computers

are much too specialized and cumbersome. But Frans –

how can I best explain this to you? – would appear to have found ways to make them

easier, more flexible and self-learning.

He

was

onto

something great – at least potentially. But as well as feeling

pride

in

his

breakthrough, he was also

very worried – and that was obviously the reason he

called Steven Warburton.”

“Why was he worried?”

“In the long term, because he suspected his creation

could become a threat to the world, I imagine. But more immediately,

because

he

knew

things

about

the

N.S.A.”

“What sort of things?”

“There’s one aspect I know

nothing

about.

He

had

somehow stumbled upon the

messier

side

of

their

industrial

espionage.

But

there's another aspect I do have a lot of information on.

It's

no

secret

that

the

organization is working hard specifically

to

develop

quantum computers. For the N.S.A.

that

would

be

paradise, pure and simple. An effective quantum machine

would enable them to crack all encryptions, all digital security systems eventually, and after that no-one would be

safe

from

that

organization's watchful eye.”

“A
hideous
thought,”
Bublanski
said
with
surprising feeling.
“But there is actually an even
more

frightening

scenario: were such a thing to fall into the hands of major criminals,” Farah Sharif said.

“I see what you’re getting at.”

“So of course I’m keen to know what you’ve managed to get hold of from the men now under arrest.”

“Unfortunately

nothing

like that,” he said. “But these

men

are

not

exactly

outstanding intellects. I doubt they

would

even

pass

secondary-school maths.”

“So the real computer
genius got away?”

“I’m afraid so. He and a female
suspect
have
disappeared without trace.

They probably have a number
of identities.”

“Worrying.”

Bublanski

nodded

and

gazed into Farah Sharif's

dark eyes, which looked

beseechingly

at

him.

A

hopeful thought stopped him from
sinking
back
into
despair.

“I’m not sure what it
means,” he said.

“What?”

“We’ve had I.T. guys go

through Balder's computers.

Given

how

security-

conscious he was, it wasn't easy. You can imagine. But we managed. We had a spot of luck, you might say, and what we soon realized was that one computer must have been stolen.

"I suspected as much," she

said. "Damn it!"

"But

wait,

I

haven't

finished. We also understood that a number of machines had been connected to each

other, and that occasionally these had been connected to a supercomputer in Tokyo.”

“That sounds feasible.”

“We can confirm that a

large

file,

or

at

least

something big, had recently been deleted, and we haven't been able to restore it.”

“Are you suggesting Frans

might have destroyed his own

research?”

“I don’t want to jump to any
conclusions.

But

it

occurred to me while you
were telling me all this.”

“Don’t

you

think

the

murderer might have deleted it?”

“You mean that he first

copied it, and then removed it from his computers?”

“Yes.”

“I find that hard to believe.

The man was only in the

house for a very short while, he would never have had time

– let alone the ability – to do anything like that.”

“O.K.,
that
sounds
reassuring,
despite
everything,”
Sharif
said
doubtfully. “It’s just that ...”

Bublanski waited.

“I don’t think it fits with Frans’ character. Would he really destroy the greatest thing he’d ever done? That

would be like ... I don’t know ... chopping off his

own arm, or even worse:

killing a friend, destroying a life.”

“Sometimes one has to

make

a

big

sacrifice,”

Bublanski said thoughtfully.

“Destroy what one loves.”

“Or else there’s a copy

somewhere.”

“Or else there’s a copy

somewhere,” he repeated.

Suddenly he did something strange: he reached out his hand.

Farah

Sharif

did

not

understand. She looked at the hand as if she were expecting him to give her something.

But Bublanski decided not to let himself be discouraged.

“Do you know what my

rabbi says? That the mark of a man is his contradictions.

We can long to be away and

at home, both at the same time. I never knew Professor Balder, and he might have thought that I was just an old fool. But I do know one

thing: we can both love and fear our work, just as Balder seems to have both loved and

run away from his son. To be

alive, Professor Sharif, means not

being

completely

consistent. It means venturing out in many directions all at the same time, and I wonder if your friend didn't find himself in the throes of some sort of upheaval. Maybe he really did destroy his life's work. Maybe he revealed himself with all his inherent contradictions towards the end, and became a true human being in the best sense of the word."

"Do you think so?"

"We may never know. But he had changed, hadn't he?"

The custody hearing declared him unfit to look after his own son. Yet that's precisely what he did, and he even got the boy to blossom and begin

to draw.”

“That's

true,

Chief

Inspector.”

“Call me Jan. People

sometimes even call me

Officer Bubble.”

“Is that because you’re so bubbly?”

“Ha, no, I don’t think so somehow. But I do know one thing for sure.”

“And what’s that?”

“That you’re ...”

He got no further, but

neither did he need to. Farah Sharif gave him a smile

which in all its simplicity restored Bublanski's belief in life and in God.

At 8.00 Salander got out of her bed on Fiskargatan. Once more she had not managed to get much sleep, and not only because she had been working at the encrypted

N.S.A. file without getting anywhere at all. She had also been listening out for the sound of footsteps on the stairs and every now and then she checked her alarm and the

surveillance camera on the landing.

She was no wiser than

anyone else as to whether her sister had left the country.

After her humiliation on

Ingarö, it was by no means impossible that Camilla was preparing a new attack, with even

greater

force.

The

N.S.A. could also, at any moment, march into the
apartment.

Salander

was

under no illusions on either point. But this morning she dismissed
all that. She went to the bathroom with resolute steps and took off
her top to check her bullet wound. She thought

it

was

finally

beginning to look better, and in a mad moment she decided to take herself off to the boxing club on Hornsgatan for a session.

To drive out pain with pain.

Afterwards she was sitting exhausted in the changing room. She hardly had the

energy to think. Her mobile buzzed. She ignored it. She went into the shower and let the warm water sprinkle over

her. Gradually her thoughts cleared,

and

August's

drawing reappeared in her mind. But this time it wasn't the

illustration

of

the

murderer which caught her

attention – it was something at the bottom of the paper.

Salander had only had a

very brief glimpse of the finished work at the summer house on Ingarö; at the time she had been concentrating on sending it to Bublanski and Modig. If she had given it

any thought at all, then like everyone else she would have

been

fascinated

by

the

detailed rendering. But now her photographic memory

focused on the equation

August had written at the bottom of the page, and she stepped out of the shower deep in thought. The only thing was, she could hardly hear herself think. Obinze

was raising hell outside the changing room.

“Shut up,” she shouted

back. “I’m thinking!”

But that did not help much.

Obinze

was

absolutely

furious, and anyone other

than

Salander

would

understand why. Obinze had been shocked at how weak

and half-hearted her effort at the punchbag was, and had worried when she began to

hang her head and grimace in pain. In the end he had

surprised her by rushing over and rolling up the sleeve of her T-shirt, then to discover the bullet wound. He had

gone completely crazy, and evidently had not calmed

down even now.

“You’re an idiot, do you

know that? A lunatic!” he shouted.

She was too weak to answer. Her strength deserted her completely, and what she had remembered from the

drawing now faded from her mind. She sank down on the bench in the changing room next to Jamila Achebe. She used to both box and sleep with Jamila, usually in that order. When they fought their toughest

bouts

it

often

seemed like one long, wild

foreplay. On a few occasions their behaviour in the shower had not been entirely decent.

Neither of them set much store by etiquette.

“I actually agree with that noisy

bastard

out

there.

You’re not quite right in the head,” Jamila said.

“Maybe so,” Salander said.

“That wound looks nasty.”

“It’s healing.”

“But you needed to box?”

“Apparently.”

“Shall we go back to my
place?”

Salander did not answer.

Her mobile was buzzing

again in her black bag. Three text messages with the same content from a withheld

number. As she read them she

balled up her fists and looked lethal. Jamila felt that it might be better to have sex with Salander another day instead.

Blomkvist had woken at 6.00

with some great ideas for the article, and on his way to the office the draft came together in his mind with no effort at all. He worked in deep

concentration at the magazine and barely noticed what was going

on

around

him,

although

sometimes

he

surfaced with thoughts of

Zander.

He refused to give up hope, but he feared that Zander had given his life for the story, and he did what he could to honour his colleague with

every sentence he wrote. On one level he intended the report to be a murder story about Frans and August

Balder – an account of an eight-year-old autistic boy who sees his father shot, and who despite his disability

finds a way of striking back.

But

on

another

level

Blomkvist wanted it to be an instructive narrative about a new world of surveillance

and espionage, where the

boundaries between the legal and the criminal have been erased. The words came

pouring out, but still it was not without its difficulties.

Through an old police

contact he had got hold of the

paperwork on the unsolved murder of Kajsa Falk, the girlfriend of one of the

leading figures in Svavelsjö M.C. The killer had never been identified and none of the people questioned during the investigation had been willing to contribute anything of value, but Blomkvist

nevertheless gathered that a violent rift had torn apart the motorcycle club and that

there was an insidious terror among the gang members of a “Lady Zala”, as one of the witnesses put it.

Despite

considerable

efforts, the police had not managed to discover who or what the name referred to.

But there was not the slightest doubt in Blomkvist's mind

that

“Lady

Zala”

was

Camilla, and that she was behind a whole series of other

crimes, both in Sweden and abroad. But it was not easy to unearth any evidence, and

that exasperated him. For the time being he referred to her in
the
article
by
her
codename, Thanos.

Yet the biggest challenge
was not Camilla or her
shadowy connections to the Russian

Duma.

What

bothered Blomkvist most was

that he knew Needham would

never have come all the way to Sweden and leaked top-secret information if he were not bent on hiding something

even bigger. Needham was no

fool, and he in turn knew that Blomkvist was not stupid

either. He had therefore not tried to make any part of his account too pretty.

On the contrary, he painted
a fairly dreadful picture of the N.S.A. And yet ... a closer
inspection of the information told Blomkvist that, all in all,
Needham was describing an
intelligence agency which
both functioned well and
behaved reasonably decently, if you ignored the revolting bunch of
criminals in the department
known
as

Protection

of

Strategic

Technologies – the self-same department, as it happens, which

had

prevented

Needham from nailing his hacker.

The American must have

wanted to do serious harm to a few specific colleagues, but rather than sink the whole of his organization, he preferred to give it a softer landing in an already inevitable crash.

So

Blomkvist

was

not

especially surprised or angry when Berger appeared behind

him and with a worried

expression handed him a T.T.

telegram.

“Does this scupper our
story?” she said.

The telegram read:

**Two senior executives at the N.S.A., Jacob Barclay and Brian
Abbot, have been**

**arrested on suspicion of serious financial misconduct and
are on indefinite leave awaiting trial.**

**“This is a blot on the reputation
of**

our

organization and we have

spared no effort in tackling the issues and holding those guilty to account. Anyone working for the N.S.A. must have the highest ethical standards and we undertake to be as transparent during the judicial process as we can,

while

remaining

sensitive to our national security interests,” N.S.A.

chief

Admiral

Charles

O'Connor has told A.P.

The telegram did not

contain very much apart from

the long quote; it said nothing

about Balder's murder and nothing that could be linked to the events in Stockholm.

But Blomkvist understood

what Berger meant. Now that

the news was out, the

Washington Post and the *New York Times* and a whole pack of

serious

American

journalists would descend on the story, and it would be impossible to anticipate what they might dig up.

“Not

good,”

he

said

calmly. “But not a surprise.”

“Really?”

“It’s part of the same

strategy that led the N.S.A. to seek

me

out:

damage

limitation. They want to take back the initiative.”

“How do you mean?”

“There’s a reason why they

leaked this to me. I could tell right away that there was something odd about it. Why

did

Needham

insist

on

coming to talk to me here in Stockholm, and at 5.00 in the morning?”

“So you think that what

he’s doing is sanctioned

higher up?”

“I suspected it, but at first I didn’t get what he was doing.

I just felt that something was wrong. Then I talked to

Salander.”

“And that clarified things?”

“I realized that Needham knew exactly what she’d dug up during her hacker attack, and he had every reason to fear that I would learn all about it. He wanted to limit the damage.”

“Even

so,

he

hardly

presented you with a rosy picture.”

“He knew I wouldn’t be

satisfied with anything too pretty. I suspect he gave me

just enough to keep me happy and let me have my scoop, and to prevent me from

digging any deeper.”

“He’s

in

for

a

disappointment then.”

“Let’s at least hope so. But

I can't see how to break through. The N.S.A. is a closed door.”

“Even

for

an

old

bloodhound

like

Mikael

Blomkvist?”

“Even for him.”

CHAPTER 30

25.xi

The text message had said

<Until next time, sister!> Salander

could not work out if it had been sent three times in error or if it was an absurd attempt to be over-explicit. It made no difference now anyway.

The message was evidently

from Camilla, but it added nothing to what Salander already knew. The events on Ingarö had only deepened the ancient hatred – she was certain Camilla would come after her again, having got so close.

It was not the wording of the texts that had upset Salander so much as the thoughts it had brought to mind, the memory of what she had seen on the steep rock slope in the early

morning light when she and August had crouched on the narrow ledge in falling snow, gunfire rattling above them.

August had not been wearing a jacket or shoes and was shivering violently as the seconds went by and Salander

realized

how

desperately

compromised their situation was. She had a child to take care of and a pathetic pistol for a weapon, while the

bastards up there had assault rifles. She had to take them by surprise, otherwise she and August would be slaughtered

like lambs. She listened to the men's footsteps and the direction they were shooting in, even their breathing and the rustle of their clothes.

But the strange thing was, when she finally saw her chance, she hesitated. Crucial moments went by as she broke a small twig into pieces on the rock ledge in front of them. Only then did she spring to her feet right in front of the men and, taking advantage of

that

brief

millisecond of surprise, she fired right away, two, three times.
From experience she knew that moments like these

burned

an

indelible

impression on your mind, as if not only your body and muscles
are sharpened, but also your perception.

Every detail shone with a strange precision and she saw

each ripple in the landscape in front of her, as if through a camera zoom. She noted the surprise and fear in the men's eyes,

the

wrinkles

and

irregularities in their faces and clothes, and the weapons which they were waving and firing off at random, narrowly missing their targets.

But

her

strongest

impression did not come from

any of that. It came from a

silhouette further up the slope which she caught out of the corner of her eye, not

menacing in itself, but it made more of an impact on her than the men she had shot. The silhouette was that of her sister. Salander would have

recognized

her

a

kilometre away, even though they had not seen each other for years. The air itself was poisoned by her presence and

afterwards

Salander

wondered if she should have shot her too.

Camilla stood there a

moment too long. It was

careless of her to be out on the rock slope in the first place, but presumably she

could

not

resist

the

temptation of seeing her sister being

executed.

Salander

recalled

how

she

half

squeezed the trigger and felt a

holy rage beating in her chest.

Yet she hesitated for a split second, and that was enough.

Camilla threw herself behind a rock and a scrawny figure appeared on the terrace and started shooting. Salander

jumped back onto the ledge and tumbled down the slope with August.

Now, walking away from

the boxing club, thinking

back to it all, Salander's body

tightened in readiness for a new battle. It struck her that perhaps she should not go home at all, but leave the country for a while. But

something else drove her

back to her desk; what she had seen in her mind's eye in the shower, before reading Camilla's texts, and which was now occupying her

thoughts more and more.

August's equation:

$$N = 3034267$$

$$E : y^2 = x^3 - x - 20; P = (3.2)$$

From a mathematical point

of view, there was nothing unique or extraordinary about it.

But

what

was

so

remarkable was that August had started with the random number she had given him at Ingarö and taken that further to develop a

considerably

better elliptic curve than the

one she herself had made.

When the boy had not wanted

to go to sleep, she had left it on the bedside table. She had not got any answer then, nor even the slightest reaction, and she had gone to bed

convinced

that

August

understood

nothing

about

mathematical

abstractions,

that he was only a kind of human calculator of prime-number factorizations.

But, my God ... she had been wrong. August had

stayed up in the night not just drawing;

he

had

also

perfected

her

own

mathematics. She did not

even take off her boots or leather

jacket,

she

just

stomped into her apartment and opened the encrypted

N.S.A. file along with her program

for

the

elliptic

curves.

Then she rang Hanna Balder.

Hanna had scarcely slept

because she had not brought any of her pills with her. Yet the hotel and its surroundings still

cheered

her.

The

breathhtaking

mountain

scenery reminded her of how cramped her own existence

had become. Slowly she

began to unwind, and even the deep-seated fear in her body was beginning to let go.

But that could have been

wishful thinking. She also felt slightly at sea in such

extravagant surroundings.

There had been a time

when she would sail into

rooms like these with perfect self-assurance: *Look at me, here I come*. Now she was timid and trembling and had

difficulty

eating

anything

even though the breakfast

was lavish. August sat beside her, compulsively writing out his series of numbers, and he was not eating either, but he drank unbelievable volumes

of freshly pressed orange

juice.

Her new mobile rang,

startling her. But it had to be the woman who had sent
them here. Nobody else had
the number, so far as she knew, and no doubt she just wanted to
know if they had arrived safely. So Hanna
answered
cheerfully
and
launched into an effusive
description of how wonderful

everything at the hotel was.

She

was

brusquely

interrupted:

“Where are you?”

“We’re having breakfast.”

“In that case stop now and go up to your room. August and I have work to do.”

“Work?”

“I’m going to send over
some equations I want him to
take a look at. Is that clear?”

“I don’t understand.”

“Just show them to August,
and then call me and tell me what he’s written.”

“O.K.”

Hanna

said,

nonplussed.

She grabbed a couple of croissants and a cinnamon bun and walked with August to the lifts.

It was only at the outset that August helped her. But it was enough. Later she would see her mistakes more clearly and make new improvements to

her

program.

Deep

in

concentration she worked on

for hour after hour, until the sky darkened outside and the snow began to fall again.

Then suddenly – in one of those moments she would

remember

for

ever

–

something strange happened

to the file. It fell apart. A shock ran through her. She punched the air.

She had found the secret

keys

and

cracked

the

document, and for a little

while she was so overcome by this that she hardly managed to read. Then she began to examine the contents, and her amazement grew with every passing moment. Could this even be possible? It was

more

explosive than anything she had imagined, and the reason it had all been written down could only have been that someone believed the R.S.A.

algorithm was impenetrable.

But here it was, black on white, all that filth and dirt.

The text was full of internal jargon

and

strange

abbreviations

and

cryptic

references, but that was not a problem for Salander since she was familiar with the subject. She had got through about four-fifths of the text when the doorbell rang.

She chose to ignore it, probably only the postman.

But then she remembered

Camilla's text message and checked the camera on the landing on her computer. She

stiffened.

It was not Camilla but her other bugbear, the one she had almost forgotten with

everything else that was

going on. Ed the fucking Ned.

He looked nothing like his

pictures online, but he was unmistakable all the same. He looked

grumpy

and

determined, and Salander's

brain started ticking. How had he managed to track her down?
What should she do?

The best she could come up with was to send the N.S.A.
file off to Blomkvist on their P.G.P. link.

Then she shut down her
computer and hauled herself
to her feet to open the door.

What
had

happened

to

Bublanski? Sonja Modig was at a loss to understand it. The pained expression he had

been wearing in recent weeks

had vanished, as if blown away. Now he smiled and

hummed to himself. It's true that there was plenty to be pleased about. The murderer

had been caught. August Balder had survived despite two attempts on his life, and the details of Frans Balder's conflict and connection with the research company Solifon

were becoming clearer.

But

many

questions

remained, and the Bublanski she knew was not one to rejoice without good reason.

He was more inclined to self-doubt, even in moments of triumph.

She

could

not

imagine what had got into him. He walked around the corridors beaming. Even now,

as he sat in his office reading the

dull

report

on

the

questioning

of

Zigmund

Eckerwald

by

the

San

Francisco police, there was a smile on his lips.

“Sonja, my dear. There you
are!”

She

decided

not

to

comment on the unwonted

enthusiasm of his greeting and went straight to the point.

“Jan Holtser is dead.”

“Oh no.”

“And with him went our

last hope of learning more about the Spiders.”

“So you think he was about

to open up?”

“There was a chance, at

least.”

“Why do you say that?”

“He

broke

down

completely when his daughter
showed up.”

“I didn’t know. What
happened?”

“He has a daughter called Olga,” Modig said. “She
came from Helsinki when she

heard that her father had been injured. But when I talked to her and she heard that he had

tried to kill a child, she went berserk.”

“In what way?”

“She stormed in to him and

said something incredibly

aggressive in Russian.”

“Could you understand

what she was saying?”

“Something like he could
die alone and she hated him.”

“So she laid into him.”

“Yes, and afterwards she
told me that she would do
everything in her power to help
us
with
the

investigation.”

“And how did Holtser
react?”

“That’s what I was saying.

For a moment I thought we had him. He was totally

destroyed, had tears in his eyes. I’m not really big on that Catholic
teaching which says that our moral worth is determined just
before we

die. But it was almost touching to see. This man who had done so
much evil was crushed.”

“My rabbi—”

“Please, Jan, don’t start

with your rabbi now. Let me go on. Holtser said what a terrible person he had been, so I told him that he should as a

Christian

take

the

opportunity to confess, and tell us who he was working

for, and at that moment I’m convinced he came close. He hesitated and his eyes flitted from side to side. But instead of

confessing he began to talk about Stalin.”

“Stalin?”

“About how Stalin didn’t

punish only the guilty but also

their

children

and

grandchildren and the entire family. I think he was trying

to say that his boss was the same.”

“So he was worried about
his daughter.”

“However much she may
have hated him, he was. I tried to tell him that we could get the girl
onto a witness protection programme, but
Holtser had started to drift away. He fell unconscious
and died an hour later.”

“Anything else?”

“Only that someone we’re beginning to think may be a
superintelligence

has

vanished and that we still have no trace of Andrei

Zander.”

“I know, I know.”

“We’ve at least made

progress

on

one

front,”

Modig said. “You remember
the
man
identified
by
Amanda on August’s drawing
of the traffic light?”
“The former actor?”
“That’s right, he’s called Roger

Winter.

Amanda

interviewed

him

for

background information, to

find out whether there was a relationship between him and the boy or Balder, and I don't think she expected to get much out of it. But Winter seemed to be badly shaken, and before Amanda had even

begun to put pressure on him

he confessed to a whole catalogue of sins.”

“Really?”

“And we’re not talking

innocent stories. You know, Westman and Winter have

been friends since they were young

men

at

Revolutionsteatern and they used to get together to drink in the afternoons at the

apartment in Torsgatan when Hanna was out. August would

sit in the next room doing his puzzles, and neither of the men paid him much attention.

But on one of these occasions the boy had been given a thick maths book by his

mother – it was clearly way above his level, but he still leafed through it frantically, making excited noises. Lasse became irritated and grabbed the book from the boy and threw it in the bin. It seems

August

went

completely

crazy. He had some sort of fit, and Lasse kicked him several times.”

“That’s appalling.”

“That

was

just

the

beginning. After that August became very odd, Roger said.

The boy took to glaring at them with this weird look, and one day Roger found that

his jeans jacket had been cut into tiny pieces, and another

day someone had emptied out all the beer in the fridge and smashed all the bottles of spirits. It turned into some kind of trench warfare, and I suspect that Roger and Lasse in their alcoholic delirium began to imagine all sorts of strange things about the boy, and even became scared of him.

The

psychological

aspect of this isn't easy to understand. Roger said it

made him feel like shit, and he never talked about it with Lasse afterwards. He didn't want to beat the boy. But he couldn't stop himself. It was as if he got his own childhood back, he said."

"What on earth did he

mean by that?"

"It's not altogether clear.

Apparently Roger Winter has a disabled younger brother.

Throughout their childhood

Roger
was
a
constant
disappointment, while his
talented
brother
was
showered with praise and

distinctions, and appreciated in every possible way. I guess that bred some bitterness.

Maybe

Roger

was

subconsciously getting his

own back on his brother. Or else ...”

“Or else what?”

“He put it in an odd way.

He said it felt as if he were trying to beat the shame out of himself.”

“That’s sick.”

“Yes. Strangest thing of all

is the way he suddenly

confessed everything. It was almost as if he wanted to be arrested. Amanda said he was

limping and had two black eyes.”

“Peculiar.”

“Isn’t it? But there’s one other thing which surprises me even more,” Modig said.

“And what’s that?”

“That

my

boss,

that

brooding old grouch, has

become a little ray of

sunshine.”

Bublanski

looked

embarrassed. “So it shows.”

“It shows.”

“Well, yes,” he stammered.

“It’s just that a woman has

agreed to come out to dinner with me.”

“You haven’t gone and

fallen in love, have you?”

“It’s

just

dinner,”

Bublanski said, blushing.

Needham did not enjoy it.

But he knew the rules of the game. It was like being back in
Dorchester. Whatever you did, you could not back

down. If Salander wanted to play hardball, he would show

her hardball. He glared at her.

But it did not get him very far.

She glared back and did

not say a word. It felt like a duel, and in the end Needham

looked away. This whole

thing was ridiculous. The girl had been unmasked and

crushed after all. He had cracked her secret identity

and tracked her down, and she should be grateful that he wasn't marching in with the Marines to arrest her.

“You think you’re pretty tough, don’t you?” he said.

“I don’t like surprise visits.”

“I don’t like people who break into my system, so

we're square. Maybe you'd
like to know how I found you?"

"I couldn't care less."

"It was via your company
in Gibraltar. Not too smart to call it Wasp Enterprises."

"Apparently not."

"For a smart girl, you make
a lot of mistakes."

"For a clever boy, you

work for a pretty rotten set-up.”

“You got me there. But

we’re a necessary evil in this wicked world.”

“Especially with guys like Jonny Ingram around.”

He was not expecting that.

He really was not expecting that. But he would not let it show.

“You have quite a sense of

humour,” he said.

“It’s hilarious, isn’t it? To have people murdered and to work together with villains in the Russian Duma making

megabucks and saving your

own

skin,

that’s

really

comical, isn’t it?” she said.

For a moment he could

barely breathe. He could no longer keep up the pretence.

Where the hell had she got that from? He felt dizzy. But then he realized – and that slowed his pulse a little – that she was bluffing. If he

believed her even for one second it was only because in his worst moments he too had

imagined that Ingram might be guilty of something like that. But Needham knew

better than anyone that there was not a shred of evidence of such a thing.

“Don’t try to bullshit me,”

he growled. “I have the same material you do and a lot more besides.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that, Ed, unless you too have the private keys to Ingram’s R.S.A. algorithm?”

Needham looked at her and

told himself that this could not be true. Surely she could not have

cracked

the

encryption? Not even he, with all the resources and experts at his disposal, had thought it was even worth trying.

But

now

she

was

suggesting ... No, it was

impossible. Maybe she had a

mole

in

Ingram's

inner

circle? No, that was just as far-fetched.

"This is how it is, Ed," she

said in a new authoritative tone. "You told Blomkvist

that you would leave me in peace if I told you how I carried out my data breach.

It's possible you're telling the truth there. It's also possible that you're lying, or that you won't have any say in the

matter anyway. You could get the sack. I don't see any case at all for trusting you or the people you work for."

Needham took a deep

breath.

"I respect your attitude," he said. "But I'm a man of my word. Not because I'm a

particularly decent person.

I'm a vengeful maniac, just like you, young lady. But I wouldn't have survived as

long as I have if I let people down when it matters. You can either believe that or not.

I swear to you though, I will make your life hell if you don't open up."

"You're a tough guy," she said. "But you're also a proud bugger, aren't you? You need

to make absolutely sure that no-one ever gets wind of my breach, whatever the cost.

But

as

to

that,

I'm

ridiculously well prepared.

Every detail of it would be made public before you even have time to blink. I don't in fact want to do it, but I *will* humiliate you if I have to."

"You're full of shit."

"I wouldn't have survived

either if I was full of shit,"

she said. "I hate this society where we're watched over all

the time. I've had enough of Big Brother and authorities in

my life. But I'm prepared to do something for you, Ed. If you can keep your trap shut, I can give you information that will put you in a stronger position, and help you clear out the rotten apples in Fort Meade. I'm not telling you anything about my breach –

only because it's a matter of principle for me. But I can help you get your own back on the bastards.”

Ed stared at the strange woman in front of him. Then

he did something which

would surprise him for a long time.

He burst out laughing. He laughed until he cried.

CHAPTER 31

2.xii–3.xii

Levin woke up in a good

mood at Häringe castle after a

long conference about the digitalization of the media, which had ended with a big party where the champagne

and hard liquor had flowed. A failure

of

a

trade-union

representative

from

the

Norwegian

newspaper

Kveldsbladet had remarked spitefully that Serner's parties
"grow more lavish the more people you sack", and made a
bit of scene which resulted in

Levin getting red wine on his tailor-made jacket. But he was happy to let him have that. Especially since it had enabled him to get Natalie Foss up to his hotel room in the small hours. Natalie was twenty-seven and sexy as

hell, and despite the fact that he was drunk Levin had

managed to have sex with her

both last night and this

morning.

Now it was already 9.00

and his mobile was pinging and he had more of a

hangover than was good for him, bearing in mind all the things he had to do. On the other

hand

he

was

a

champion in this discipline.

“Work hard, play hard” was his motto. And Natalie, Jesus!

– how many fifty-year-olds could pull a bird like that?

But now he had to get up. He

was dizzy as he lurched to the bathroom for a pee. Then he checked his share portfolio. It was usually a good way to start hungover mornings. He picked up his mobile and

went into Internet banking.

Something must be wrong,

some technical mishap he

could not understand. His

portfolio had crashed, and as he sat there, shaking and skimming through his assets,

he

noticed

something

peculiar. His large holding in Solifon had as good as

evaporated. He was beside

himself as he went into the stock-exchange sites and saw the

same

headline

everywhere:

THE N.S.A. AND
SOLIFON
CONTRACTED
FOR THE
MURDER OF
PROFESSOR
FRANS BALDER.
MILLENNIUM
MAGAZINE

REVELATIONS

SHOCK THE

WORLD.

What he did next is

unclear. He probably yelled and swore and banged his

fists on the table. He vaguely

remembered Natalie waking up, asking what was going on. But the only thing he knew for sure was that he kneeled for a long time over the toilet bowl, vomiting as if there were no end to it.

Grane's desk at Säpo had

been tidied. She would not be coming back. Now she sat there for a little while, leaning back in her chair and reading *Millennium*. The first page was not what she had expected from a magazine serving up the scoop of the century. It was black, elegant, sombre.

There

were

no

pictures. At the top it said: IN MEMORY OF

ANDREI ZANDER

And further down:

THE MURDER OF

FRANS BALDER

AND THE STORY

OF HOW THE

RUSSIAN MAFIA

GOT TOGETHER

WITH THE N.S.A.

AND AMERICA'S

LEADING

TECHNOLOGY

COMPANY

Page two consisted of a close-up of Zander. Even

though Grane had never met him, she was moved. Zander looked beautiful and a little vulnerable. His smile was

searching, tentative. There was

something

at

once

intense and unsure about him.

In an accompanying text

Erika Berger wrote about

how Zander's parents had

been killed by a bomb in

Sarajevo. She went on to say that he had loved *Millennium* magazine, the poet Leonard Cohen

and

Antonio

Tabucchi's

novel

Pereira

Maintains. He dreamed of the great love and the great

scoop. His favourite films were "Dark Eyes" by Nikita Mikhalkov

and

“Love

Actually” by Richard Curtis.

Berger praised his report on Stockholm’s homeless as a piece of classic journalism.

And even though Zander

hated people who offended

others, he himself refused to speak ill of anyone. The piece went on:

As I write this, my hands are shaking. Yesterday our friend and colleague Andrei Zander was found dead on a freighter in Hammarbyhamnen. He had

been tortured, and had suffered terribly. I will live with that pain for the rest of my life.

But I am also proud to have had the privilege of working with him. I have never met such a dedicated journalist and genuinely good person. Andrei was twenty-six years old. He loved life and he loved

journalism. He wanted to

expose injustices and help the vulnerable and displaced. He was murdered because he tried to protect a small boy called August

Balder and, as we

reveal in this issue one of the biggest scandals in modern times, we honour Andrei in every sentence. In his report,

Mikael Blomkvist writes:

“Andrei believed in love. He

believed in a better world and a more just society. He was the best of us.”

The report ran to more than

thirty pages of the magazine and was perhaps the best

piece of journalistic prose Grane had ever read. She

sometimes had tears in her eyes, but still she smiled when she came to the words:

Säpo's star analyst Gabriella Grane

demonstrated

outstanding civic courage.

The basic story was simple.

A group of individuals under Commander Jonny Ingram –

who ranked just below the N.S.A. head, Admiral Charles

O'Connor, and had close

contacts with the White

House and Congress – had

begun to exploit the vast numbers of trade secrets in

the hands of his organization for their own gain. He had been assisted by a group of business-intelligence analysts at

Solifon's

research

department "Y".

If the matter had stopped there, it would have been a scandal which was in some way comprehensible. But the course of events

followed its own evil own logic when a criminal group – the Spiders

– entered the drama. Mikael Blomkvist had evidence to

show how Jonny Ingram had got

together

with

the

notorious

Russian

Duma

member Ivan Gribanov and

“Thanos”,

the

mysterious

leader of the Spiders, to plunder tech companies of

ideas and new technology

worth astronomical sums of money, and to sell it all on.

But they really plumbed the

depths of moral depravity when Professor Frans Balder picked up their tracks and it was decided to eliminate him.

That

was

the

most

astonishing part of the story.

One of the most senior

executives at the N.S.A. had known that a leading Swedish

researcher was going to be murdered and did not lift a finger to prevent it.

It was not the account of the political quagmire that most engaged Grane, but

rather the human drama.

There Blomkvist's gifts as a writer were on full display.

She shuddered at the creeping realization that we live in a twisted world

where

everything, both big and

small,
is
subject
to
surveillance,
and
where
anything worth money will
always be exploited.

Just as she finished reading
she noticed someone standing
in the doorway. It was Helena Kraft, beautifully dressed as always.
Grane could not help
remembering how she had
suspected Kraft of being the leak in the investigation.
What she had taken to be guilty shame had been Kraft's regret at
the unprofessional
way

in

which

the

investigation

was

being

conducted – at least that is what she had been told during their long conversation after Mårten Nielsen confessed and

was arrested.

“I can’t begin to say how sorry I am to see you go,”

Kraft said.

“Everything has its time.”

“Do you have any idea
what you’re going to do?”

“I’m moving to New York.

I want to work in human

rights, and, as you know, I’ve had an offer on the table from the
U.N. for some time.”

“It’s

a

loss

for

us,

Gabriella. But you deserve it.”

“So my betrayal’s been

forgiven?”

“Not by all of us, I can assure you. But I see it as a sign of your good character.”

“Thanks, Helena. Will I see

you

later

at

the

Pressklubben’s memorial for Andrei Zander?”

“I’m afraid I have to do a presentation

for

the

government on this whole

mess. But later this evening I'll raise a glass to young Zander,

and

to

you,

Gabriella.”

Alona Casales was sitting at a distance, contemplating the panic with an inward smile.

She

observed

Admiral

O'Connor crossing the floor, looking

like

a

bullied

schoolboy rather than the

head of the world's most

powerful

intelligence

organization. But then all the powerful figures at the N.S.A.

were feeling put-upon and

pathetic today, all of them

apart from Needham, that is.

Needham was not in a

good mood either. He waved his arms around and was
sweaty and bilious. But he exuded all his usual authority.

It was obvious that even

O'Connor was afraid of him.

Needham had come back

from Stockholm with real

dynamite, and had caused a huge row and insisted on a complete
shake-up

throughout the organization.

The head of the N.S.A. was not going to thank him for that; he probably felt like sending Needham to Siberia –

immediately and for ever.

But there was nothing he

could do. He looked small as

he

approached

Needham,

who did not even bother to turn

in

his

direction.

Needham ignored the head of

the N.S.A. in the same way

he ignored all the other poor bastards he had no time for, and
plainly nothing improved

for

O'Connor

once

the

conversation got going.

For the most part Needham

seemed dismissive and, even though Casales could not hear what was going on, she could

imagine what was being said,

or rather, what was not being said. Over the course of her own long conversations with

Needham he refused to say one word about the way he had

got

hold

of

the

information. He was not,

even on a single point, going to compromise, and she

respected that.

Now

he

seemed

determined to exploit the

situation for all it was worth, and Casales solemnly swore that she would stand up for integrity in the agency and

give Needham as much backing as she could if he ran into any problems. She also swore to herself that she would call Gabriella Grane in a final bid to ask her out, if the rumour was true that she was on her way over here.

Needham was not in fact

deliberately

ignoring

the

N.S.A. head. But nor was he

going to interrupt what he was doing – yelling at two of his controllers – just because the admiral was standing at his desk. Only after about a minute did he address him and then in fact he said something quite friendly, not to

ingratiate

himself

or

compensate

for

his

nonchalance, but because he really meant it.

“You did a good job at the press conference.”

“Did I?” the admiral said.

“It was hell.”

“Well, you can thank me

then, for giving you time to prepare.”

“Thank *you*? Are you kidding? Every news site

around the world is posting pictures of Ingram and me together.

I'm

guilty

by

association.”

“In that case for Christ’s sake keep your own people in

line from now on.”

“How dare you talk to me like that?”

“I’ll talk however the hell I want. We’re in the middle of a crisis and I’m responsible for security. I don’t get paid for being polite.”

“Watch what you say ...”

O’Connor began.

But he was completely thrown

when

Needham

suddenly stood up, big as a bear, either to stretch his back or to assert his authority.

“I sent you to Sweden to clean all this up,” the admiral went on.
“Instead when you came back everything was a complete
disaster.”

“The disaster had already
happened,”

Needham

snapped. “You know it as well as I do.”

“So how do you explain all
the shit that ended up in that Swedish magazine?”

“I’ve explained it to you a thousand times.”

“Right,

your

hacker.

Guesswork and bullshit is

what I call it.”

Needham had promised to

keep Wasp out of this mess,

and it was a promise he was going to keep.

“Top-quality bullshit in

that case, don't you think?"

he said. "That damn hacker, whoever he may be, must

have cracked Ingram's files and

leaked

them

to

Millennium. That's bad, I agree. But do you know

what's worse? What's worse is that we had the chance to cut the hacker's balls off and

put an end to the leaking. But then we were ordered to shut down our investigation. Let's not pretend you went out of your way to stand up for me then."

"I sent you to Stockholm."

"But you called off my

guys

and

our

entire

investigation

came

to

a

grinding halt. Now the tracks are covered, and what good would it do us if it came out

that some lousy little hacker had taken us for a ride?”

“Not a lot, probably. But we can still make trouble for *Millennium* and that reporter Blomström, believe you me.”

“It’s Blomkvist, actually.

Mikael Blomkvist. And be

my guest. You'd really do well in the popularity stakes if you
marched in on Swedish

territory and arrested the world's

most

celebrated

journalist

right

now,"

Needham said.

O'Connor

muttered

something

inaudible

and

stormed off.

Needham knew as well as

anyone that O'Connor was

fighting for political survival and could not afford to make any reckless moves. He

himself was fed up with

working his fingers to the bone, and he loped over to

Casales to chat with her instead. He was in the mood for something irresponsible.

“Let’s go get hammered

and forget this whole fucking mess.”

Hanna Balder was standing in

her snow boots on the little hill outside Hotel Schloss Elmau. She gave August a

push and watched him whizz

down the slope on the old-fashioned wooden toboggan

the hotel had lent them. He came to a stop near a brown barn. Even though there was a glimmer of sunshine, a light snow was falling. There was hardly any wind. In the far distance the mountain peaks touched the sky and wide-open spaces stretched out

before her.

Hanna had never stayed in such a wonderful place, and August was recovering well, not least thanks to Charles Edelman's efforts. But none of it was easy. She felt terrible. Even here on the slope she had stopped twice and felt her chest. Withdrawal from

her

pills

–

benzodiazepines – was worse than

she

could

have

imagined. At night she would

lie in bed curled up like a shrimp and examine her life in the most unsparing light, sometimes banging her fist against the wall and crying.

She cursed Lasse Westman,

and she cursed herself.

And yet ... there were

times when she felt strangely purified and occasionally she came close to being happy.

There were moments when
August was sitting with his
equations and his number series and he would even
answer her questions – albeit in
monosyllables
and
somewhat odd terms.
The boy was still an

enigma to her. Sometimes he spoke in numbers, in high numbers to the power of even

higher numbers, and seemed to think that she would

understand. But something

had indeed changed, and she

would never forget how she had seen August sitting at the desk in their hotel room that first day, writing out long winding

equations

which

poured

from

him

with

amazing fluency, and which she photographed and sent on to the woman in Stockholm.

Late that evening a text

message had come in on her Blackphone:

<Tell August we've cracked the code!>

She had never seen her son

so happy and proud. Even

though she could have no

idea what it was all about and never mentioned it, even to Edelman, it meant the world to her. She began to feel proud

too,

immeasurably

proud.

She developed a passionate

interest in savant syndrome,

and

when

Charles

was

staying at the hotel they often sat up after August had gone to bed and talked into the small hours about her son's abilities,

and

about

everything else too.

She was not sure that it had

been such a good idea to jump into bed with Charles.

Yet she was not sure it had been a bad idea either.

Charles reminded her of

Frans. They formed a little family of sorts: she, August, Charles, Charlotte Greber, the rather strict but kind teacher, and

the

Danish

mathematician Jens Nyrup

who visited them. Their
whole stay was a voyage of discovery into her son's
remarkable universe. As she now sauntered down the
snowy hill and August got up
from the toboggan, she felt,
for the first time in ages, she would
become
a
better

mother, and she would sort out her life.

Blomkvist

could

not

understand why his body felt so heavy. It was as if he were trying to move through water.

And

yet

there

was

a

commotion going on out

there, a victory celebration.

Nearly

every

newspaper,

website, radio station and T.V. channel wanted to

interview him. He did not accept any of the requests.

When

Millennium

had

published big news stories in the past, he and Berger had not been sure whether other media companies would latch

on to them. They had needed

to think strategically, to make sure they were syndicated in

the

right

places

and

sometimes even shared their scoop. Now none of that was necessary.

The news broke with a

bang all by itself. When

N.S.A.

head

Charles

O'Connor and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Stella Parker
appeared at a joint press conference
to
apologize
publicly
for
what
had
happened, the last lingering

doubts about the story's credibility were dispelled.

Now a heated debate was

raging on editorial pages

around the world about the consequences

and

implications

of

the

disclosures.

But in spite of all the fuss and the telephones which never stopped ringing, Berger had decided to arrange a last-minute party at the office.

She felt they deserved to escape

from

all

the

hullabaloo for a little while and raise a glass or two. A first

print

run

of

fifty

thousand copies had sold out the previous morning and the

number of hits on their

website, which also had an English version, had reached several million. Offers of book contracts poured in,

their subscription base was

growing by the minute and advertisers were queuing up to be part of it all.

They had also bought out
Serner Media. Berger had
managed to push the deal
through a few days earlier, though it had been anything but
easy.

Serner's
representatives had sensed
her desperation and taken full advantage, and for a while she
and

Blomkvist

had

thought that it would prove beyond them. Only at the

eleventh

hour,

when

a

substantial contribution came in from an unknown company

in Gibraltar, bringing a smile to Blomkvist's face, had they been able to buy out the Norwegians. The price had

been outrageously high, given the situation, but it was still a minor coup when a day later the magazine's scoop was

published and the market value of the *Millennium* brand rocketed. They were

free and independent again, though they had hardly had time yet to enjoy it.

Journalists

and

photographers

had

even

hounded

them

during

Zander's

memorial

at

Pressklubben.

Without

exception they had wanted to

offer

congratulations,

but

Blomkvist felt smothered, and his responses had not been as gracious as he would

have liked them to be. The sleepless

nights

and

headaches

continued

to

plague him.

Now, in the late afternoon of the following day, the furniture in the office had been hurriedly rearranged.

Champagne, wine and beer

and catered Japanese food

had been set out on the desks.

And people started to stream in,

first

the

staff

and

freelancers, then a number of friends of the magazine,

among

them

Holger

Palmgren. Mikael helped him

out of the lift and the two embraced.

“Our

girl

made

it,”

Palmgren said, with tears in his eyes.

“She

generally

does,”

Blomkvist replied with a

smile. He installed Palmgren in the place of honour on the sofa and gave instructions that his glass was to be kept filled.

It was good to see him

there. It was good to see all sorts of old and new friends.

Gabriella Grane was there

too, and Chief Inspector

Bublanski,

who

probably

should not have been invited, in view of their professional relationship and *Millennium's* status

as

independent

watchdog over the police

force, but Blomkvist had

wanted him to be there.

Officer Bubble spent the

whole evening talking to

Professor Farah Sharif.

Blomkvist drank a toast

with them and the others. He was wearing jeans and his

best jacket, and, unusually for him, he had quite a lot to drink. But he could not shake off that empty, leaden feeling and that was because of

Zander of course. Andrei was

constantly in his thoughts.

The moment in the office

when his colleague had so nearly taken up his offer of a beer was etched in his mind, a moment which was both

humdrum

and

life-

determining. Memories of the young man came to him all the time, and Blomkvist had difficulty concentrating on conversations.

He had had enough of all the praise and flattery – the only tribute that did affect him was Pernilla's text: <you do write for real, Pappa> – and occasionally he glanced over towards the door. Naturally Lisbeth Salander had been

invited, and would have been the guest of honour had she turned up. Blomkvist had

wanted to thank her for the handsome

contribution

to

help close out the Serner dispute. But there was no sign of her. What did he expect?

Her sensational decrypted document had allowed him to unravel the whole story, and had even persuaded Needham and the head of Solifon, Nicolas Grant, to give him more details. But he had heard from Salander only once since then: when he had interviewed her – to the extent that was possible –

over the Redphone app about

what had happened at the

summer house out on Ingarö.

That was a week ago now

and Blomkvist had no idea what she thought of his

article. Maybe she was angry

that he had dramatized it too much – he had had no choice

but to fill in the blanks around the meagre answers

she gave. Or perhaps she was

furious because he had not mentioned Camilla by name
but had simply referred to her as a Swedish–Russian woman
known as Thanos. Or else she
was disappointed that he had not taken a harder line across the
board.

It was impossible to know.

Things were not improved by

the fact that Chief Prosecutor Ekström really did appear to be
considering a case against Salander:

unlawful

deprivation of liberty and seizure of property were the charges he was trying to

cobble together.

Eventually Blomkvist got

fed up with it all and left the party

without

saying

goodbye. The weather was awful

and

for

lack

of

anything better to do he
scrolled through his text
messages.

There

were

congratulations and requests for interviews and a couple of
indecent

proposals.

But

nothing from Salander. He

switched off his mobile and trudged

home

with

surprisingly heavy steps for

the man who had just pulled off the scoop of the century.

Salander

was

sitting

in

Fiskargatan on her red sofa, gazing emptily out at Gamla Stan and Riddarfjärden. It was a little over a year since she had started the hunt for her sister and her father's criminal legacy, and she had

to admit to her success on many counts.

She had tracked down
Camilla and dealt the Spiders a
serious
blow.

The
connections with Solifon and the N.S.A. had been severed.
Ivan Gribanov, the Duma
member, was coming under
tremendous

pressure

in

Moscow, Camilla's hit man

was dead and her closest

henchman Jurij Bogdanov

and several other computer engineers were wanted by the

police and forced to go

underground. But Camilla

was

alive

out

there

somewhere.

Nothing

was

over. Salander had only

winged her quarry and that was not enough. Grimly she looked down at the coffee table, where a packet of

cigarettes and her unread

copy of *Millennium* lay. She

picked up the magazine and put it down again. Then she picked it up once more and read

Blomkvist's

report.

When she reached the last sentence she stared for a while at the new photograph next to his byline. Then she jumped to her feet and went to the bathroom to put on some make-up. She pulled on

a tight black T-shirt and a

leather jacket and went out into the December evening.

She was freezing. It was

crazy to be wearing so little, but she did not care. She cut down towards Mariatorget

with quick steps, turned left into Swedenborgsgatan and

walked into a restaurant

called Süd, where she sat down at the bar and alternated between whisky and beer.

Since much of the clientele

came from the world of culture and journalism, it was hardly surprising that many of them recognized her.

Guitarist Johan Norberg, for example, who wrote a regular column for *We* and was known for picking up on

small yet significant details, observed that Salander was not drinking as if she enjoyed it, but rather as if it she had to get it out of the way.

There was something very determined about her body

language, and a cognitive

behavioural therapist who

happened to be sitting at a table

further

in

even

wondered if Salander was

aware of anyone else in the restaurant. She hardly looked out over the room and seemed

to be preparing herself for some kind of operation or action.

At 9.15 she paid in cash and stepped into the night without a word or gesture.

Despite the cold, Blomkvist walked home slowly, deep in gloom. A smile only crossed his lips when he ran into some of the regulars outside the Bishops Arms.

“So you weren’t washed up
after all!” Arne, or whatever
his name was, bellowed.

“Maybe not quite yet,”

Blomkvist

said.

For

a

moment he considered having

a last beer inside and chatting with Amir.

But he felt too miserable.

He wanted to be alone, so he carried on the entrance door of his building. On the way up the stairs he was overcome by a vague sense of unease, maybe as a result of all he

had been through. He tried to dismiss it, but it would not go away, especially when he

realized that a light had blown on the top floor. It was pitch black up there.

He slowed his steps and

sensed a movement. There

was a flicker, a weak sliver of light as if from a mobile, and a figure like a ghost, a slight person with dark flashing

eyes could be made out standing in the stairwell.

“Who’s that?” he said,

frightened.

Then he saw it was

Salander.

He brightened at first and opened his arms, but she looked furious. Her eyes were rimmed with black and her body seemed coiled, as if prepared for an attack.

“Are you angry with me?”

he said.

“Quite.”

“Why is that?”

Salander

took

a

step

forward, her face shining and pale, and he remembered her gunshot wound.

“Because I come to visit, and there’s no-one at home,”

she said, and he walked

towards her.

“That’s a bit of a scandal, isn’t it?” he said.

“I’d say so.”

“What if I ask you in

now?”

“Then I suppose I’ll have to accept.”

“In that case, welcome,” he

said, and for the first time in ages a broad smile spread across his face.

A star fell outside in the night sky.

A Letter to my Readers

by David Lagercrantz

I miss those early hours, four in
the
morning,
when
Stockholm was silent and my
family were still asleep: I would drink my espresso and
sit down at my computer and
write as if my life depended on it.
True, it wasn't always

easy, but sometimes I even miss that feverish intensity which occasionally bordered on terror – the terror of not being

worthy

of

Stieg

Larsson's legacy.

That concern was what

drove me, and it's safe to say it was Lisbeth Salander who terrified me most. How could

I portray such an iconic character

without

disappointing

people?

I

remember

going

in

too

heavy-handed at first. It was as if I wanted to put too much in, so I spent a great many hours cutting and toning

things down. The main things

I removed were emotions.

Sentimentality

and

melodrama don't suit Lisbeth.

Her feelings should merely be glimpsed between the

lines, and I realised she's at her best in action, when she's fighting as the underdog. If I could just find the right scenes, she'd come

to life.

But there was still one

problem that took me a long time to figure out: how does Lisbeth Salander remember?

You know, it's not just

Lisbeth's

personality

that

makes her such an amazing character. Just like Batman or Superman or any other great superhero, she's got her own

mythology which is a crucial element of her explosive force. I realised early on I wanted to show that and develop it. So I needed to go back to her childhood, when her malevolent father, Alexander Zalachenko, abused and raped her mother,

and Lisbeth vowed to take revenge. But I realised I would kill off some of the mystique if I had her recall those incidents herself.

The chain

of

events

seemed

stronger if they were seen from outside, with just hints of her rage and pain.

It felt like I needed a filter.

I also noticed that Stieg Larsson had wrestled with

this issue himself: he almost

always has the old lawyer Holger Palmgren, Lisbeth's

former guardian, recount her childhood. Of course, that's a classic trick. Mythologised genius figures in literature are often best observed from a certain distance. You need a Dr Watson to create the myth

and maintain the mystery

around its power. From the protagonist's point of view, most things are just logical

and self-evident, but when the same process is observed by someone else, it helps us understand

what's

so

remarkable about it. It helps us to feel amazed. I decided to use the same devices as Stieg Larsson. And yet I

refused

to

surrender

completely.

I carried on delving into Lisbeth Salander's thoughts and memories, testing the

limits. It's no exaggeration to say that was the process that enabled me to suss her out and then one evening, a brilliantly clear, marvellous evening, to discover her big secret.

After that day it was as if she wrote herself. I started to comprehend why she had to strike back once again – hard, without pity. I realised how the story had to continue, and

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Lagercrantz', written in a cursive style.

I miss it already. I hope you enjoy reading it!

David Lagercrantz, Stockholm, 15 May, 2015

Translated from the Swedish by Ruth Urbom

AUTHOR AND
TRANSLATOR
BIOGRAPHIES



© Caroline Andersson David Lagercrantz is the son of

Olof

Lagercrantz,

a

Swedish author and literary critic,

and

Martina

Lagercrantz.

He

studied

philosophy and religion and attended

the

School

of

Journalism in Gothenburg.

Eventually he made it to

Expressen, a national daily paper, where he covered

some major crime stories

including an infamous triple murder in the cemetery in the northern Swedish town of

Åmsele in 1988.

David made his debut as an

author in 1997 with *Ultimate High*, the story of Swedish adventurer Göran Kropp, who

climbed

Mount

Everest

without oxygen tanks or

sherpas the week after one of the most tragic disasters ever to occur on the mountain. The

book became a great success, both in Sweden and abroad, and that success enabled

David to continue as an

author.

Three

years

later

A

Swedish

Genius,

David's

biography of inventor Håkan Lans, was published. It has since been reprinted several times

and

provided

inspiration for the critically acclaimed documentary film

Patent 986. In 2005 David returned his attention to the Himalayas with a thriller

entitled

The

Sky

Over

Everest.

He continued with *Fall of Man in Wilmslow*, a historical novel about the English

mathematician

and

code-
breaker Alan Turing. This
book is often regarded as David's
breakthrough
in
fiction. It received excellent
reviews
and
immediately

landed on the bestseller lists, with rights sold to publishers in fifteen countries.

Looking back over his

works, David saw a pattern in his writing: he often wrote about major talents who

refuse to follow convention.

He was interested not only in what it takes to stand out from the crowd, but also in

the

resistance

that

such

creativity inevitably faces.

Meanwhile, the Swedish

publishing company Abbe

Bonnier was involved in talks with Swedish football star Zlatan

Ibrahimović

about

publishing an autobiography.

Bonnier felt that this project would be a good match for David's previous work.

Zlatan and David met and agreed to work together. The

result was *I am Zlatan Ibrahimović*, one of the most successful books in Sweden in modern times.

The book sold 500,000

copies in hardback in less than two months. Reviews

hailed it as both a masterpiece and a future classic. The critic
Dilsa Demirbag-Sten, writing in

the

daily

broadsheet

Dagens Nyheter, noted that the book had done wonders

for

the

young

reading

generation, and she was

undoubtedly right.

I

am

Zlatan

has

encouraged a new generation to read – one that had

previously not been addressed by the publishing market.

Kids from council estates

who used to think that

reading was the nerdiest thing in the world have devoured the book. To date, it has been

published

in

over

30

languages around the world, with millions of copies sold.

It was shortlisted for the UK's William Hill Sports

Book of the Year award, the most highly regarded award for sports writing. In Sweden it was the first book of its kind to be nominated for the prestigious August Prize, a literary award named after August Strindberg.

In December 2013 David Lagercrantz signed a contract to write a new instalment in Larsson's *Millennium* series, the

global

publishing

phenomenon

featuring

Lisbeth Salander and Mikael Blomkvist. The fourth book in the series – *The Girl in the Spider's Web* – is launched worldwide on August 27,

2015.

David is married to Anne Lagercrantz, head of news and current affairs on the Swedish Public Radio. He has three children and lives in the Södermalm neighbourhood of Stockholm.

Translator George Goulding

was born in Stockholm,

educated in England and
spent his legal career working for a London-based law firm.
Since his retirement in 2011
he has worked as a translator of Swedish fiction.

AUTHOR'S

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Lagström, V.P. services at Outpost

24,

the

authors

Daniel Goldberg and Linus

Larsson,

and

Menachem

Harari.

And of course to my Anne.

* An ability to recall images, sounds or objects in memory after only a few instants of exposure.

ALSO AVAILABLE

Stieg Larsson THE GIRL WITH

THE DRAGON

TATTOO

Translated from the Swedish by Reg Keeland

Lisbeth Salander gets under
the skin of her targets like no-
one else.

Those who underestimate her
live to regret it. If they are lucky ...

Mikael Blomkvist – disgraced

journalist, womanizer – is
everything she ought to hate.

But when she is hired by a
security firm to investigate
him, her report on his life
reveals an integrity that
fascinates her.

Then she discovers that Blomkvist, himself a brilliant investigator,
is cracking open the cold case of a missing girl

– uncovering secrets that
have poisoned a family
through generations.

And only one thing gives

Salander greater satisfaction than exposing a liar: stopping a
killer.



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ALSO AVAILABLE

Stieg Larsson THE GIRL WHO

PLAYED WITH FIRE

Translated from the Swedish by Reg Keeland

Lisbeth Salander – the girl

with the dragon tattoo – can

be viciously violent. Mikael

Blomkvist knows it, and owes his life to it.

When a criminologist and a
journalist who works with
Blomkvist at *Millennium*
magazine are killed on the
brink of publishing a brutal
exposé of human trafficking,
the evidence points in one
direction.

Salander's prints are on the murder weapon. But

Blomkvist knows Lisbeth
would never act without
reason, and he cannot find
one here.

The victims were his friends.

But so is Salander. And
something much more
dangerous is surely at play ...



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ALSO AVAILABLE

Stieg Larsson THE GIRL WHO

KICKED THE

HORNETS' NEST

Translated from the Swedish by Reg Keeland

Lisbeth Salander is a threat to national security. Since she was thirteen, shady government forces have acted to keep her quiet.

Prone to violence, deemed mentally disturbed, she has had her freedom removed and her every movement watched.

Yet still, she is an unstoppable force for justice.



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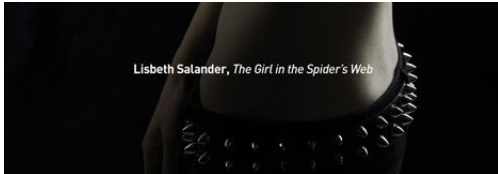
Salander has a bullet in her head. She is wanted for murder. She knows that the secrets and corruption at the heart of her country's government go right to the top.

And she will not take it lying down ...

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Document Outline

- [Title Page](#)
- [Continuing Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy](#)
- [Copyright](#)
- [Contents](#)
- [Map of Stockholm](#)
- [Characters in the Millennium Series](#)
- [Prologue](#)
- [Part I](#)
- [Part II](#)
- [Part III](#)
- [Map of Stockholm Archipelago](#)
- [A Letter to my Readers](#)
- [Author And Translator Biographies](#)

- [Author's Acknowledgements](#)
- [Also Available](#)
- [Lisbeth Quotation](#)