

**Jan Costin Wagner**  
*Das Licht in einem dunklen Haus* (KiWi, 2011)  
**‘Light in a Dark House‘**

Opening chapters  
Translated by Anthea Bell

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## **Prologue**

*18 August 1985*

*Something’s happened. I must write it down. Write it all down so that I can remember it later. Describe everything, and then there’ll be a picture of it in my mind.*

*That’s what Lauri said.*

*Right, then. She isn’t crying. And she isn’t laughing. She’s just sitting there. I’m sitting on the piano stool beside her, and there’s kind of a humming in my head. Like bees or flies or something. Dear Diary. We’re sitting side by side. At the piano.*

*She’s looking at the keys, concentrating on them. Then she strikes a key, and there’s a clear sound. It’s a hot day, we’re both sweating. Her dress is still all crumpled up. Sort of creased and messy. It’s the blue and white dress that I told Lauri about. Kind of a light summer dress, and you can see the shape of her breasts quite well underneath it, or maybe it’s more like you can guess at the shape of her breasts.*

*The dress is all creased and rucked up, I can almost see the place where her bottom begins. The sound of the piano note is clear, a little louder than the humming, but anyway the humming isn’t real, it’s only inside my head.*

*The window’s open. The wind is blowing in, but it’s a warm wind. Laughter and splashing from the lake. That’ll be the kids from next door.*

*Outside it’s very hot. I sweated quite a lot when I was riding out to see her on my bike.*

*And then we’re sitting side by side, after all that happened. But she’s trembling too. I’m sure she can’t be cold, because she’s sweating and kind of breathless, but she’s trembling, and she strikes another note on the piano. A little higher than the first, so it’s even clearer. It sounds somehow high and clear and quiet all at once.*

*Like a whispered scream.*

## Autumn

### 1

In an autumn when no rain fell, Kimmo Joentaa was living with a woman who had no name. The anticyclone keeping the weather fine had been christened Magdalena. The woman told people to call her Larissa.

She came and went. He didn't know where from or where to.

In the evening, when he came home, he would sit in the car for a while, looking for signs of her presence behind the window panes. Sometimes there was a light switched on that hadn't been on when he left in the morning. Sometimes it was dark.

If there was a light on, she usually wasn't there. If it was dark, she would be sitting on the sofa with her knees drawn up, and she laughed when he asked how her day had been. She laughed and laughed, until after a while Kimmo Joentaa joined in.

He'd asked her several times why she always switched on the light when she went out, and why she was sitting in the dark when he came home. She didn't reply. She just looked at him and said nothing. That was what she usually did when he asked questions. If he looked like beginning to ask them again, she would come over, put her arms round him, undress him, push him down on the sofa and move above him in a practised rhythm until he came.

Before the snow and ice melted, she'd played ice hockey on the lake with the kids. She ate huge quantities of ice cream, and liked vanilla and tundra berry flavours best. She enjoyed action films, with shoot-outs and exploding cars. She didn't like comedies, but she laughed a lot, mostly at him. He didn't even have to say anything, often just the expression on his face would make her laugh, or a movement that he made.

She had blonde hair, and insisted that she was one metre sixty tall – not one metre fifty-one, as Joentaa suggested now and then, because he liked her furious look – and she was very slim, which surprised Joentaa in view of her consumption of sweet things.

Sometimes she disappeared. If he rang her mobile number, he reached the strange, anonymous voice of a recorded answer. He left messages, and sensed his words seeping away into the silence. He wrote to the email address that she had given him, and never got any answers. He sat in front of the laptop in an empty house, with his mobile in his hand, and waited.

He began switching on the light when he left in the morning, and he felt a tingling in his stomach when at last, after days or weeks, the house was dark again when he came home. Then she would be sitting on the sofa with her knees drawn up, and she would turn to look his way and say she was back.

If he asked her where she had been she said nothing.

She liked walking. At weekends they walked through the forest together for hours at a time, and she told him about films she had seen or books she was reading. She read anything and everything so long as it was a story. She liked stories that she could tell him. Her books gathered in piles in various corners of the house. He listened to her attentively, and tried to find the storyteller behind the characters who came to life on the stage of her imagination.

She worked as a prostitute, Joentaa didn't know where. He once began asking her about it, but she just gave a wry grin and said he didn't want to know. When summer began she had told him that she'd also taken a part-time job selling ice cream, and Joentaa said he was glad.

"If I fix it cleverly I'll be able to eat all the sweet stuff I like," she said.

He asked her to tell him her name, her real name, and she said that names didn't matter.

She cried in her sleep, and if he woke her, or asked, when she was awake again, why she'd been crying, she couldn't remember having any dreams at all.

## 2

In mid-September they went to a birthday party together. Nurmela, the Turku police chief, was celebrating his fiftieth in the huge garden of his house, which went down to the river and had a picturesque view.

When they arrived, Nurmela's wife Katriina welcomed them. Joentaa had met her several times at Christmas parties at the police station. She was tall and slender, and always seemed to be aware of her physical presence as she moved.

The garden was already full of guests, and Joentaa made for Petri Grönholm and Paavo Sundström, who were sitting at a wide table in the sun. Larissa held his hand tight as they walked, and when Joentaa cast her a brief glance she smiled at him. He felt her hand in his, and the heat of an autumn that was much too warm, and he was suddenly glad they had come to the party. He went up to the table where Sundström and Grönholm

were sitting, and introduced the woman standing beside him, very close to him, as Larissa.

“Hello,” said Grönholm.

“Wow,” said Sundström.

Larissa laughed. The loud, abrupt laugh that he liked, because it was genuine and for a few moments it gave him the feeling that he knew her.

Sundström stared at Larissa, until an idea seemed to bring him back to reality.

“My own worse half is around here somewhere,” he said, half-heartedly looking for her. “Probably at the prosecco bar.”

“Sounds a good idea,” said Larissa.

“Yes ... in a moment,” said Joentaa.

“Come on, let’s get tight today,” said Larissa.

Sundström laughed, Grönholm laughed, Joentaa nodded, and Larissa let go of his hand and walked up the slope to the drinks table. Joentaa watched her go, and was aware that Sundström and Grönholm were doing the same.

“Good for you, Kimmo. The new woman in your life, right?” asked Sundström.

Joentaa nodded. The new woman. Or whatever.

“I’m glad,” said Grönholm. “Really glad for you ...”

“What a ...” Sundström interrupted him.

“What a what?” asked Grönholm.

“What a little cracker,” said Sundström.

“What did you say?” asked Grönholm, smiling, and he glanced rather uncertainly at Joentaa.

“I only meant ...oh, hello, darling,” said Sundström. “May I introduce Kimmo Joentaa, another of my unfortunate subordinates? Kimmo, Sabrina. Sabrina, Kimmo.”

“Hello,” said Joentaa.

Sabrina Sundström raised a glass of prosecco to her mouth, took a sip, lowered the glass and gave Joentaa a ready smile. Joentaa didn’t know her, but he knew she must have a sense of humour. A good one. How else could she live with Paavo Sundström?

Violin music began playing in the background, and after that Police Chief Nurmela, standing on the terrace in expansive mood, spoke into a microphone, thanking them all for coming and for their generous presents, which he would unpack at the appropriate time. He just hoped there weren’t too many references to pensions, retirement

and the evening of his days, because this was only half-time for him, there was a lot he still planned to do. His wife Katriina was standing behind him, and when he had finished she said that the buffet would be open in a few minutes' time.

The violins struck up again. The black-clad quartet of musicians was sitting at the side of the broad terrace, three young women and one young man. Larissa came back, balancing a bottle of sparkling wine and glasses on a tray.

"Plenty for everyone," she said.

Sundström laughed, Grönholm poured the wine, and Larissa sat down and was immediately deep in conversation with Sundström's wife. If Joentaa got the hang of the remarks that he caught from time to time correctly, they were talking about summer fashions.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Nurmela coming towards them with his wife. Walking with a spring in his step, wearing a beige suit with a yellow tie. There were laughing, blue Donald Ducks all over the tie. Katriina moved fluently and gracefully, easily keeping up with his staccato pace.

"Great outfit," said Sundström, as soon as the couple were in earshot. "The tie, I mean. And of course your wife's dress."

"Thanks, thanks," said Nurmela. Katriina smiled, and Joentaa got the impression that a sudden change came over Nurmela's face.

"Hello there, August," said Larissa.

"Hm?" That was Grönholm.

"Who?" said Sundström, and Grönholm's eyes wandered off, presumably in search of August.

"Oops," said Larissa, clapping her hand to her mouth, and Joentaa sensed that, beside him, Nurmela was swaying slightly as he quickly excused himself. Katriina was staring at Larissa. "Come along, darling, I must ... must go and see to the guests .." said Nurmela. He made off in the direction of the drinks table.

They all watched him go. Katriina tore herself away and followed him.

"What was all that about?" asked Grönholm.

"Since when was Nurmela's name August?" asked Sundström.

"His first name isn't August, you know," said Grönholm, turning to Larissa.

"My mistake," she said, with a wide smile for Kimmo Joentaa. "Who wants some more fizz?" She picked up the bottle and refilled their glasses. Joentaa gratefully held out

his, and drained it in a single draught. He suddenly had the sure and certain feeling that he could spend this summery autumn day suitably only in a state of mild intoxication.

“Cheers,” said Larissa, and they all clinked glasses.

“Is his name really August or not?” asked Sabrina Sundström.

“Not as far as I know,” said Grönholm.

“Nope,” said Sundström.

“Just a mistake,” said Larissa.

“Names don’t matter,” said Joentaa.

He caught Larissa’s eye. She was giving him a glance that he couldn’t interpret. He went to find another bottle of fizz.

### 3

The rest of the party passed in a soft, pleasant haze, with the clink and clatter of the cutlery, with lines of guests winding their way over the freshly mown lawns, going over to the buffet on tables covered by snow-white cloths. Larissa ate with a hearty appetite. She liked the eggs on salmon and the curried herring best.

“Mm, delicious,” she said several times, laughing, and Joentaa felt an urge to put his arms round her and hug her until they were both breathless. He had emptied his glass of sparkling wine eight to twelve times, he didn’t know exactly how often, because at some point he had lost count, and was vaguely aware of Sundström raising his eyebrows.

“Er, Kimmo ... everything okay so far?” he asked.

Joentaa nodded. He felt curiously sober, apart from the soft veil that had come down over his mind.

Larissa was in animated conversation with Sundström’s wife, and Grönholm was leaning back, relaxed, drinking beer after beer with a glass of sparkling wine or so in between, and seemed to be listening to them. Joentaa wondered why Grönholm never brought a woman to any occasions of this kind, and whether that accounted for Grönholm’s good humour and generally equable temperament, but rejected the idea, and for a while watched Nurmela talking to the guests surrounding him in the centre of the garden. Now and then he glanced at the table where Joentaa was sitting. Presumably he was trying to work out how the little blonde had found her way into his birthday party. Joentaa had a feeling that Nurmela’s eyes were lingering on his face more and more often, but he didn’t avoid them. His own eyes felt too lethargic, and the warmth of the

evening too mild and gentle. He felt Larissa's caresses brushing past him as she went to get a second helping at the buffet. Sometimes he held her hand tight, and waited for a few seconds before letting go of it.

"I have to go to the buffet," Larissa told him.

"I'm not stopping you," replied Joentaa.

He watched her go, and saw that she was wiggling her hips ostentatiously, which she never usually did. Putting on a show for the others. For August, maybe. Most of the men present looked her way, some laughed, others carefully showed no reaction.

"That woman is quite something," whispered Sundström, right beside his ear. He felt Sundström's breath, and nodded.

"What did you say?" asked Sabrina.

Larissa came back, carrying a white plate of eggs and herring. Looking at her, he suddenly thought that he had never known anyone so happy before.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Hm?"

"You're looking at me in such a funny way," she said.

"It's nothing," he replied.

Never known anyone so happy before, he thought. Or anyone who cried so often in her sleep.

Then she ate eggs and herring, and Sundström's jokes began to border on the smutty. Evening came on, darkness fell, lighted torches in holders gave warmth and a little light, and when it was too cold and dark to stay outside, the hard core of guests moved into the brightly lit house. Joentaa felt weak at the knees. He was vaguely aware of Nurmela drawing him aside.

"Come here a moment, Kimmo," he said.

"Hm?"

The two of them were alone on the lawn. Laughter came from inside the house. Behind them, there was the clink of china as waiters cleared the remains of the buffet away.

"Did you bring her?"

"Hm?"

"The ... woman you arrived with."

"Larissa."

Nurmela stared at him. Seemed to be having difficulty in getting words out. Seemed to be focusing on some point in the distance. Joentaa watched the ducks in their sailor suits. On Nurmela's tie. In the flickering light of the torches.

"Are you out of your mind?" asked Nurmela.

"Hm?"

"Showing up here with a ... a tart ..."

"Ah, I see," said Joentaa.

"Yes, you do."

"Yes."

"Exactly, yes."

"Larissa also has a job selling ice cream. Part-time," said Joentaa.

Nurmela did not reply. His eyes were almost popping out of his head.

"Those ducks are dancing," said Joentaa.

"What?"

"On your tie."

Nurmela looked down at himself, then up again.

"I didn't know that you knew each other," said Joentaa.

"What?"

"I didn't know that you and Larissa ... that you ... well, knew each other."

Nurmela's hands shot out and grabbed Joentaa by the throat. He felt a pain in his chest, and heard himself breathing stertorously. Looked at the blue ducks.

Nurmela's breath smelled of alcohol, his voice sounded clear and sober.

"Arsehole," he said.

Then he let go of him again. Joentaa followed his eyes to the windows at the front of the house. Katriina in the middle of the room, in the light from the chandeliers. Tall and slim. A smile for every guest.

"I'm sorry if Katriina ..." Joentaa said.

Nurmela let himself drop on to a white folding chair. Joentaa went a few steps and fetched another for himself. Sat down.

"I'm sorry if Katriina ... was annoyed ..."

"She didn't notice anything," said Nurmela.

"She didn't?"

"No. Well, yes, but I can smooth it over," said Nurmela.



Smooth it over, thought Joentaa. Soft, gentle rain was falling, the first in a long time. Inside the house, no one seemed to notice that the host of the party was missing.

“I’ll tell her some kind of shit,” said Nurmela.

Joentaa nodded.

“Doesn’t matter,” said Nurmela.

Joentaa nodded again, and saw Larissa on the other side of the windows. Deep in animated conversation with Nurmela’s wife. They were laughing together. Nurmela stared into the darkness. He had begun to stumble over his words.

“Doesn’t any of it matter,” he mumbled.

“No,” said Joentaa. He saw Larissa beyond the window pane. Larissa. With Nurmela. He found it difficult to give distinct outlines to the image.

“Half-time,” said Nurmela.

“Yes,” said Joentaa.

“Time for the next half.” Obviously in an attempt to put this announcement into practice, he stood up wearily and marched towards the house. “Come on, Kimmo, let’s have another drink,” he called.

Joentaa followed him.

“Are you two ... together?” asked Nurmela as they walked on.

Larissa beyond the windows at the front of the house. Dancing to the rhythm of soundless music.

Joentaa nodded.

“Mhm. Mhm,” said Nurmela, and it struck Joentaa that maybe Larissa was about to lose one of her best clients. Although why should she? Now that everything was adequately explained.

Nurmela, Larissa.

Nurmela nodded to himself. The blue ducks laughed, a peal of laughter like Larissa’s on the other side of the windows.

When Nurmela opened the door, and at last they could hear the music to which Larissa and Katriina were dancing, Joentaa thought that there were two questions he must ask him some time.

Why his house had sound-proofed glazing.

And why ... why August?

4

“Why ... why August?” asked Sundström, either because no more risqué jokes occurred to him or because Grönholm had just gone to fetch another beer.

He leaned over to Joentaa, who was sitting at the other end of the sofa. There was a red-haired woman whom Joentaa didn't know between them, and Sundström for one seemed to take no interest in including her in the conversation. His head hovered in the air just above her lap as he made the question more specific. “What was all that just now about this August?”

“No idea,” said Joentaa.

“Larissa's been trying to kid me that she never said anything about any August. But you heard her too, mentioning August. And she seemed to mean Nurmela.”

“No idea,” said Joentaa again.

“But ...”

“Doesn't matter. A misunderstanding,” said Joentaa.

“All I mean is ... well, Nurmela's first name isn't August. I haven't been able to think what it is, but certainly not ...” murmured Sundström, removing his head from the lap of the redhead, who didn't bat an eyelash.

The music was loud and heavenly, the basses hummed and growled, and Larissa and Katriina danced and laughed at each other, and Joentaa thought that Nurmela threw a really remarkable party. A hard core of last guests. The string quartet had left long ago. Grönholm was staggering towards them in high good humour, and Nurmela was lying back in an armchair to one side of the room, smiling as if transported to a better world.

Half-time, thought Joentaa. In view of the picture before his eyes, that seemed a mild way of putting it.

Larissa. And August.

Or whatever they were called.

Then Larissa came over to him, took his arm and led him on to the dance floor in Nurmela's living-room. With strength that allowed no contradiction. He wondered where on earth Nurmela got this way-out music from, and Larissa was hanging around his neck, her lips to his ear. A faint suggestion of her voice, but he couldn't make out the words. Too loud, he signalled, and she smiled and dismissed it with a wave.

In the background, Sabrina Sundström was smoothing down her husband's tousled hair, and Petri Grönholm raised his beer glass to his mouth. Larissa was laughing.

At him. Of course. He returned the laugh and exaggerated his ridiculous style of dancing by adding some nervous twitches. On the sofa, Grönholm laughed and egged him on. Sundström had closed his eyes, and seemed to be enjoying Sabrina's scalp massage. After that there was quieter music, piano and voice. Larissa wound her arms around him and said the singer could hardly have survived that song.

"How do you mean?" asked Joentaa.

"Too sad."

"Hm," said Joentaa.

She let herself drop, laughing as she dragged him down towards the floor. "Oops," said Joentaa, holding on to her tightly, and Petri Grönholm threw up on Nurmela's golden-brown fitted carpet.

The redhead screeched, jumped off the sofa, and landed in the arms of a drugs investigator.

"Oh dear," said Sabrina Sundström, and Katriina walked across the room, upright and graceful, and bent over Grönholm, who was clutching a table leg and trying to get up.

"It doesn't matter," said Katriina.

"The carpet's the same colour as the beer you brought up," said Sundström.

"Paavo, please," said Sabrina.

"What about it? They match," said Sundström.

Nurmela came up and put an arm round Katriina, and together they looked down at Grönholm, who was mumbling, "Sorry ... didn't notice ... didn't realize I was so ... it was the last beer, one too many."

Katriina began mopping up, and Nurmela took the cloth from her hand. "Let me do that," he said.

"Another glass of wine?" asked Sundström, as he helped Grönholm to get to his feet.

"Kimmo's fault," said Grönholm. "Your silly dancing finished me off."

"Sorry," said Joentaa, and Grönholm began giggling. Nurmela was scrubbing for all he was worth, and Katriina said, "Not so hard, darling, or the carpet will fade."

"What?"

"That patch of carpet. If you scrub too hard, the detergent won't come out."

"Oh."

"Salt," suggested Sundström.

“For wine,” said Sabrina. “That’s for wine.”

Then they all sat round the table, and Nurmela offered a nightcap of an apricot liqueur from France that ...

“I don’t know if that’s a great idea just now,” said Katriina, but even Grönholm said, “Sounds good, sounds good.” And there was no stopping Nurmela anyway. He brought out the bottle, and they all clinked glasses.

“Hm. Very good,” said Larissa, emptying hers at a draught, and Nurmela cleared his throat.

The redhead and the drugs investigator were first to leave. Joentaa and Sundström supported the swaying Grönholm, who kept muttering to himself, “Oh man ... oh wow, would never have thought ... thought a thing like that ... of all people ...” Then he giggled again.

Nurmela and Katriina waved, the drugs investigator and the redhead waved, and then the other five were in a car driven by Sabrina Sundström. The Sundströms sat in front, with Joentaa, Larissa and Grönholm in the back.

“Where first?” asked Sabrina.

“Better take Petri home first,” said Joentaa.

“Don’t bother about me ... I ... I can drive myself if ... if I have to,” Petri Grönholm assured them.

It had really begun raining now.

“Here comes autumn,” said Sundström.

“It’s supposed to be staying warm,” said Sabrina Sundström.

Grönholm thanked everyone for the nice evening and insisted on getting out of the car and going into his apartment by himself. It was in a comparatively tall building in the centre of Turku, right on the market place.

“See you tomorrow,” called Sundström from the passenger seat, and Petri Grönholm grunted something that Joentaa couldn’t make out. Then they drove along narrower streets through the increasingly heavy rain.

“Are you sure this is right?” asked Sundström, when Joentaa asked Sabrina to turn off along the forest path.

What’s for sure, thought Joentaa.

The house in the dark.

Larissa beside him.

Her hand in his.

“Well, good night then, you two,” said Sundström.

“Sleep well,” said Sabrina.

“And you,” said Joentaa, and he followed the woman whose name he didn’t know and who was already halfway to the front door.

## 5

She cried in her sleep, and couldn’t remember any reason when Kimmo Joentaa woke her and asked if everything was all right.

“I have to sleep now,” she said.

“You must have been dreaming something.”

“Kimmo, I can’t remember what. Let me sleep, okay?”

“If you promise me not to cry.”

“Sometimes you really get on my nerves.”

“What’s he like, then – August?”

She did not reply, but sat up a little way.

He felt a pang in his stomach, in his chest.

A burning behind his eyes.

“Kimmo, go to sleep now.”

“Sorry.”

“Just go to sleep.”

“Sorry.”

“Good night, Kimmo,” she said, turning over on her side.

Some time passed. A sentence crystallized in his mind. He weighed it up on his tongue for a while before bringing it out.

“I need something from you,” he said at last.

There was no answer, and he didn’t know whether she had heard him.

“I need your name,” he said.

But perhaps his words were only sounds or colours in the dream that she was dreaming, the dream that she would have forgotten as soon as she woke up.

6

14 September 2010

*Dear Diary*

*That's what people say, don't they? Yes. I think so.*

*Write it all down just as you saw it at the time. So that you can remember it.*

*Later.*

*The hospital is sparsely furnished. The walls are green, white and blue. I walk through large halls with a sense of being alone. Glances fall on me but do not linger. They glide away again. There are people wearing coats the colours of the walls. They are in a hurry, concentrating. Focused on something that is nothing to do with me. They don't see me. They walk fast and disappear behind doors, and muted voices come through the walls, sometimes a groan, a scream, or a fit of weeping.*

*I feel like a shadow. Even when I am sitting with her. In an empty room that I found without actually looking for it. The wall around us is green. A nail in it with a wooden crucifix hanging from the nail. A plastic plant on a side table. The bed and the covers are white. Medical equipment. Tubes, electronic apparatus. The technology looks curiously old. Much used, wearing out. The recurrent, soft humming note dies away in the silence, the way the notes of the piano died away back then after she had struck the keys.*

*The recurrent, soft humming note saying that she is alive.*

*Sleeping, waking.*

*It all happens so fast, that's why you have to write it down. To keep a record. So that you can remember it some time.*

*All so fast, so fast, I must come back to it later.*

*What is keeping her alive flows into her hand, into her arm, and is easily removed, as if it were only a plaster on a cut.*

*I leave the room, go along the right-angled corridors.*

*The others come towards me. Their shadows fall on the walls. Some of them are sitting on benches, and look up when a voice announces an emergency.*

*When I step out into the daylight, the autumn feels like summer, the sun is shining as it was then, and for a few seconds I feel that only seconds have passed since.*

## 7

When Joentaa woke in the morning, Larissa was up already. He had the stale flavour of the sparkling wine on his tongue. The dizziness and headache weren't too bad, but he knew that they had arrived in the hours while he was asleep, and would stay with him for a while.

He got up and went through the living room into the kitchen. The house was quiet and empty. No splashing, rushing water in the shower. He felt an impulse to call her name, but then the word left his mouth like a croak. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Larissa," he said in a neutral voice, one that she couldn't have heard even if she had been there.

But she wasn't there. He went down to the cellar and opened the wooden door to the sauna, which lay in the cool of morning. The narrow window was open. They'd forgotten to close it. He stood in the small, square room and looked at the aftermath of the previous day. The stones were cold, the water to pour on them was a calm, smooth surface in the old grey bucket, and he thought he saw imprints on the bottom step of the wooden bench, imprints left by their bodies and perhaps their body fluids, souvenirs of the heated hour they had spent here. Before they went off to Nurmela's house and his unusual birthday party.

What's he like, then – August?

And what would that heated, passionate hour in the sauna cost him?

He went up again. Sat down at the kitchen table and thought: it was Saturday, and she didn't really work on Saturdays. Maybe she'd gone for a walk. Or a swim. The telephone rang. He stopped and waited until the answerphone came on. He knew it wasn't Larissa. Larissa never phoned. It was Sundström asking him to call back.

He went into the living room and over to the window in the front wall. His eyes searched the water of the lake. It was a calm, smooth surface, like the water down in the sauna in the dented tin bucket that Sanna had bought, when she was still alive and everything was all right.

He sat on the sofa, never taking his eyes off the lake, and thought that Sanna was dead and Larissa had disappeared. And that there was nothing else to think about.

She'd come back. In the evening. Or tomorrow. In a few days' or weeks' time.

He'd go and water Sanna's grave.

He went into the kitchen, poured water into a glass, and raised it to his mouth. Pasi Laaksonen from the house next door came past. With his fishing rod. He waved, and Joentaa raised an arm to return the wave. As usual. As he had on the day when Sanna died, and so many other days afterwards.

When Pasi Laaksonen went fishing late in the morning at weekends, Joentaa was usually standing at the kitchen window. He watched Pasi disappear down in the hollow leading to the lake, and wondered whether it was really just chance, a recurrent coincidence, or something entirely different.

Pasi with his fishing rod, walking by, waving. A few hours after Sanna's death. Perhaps he stood at the kitchen window so that he could experience the scene again and again. Because watching Pasi walk down to the water always brought back the moment when Sanna had died – and the moment when she had still been alive.

The longer he thought about it, the more conclusive that idea appeared to him, and he wondered why it occurred to him only now, years later.

He was still thinking about it when the phone rang again. He moved away from the window and went to answer it, walking with swift, springy steps, although he knew it wouldn't be Larissa.

It was Petri Grönholm. He spoke clearly, if a little slowly. Joentaa thought of the moment, not so long ago, when Petri Grönholm had thrown up on Nurmela's carpet, and the moment long before that when Sanna had stopped breathing, and then he thought of the fact that Larissa had gone without saying goodbye. Larissa or whatever her name was, and he had difficulty concentrating on what Grönholm was saying at the other end of the line.

“Kimmo?”

“Yes?”

“Did you get all that?”

“Not entirely. At the hospital, you said ...”

“Yes, Paavo Sundström is on his way, and Kari Niemi is already there with the forensics team. The woman was very sick anyway.”

Anyway, thought Joentaa.

“Which is kind of odd ... when she'd probably have died of her own accord.”

“Ah,” said Joentaa.



“Never mind that. Anyway, Paavo said we were to park in the car park outside the main building, and then there’s signposting to Intensive Care.”

Joentaa nodded. He knew the Intensive Care ward at Turku hospital.

“So ... can you pick me up? In case of any residual alcohol in my bloodstream. I was pretty well pickled last night, so I don’t want to ...” said Grönholm.

“Yes ... of course I can.”

“See you soon, then,” said Grönholm, ringing off.

Joentaa stood there for a while with the phone in his hand.

As he was putting on his coat, he finally remembered Nurmela’s first name. Petri, just like Grönholm. He wasn’t entirely sure, but yes, he did think he saw the name in his mind’s eye. Petri Nurmela, chief of police.

Cover name August.

Wasting electricity, he thought, and he switched on all the lights in the house before leaving.

## 8

29 June 1985

*Lauri says I ought to write it all down. He says I’ll want to remember it some time. Because another thing you have to think about is that everything happens so quickly, and after a while it’s all past and forgotten, and then you’d like to remember it. Lauri says. I think Lauri is a bit of a nutcase, with his books and his clever sayings and the way he acts in general, but he’s smart as well, you have to give him that, and besides, he’s a real friend, I know he is, so I’m going to write it all down.*

*Starting today.*

*I want to, as well. Which is funny, because there’s nothing I hate more than writing essays and dictations and all that stupid stuff. But I think Lauri’s idea is a good one, even if just now I was nearly killing myself laughing at him, when he was trying to tell me that Matti Nykänen is bound to fall flat on his face some time, because there has to be more to life more than flying through the air on two boards.*

*That’s only logical, he says.*

*I asked him why he wanted to start on about Matti Nykänen when it’s thirty degrees and we’re dangling our feet in the water, and the sun is blazing down like it hasn’t for a long time.*

*“You’re right,” said Lauri. He often says that, although really he’s usually the one who is right.*

*Sometimes I wonder why Lauri hangs out with me at all, because he’s best at all school subjects and I’m worst at most of them, and by way of saying thanks I picked him first of all for my football team yesterday. I saw the jaws of all the others drop, and Lauri thought he’d heard wrong and didn’t like to come over to me. I had to call his name out loud again, and then he came over slowly and gave me kind of an inquiring look. Then he played really well in defence, threw himself at the ball good and hard.*

*I guess Lauri also sometimes wonders why I hang out with him, and because we both ask ourselves the same question that makes the two of us a pretty good couple. And this is a lovely summer so far. Lauri said it’s a summer that never ought to end, it’s so good.*

*We let our feet dangle in the water, I’m quite brown from the sun, Lauri’s wearing a T-shirt and has sun cream on his arms, because he’s terrified of sunburn.*

*And he says I’ll want to remember it some time, that’s why I ought to write it all down. Not that I’ve told him anything at all yet. I only said I will, about the piano lesson. That’s all. He gives me a funny look and says that I ought to write everything down, all that I remember, because I’ll always want to remember that, about the piano lesson and of course about her too.*

*And also, he says, I must watch out, because there’s no point falling in love with the wrong women.*

*Lauri of all people says that, Lauri Lemberg who’s never kissed a girl because his smooching was useless when fat Satu Koivinen wanted to get up close and personal with him at the Midsummer party.*

*It’s a funny idea when you imagine it. Someone’s smooching turning out useless. We’ll see if I do want to remember it some time, but anyway I’ve written it down now. Dear Diary. That’s the way you put it, right? Dear Diary. Hi, dear Diary. I’ll have to ask Lauri tomorrow if you really do put it that way.*

## 9

Turku hospital. A large, white building with countless windows. Kimmo Joentaa had tried counting them once, on a sunny day before Sanna’s death.

He had really meant to go home to look through his post and sleep for a few hours. But then he sat in the car instead, staring at the big, solid building, trying to pinpoint the window behind which Sanna was lying. And sleeping. Or dying.

Then he had begun to count, gave up at a hundred and seventy-four, got out of the car and went back along all the corridors to Sanna's room. That was quick, she had said, wearily and in a husky voice, and he had sat down beside her bed and tried to smile.

The car park still looked the same. Sun too warm for autumn, as it had been then. Grönholm, beside him, got out of the car. Joentaa followed and overtook him. He suddenly felt that he had to get all this over with quickly. He walked purposefully; he knew the way. Right-angled walls, arrows to wherever you were going. There was a uniformed woman officer outside the broad swing doors with the words Intensive Care above them. Joentaa took his ID out of his coat pocket and returned her nod before going on. Behind him he heard Petri Grönholm's dragging footsteps.

Inside, white-clad forensics officers and a curious silence. Nurses both male and female were leaning against the walls, behind a glazed partition. Sundström was standing at the end of the corridor, deep in conversation with a man whom Joentaa knew.

Rintanen. The medical director of the hospital, who had looked after Sanna during the last days of her life. The doctor who made it possible for him to be with her day and night, although the hospital regulations didn't really allow for that. One of the nurses had told him at the time that it wasn't usual, and he would only make himself ill if he didn't sleep and eat. Joentaa had nodded, and said nothing, and wondered why someone who didn't understand anything about death was working in a hospital.

He went over to Sundström and to Rintanen, who stood very upright yet also looked relaxed, with his head slightly bent. He used to stand like that before. Joentaa passed the room where Sanna had been lying; he remembered the number, the snow-white colour, the door was closed. His legs began to tremble, and he went a little further before uttering a greeting that came out of his mouth as a croak.

"Kimmo, my old mate," said Sundström, imperturbably humorous. "And Mr Grönholm. Good work."

Joentaa nodded to Sundström and offered Rintanen his hand. "Hello. We've ... we've met already."

Rintanen looked at him for a few seconds, and then memory kicked in. "Oh yes ... that's to say ... yes, your wife, a few years ago."

“I’m glad to see you,” said Joentaa, on impulse.

“How are you?” asked Rintanen.

Joentaa nodded. Sundström cleared his throat.

“I’m all right,” said Joentaa.

Kari Niemi, head of Forensics, passed them, his eyes fixed on something wrapped in transparent film. Niemi, who had given him a hug in the days after Sanna’s death. He wondered if he was just imagining it, whether it was a product of his imagination, inspired by these surroundings, or if he really did still feel Niemi’s hug.

Sundström, Rintanen and Grönholm were discussing the question of how to keep the normal business of the hospital going while a murder investigation was conducted at the same time.

Joentaa moved away from them and went over to the room where most of the scene-of-crime officers were working. One of them gave him gloves and an overall. A large room with only one bed in it. Because people on their way towards death had the privilege of privacy.

He went into the room, trying to control the unsteadiness of his legs. The woman was lying on her back on the bed. Salomon Hietalahti, the forensic pathologist, was sitting at the window on a visitor’s chair, making notes.

“The murder of a dead woman,” said Sundström behind him.

Joentaa turned round.

“She was in a coma, from time to time a waking coma. Persistent vegetative state, or apallic syndrome as our medical friend Rintanen out there calls it. In his opinion she had no prospect of recovery.”

Joentaa nodded.

No prospect of recovery, he thought.

“But here’s the best of it: we don’t know who she is. We don’t even know her name.”

“How on earth ...?” said Grönholm.

Don’t even know her name, thought Joentaa.

“Because the poor soul was found lying at the side of the road with traumatic brain injury. And without any personal details on her.”

Call Larissa.

“I think I remember that case. It was in the papers for quite a while, wasn’t it?”

On the occasional table next to the telephone. Was he imagining it? He must go home, he must check.

“No idea,” said Sundström.

“Yes, it was. The unknown woman, unconscious and without any memory. Didn’t you read about her?”

He must check up on it. He must go home. Grönholm and Sundström were talking about the woman lying a few feet away on a bed like the one where Sanna had lain. In a room that looked like the room where she had died.

“Though if she was unconscious, how would she have any memory anyway?” said Grönholm, and Joentaa wondered whether it was the residual alcohol still in his bloodstream that made him sound so stupid. He thought of Sanna. And of what was on the occasional table next to the telephone. His glance had fallen on it ... but he wasn’t sure. He must leave, he must go home.

“Kimmo?”

“The giraffe,” he said.

“What?” asked Sundström.

“I must leave,” said Joentaa.

“What?”

“Back very soon. I forgot something.”

“Kimmo? Hey, hang on a minute!”

Sundström’s voice in the distance. He walked along the corridors fast, the way he had walked along them on the night when Sanna’s pulse stopped beating.

“Kimmo, for God’s sake!” cried Sundström, and he was out in the open air, running to the car, driving away.

He thought that he didn’t even know her name.

And that he mustn’t lose her.

## 10

The light was on. It was difficult to spot that, because the sun was shining almost as brightly as the electric lights inside the house, but Joentaa saw that it was on.

The light was still on. Larissa wasn’t there.

Of course not. For a moment he wondered if she ever had been there.

As he opened the door and went into the hall, he thought of the occasional table with the telephone on it. Then he was standing in front of it, looking at the key.

The second key to the house. Larissa had left it behind. For the first time. Whenever she went away for an unspecified time, she'd always taken her key with her, so that some time, when she did come back days or weeks later, she could unlock the door, put the light out, and sit in the living room in the dark.

The key hung from an ungainly wooden giraffe that had amused her enormously when they came upon it recently, as they strolled around a flea-market down by the harbour in Naantali. She had gone back there that same day. To buy the giraffe pendant. And now to leave an ungainly giraffe behind for him, along with the key and her false name.

His mobile hummed, its usual ringtone. He didn't reply. The landline telephone rang. Sundström, speaking in urgent tones, was leaving a message. Joentaa heard the voice but didn't take in what it was saying. He must find Larissa. Not just look for her, find her. Now, at once. He must be with her now, put his arms round her, hold her close and ask the questions that he'd forgotten to ask. And the other questions that she had left hanging in the air as she smiled, or said nothing, or vaguely shook her head.

He must ask questions, get answers.

Now, immediately.

He took his mobile out of his jacket pocket and called her number. The number where he could never reach her. The familiar anonymous voice spoke. The person he had called was not available. A new text. Nothing in his mailbox. His hands were beginning to shake. He went into the kitchen, poured a glass of water and sipped it.

Then he hurried downstairs to the room that had been Sanna's studio in another life. Before she fell ill, and stopped working for the firm of architects that had sent one of the most expensive wreaths on the day of her funeral. With a card signed by all the staff members.

He sat down at the desk and started his laptop. Selected and opened his email. Two new messages. He had won a lottery without playing it. The second message was from his colleague Tuomas Heinonen. He felt a pang. He must visit Tuomas in the hospital where he had checked himself in a few weeks ago, when his gambling addiction came back. Heinonen had been off work for months. He hadn't gone for treatment until he had gambled away the proceeds from the three-room apartment that he had inherited

and sold, without telling his wife Paulina anything about it. Joentaa decided that he would call Paulina, and then he would go to the hospital with her and her two little twin daughters and visit Tuomas, and then everything would be cleared up and all right again. He'd do that soon.

No message from Larissa.

He typed in her address: [veryhotlarissa@pagemails.fi](mailto:veryhotlarissa@pagemails.fi)

He wrote:

*Dear Larissa*

*I hope you're well. I am rather worried. The key is still here. Did you forget it? I'll leave it in the grass under the apple tree, and then you can get in any time, even if I'm out.*

*Love from*

*Kimmo*

He looked at the message, and wondered why he hadn't asked those important questions. Why he hadn't insisted on the answers?

He sent the message, and waited a few minutes for any feeling that someone was beginning to read it at the other end.

Then he went upstairs, found a piece of paper and a pen, and wondered what he was going to write. His eyes lingered on the photograph of Sanna standing on the shelf beside Larissa's stack of books. He had once talked to Larissa about Sanna. And about that photo. They had been lying on the sofa, and as a city exploded on the TV screen Larissa had got up to go over to the photograph.

A photo of Sanna on cross-country skis, leaning back and laughing her clear laughter, taken when she was still healthy, in the winter before her death.

Larissa had looked intently at the photograph, as if she were seeing it for the first time, and then she had said, "Sanna was terrific."

On the screen, the hero of the film had fallen into the sea from a great height without dying, and Joentaa had talked about Sanna. Probably for quite a long time, because when his voice died away the film was over, and Larissa had been sitting there very upright, clumsily stroking his leg, and their eyes met.

“I didn’t want you to ...” he had begun to say, and she had laughed, but she was still crying, and she had said, “Oh, Kimmo, I cry every day.”

## 11

He drove back to the hospital. As the car went down the street he tried to count the years, months and days that had passed since Sanna’s death.

He got muddled up, and thought that it would be better to count the hours, or the minutes. The seconds. The moments that had passed by since that one moment that wouldn’t pass by.

He had left the giraffe under the apple tree.

He sat in the car when he reached the car park, stopped counting minutes and began counting the windows again. That was certainly simpler. The police car had been left in a No Parking area. The forensic team’s minibus was parked in the sun.

He got out of his car and retraced his earlier footsteps. Faded arrows in assorted colours pointed different ways. Blue arrows for Intensive Care, green for the nearby Surgical Ward. Yellow for Maternity. White for the cafeteria.

He followed the right angles and the blue arrows.

The room where Sanna had lain.

Kari Niemi, smiling as if everything were all right, showed him an item wrapped in transparent film and said something that Joentaa couldn’t make out, because waves swallowed up the words before they reached him.

Sundström, red in the face, came towards him, and Joentaa thought of the giraffe under the tree.

“For God’s sake, Kimmo!”

“I’m back,” said Joentaa.

“What got into you?”

“Nothing.”

“Kimmo!”

Joentaa passed him and stopped in the doorway. The woman was still lying on the bed at one side of the room, like an empty shell, surrounded by apparatus that now looked unimportant.

“The unknown factor,” murmured Sundström beside him.

“Yes,” said Joentaa.



“We’re using the cafeteria for interrogations,” said Sundström, turning away.

Joentaa nodded.

“Come on, damn it!” cried Sundström.

They followed the white arrows. The cafeteria too looked the same as ever. Large, bright pictures on the walls. Joentaa remembered them only when he saw them again. A view through the big window of the garden, the fountain, the benches grouped around it. Rice cookies with egg butter under transparent plastic on the counter. He thought of Sanna carefully spreading egg butter on a roll a few days before her death, and saying that she felt better.

Members of the hospital staff were sitting at the tables in their medical coats, waiting to make statements. The discreet background noise of whispering.

Petri Grönholm was sitting at one of the tables bent over a laptop, and nodding to a young man who kept shaking his head apologetically.

“It looks as if no one noticed anything,” said Sundström, and Joentaa listened in vain for the familiar sarcasm in his voice. “We have a dead woman no one knows, and a murderer no one saw.”

Joentaa nodded, and Sundström made his way to an empty table at the side of the big room. They sat down, and Sundström took some notes out of his shabby briefcase and put them down on the table like a newsreader about to begin his bulletin.

“Well then ... to get into the ward you really have to enter a number code, but it seems that the door wasn’t locked. No one knows why not.”

“I know,” said Joentaa.

“What?” asked Sundström.

“I mean I know about the number code,” said Joentaa. He even knew what it was, unless the code had been changed since then, because Rintanen had given it to him at the time so that he could come into the ward and leave it again when he liked. He had learnt it by heart, and he still remembered it.

“I was talking to Rintanen the medical director ...”

“Yes,” said Joentaa.

He had wanted to thank Rintanen, for everything. He’d catch up with that later.

“By the way, Kimmo, I heard that this is where your wife died ...”

“Yes, it’s a long time ago,” said Joentaa, wondering why he was talking such nonsense.

“Oh,” said Sundström.

“Quite a while ago,” said Joentaa.

Sundström scrutinized him for a few seconds. “Rintanen says our woman sometimes had to be given artificial respiration. The murderer obviously cut off her oxygen supply. Simply switched the artificial respiration off.”

Joentaa nodded.

“She was found beside the road in mid-August with severe traumatic brain injury, which was then diagnosed as ... wait a moment ... apallic syndrome.”

Joentaa nodded.

“In other words unconscious, in a coma. Then in a waking coma, a vegetative state. I didn’t grasp what all that means in detail, but anyway, she wasn’t really conscious at any point, she didn’t know what was going on, and since being brought in here in mid-August she’s been kept alive only with the help of medical technology.”

Kept alive, thought Joentaa.

“The cause isn’t entirely clear,” said Sundström. “The woman was very badly injured. Maybe a hit-and-run driver knocked her down, or more likely someone not in a car hit her, struck her down and left her at the roadside. Rintanen also thinks it’s possible that she suffered a stroke or a heart attack.”

Joentaa nodded.

“Inquiries by our colleagues about hit-and-run accidents haven’t come up with any results. The woman was just found lying there.”

“Just found lying there,” said Joentaa.

“Yes. Fully clothed, and that’s the point. No papers, no money, no one who knew her has reported her missing, although her photo was in the papers for several days.”

Several days, thought Joentaa.

A woman without a name.

“Maybe her name’s Larissa,” he said without thinking.

“What?”

Joentaa saw Sundström’s baffled face, and couldn’t help laughing. A brief, slightly hoarse laugh. “Forget it,” he said.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

“Ah,” said Sundström.

Two women without names. A giraffe. August.

Sundström was looking at the printed sheets of paper.

“What are you reading?” asked Joentaa.

“Various stuff,” murmured Sundström, without raising his head. “I don’t understand why no one knows the woman. Obviously the only people who called in when the photo was in the papers were nutcases.”

Maybe I should write everything down, thought Joentaa.

“Then we’ll publish the photo again, how about that?”

Everything he didn’t know.

## 12

14 September 2010

*But when there’s no more to write down, then what?*

*There are some people you lose forever.*

*There are some people who are easy to find.*

*Kalevi Forsman, for instance. Software solutions adviser. Or something like that.*

*The company’s Internet site is attractive and user-friendly. Forsman is niftily dressed, black suit, white shirt. Black and white. Features curiously soft, as if more work had been done on them after they were fully formed.*

*Not a trace in his eyes of what I remember there – the sudden greed, the way he froze rigid at the end.*

## 13

That afternoon, the idea had struck him as far-fetched and ridiculous, but in the evening Kimmo Joentaa did indeed begin to write.

He sat at the low table in the living-room with a cup of camomile tea, in front of a sheet of white paper, and had the impression that both of them calmed him down a little.

Larissa had not come back. The giraffe was still lying under the apple tree.

The sheet of paper gradually filled up with words, Larissa; likes playing ice hockey; eats a lot of chocolate; enjoys films with shoot-outs in them; bought a moped in the summer, she goes to work on it, and she’s probably out and about on it at the moment. She used to go on the bus, or she was picked up by her colleague Jennifer – where does she work? She said things about herself now and then, but then she always added that whatever she says is a lie – must think about what could have been true. Find Jennifer.

He stared at the paper. The letters written in a hand that wasn't really his own, so tidy, so neat, so clearly formed.

Suddenly he sat up straight and turned on the TV set. The late news bulletin was on. The presenter looked grave and composed. The unknown dead woman was one of the headline items. A TV correspondent outside the hospital, frowning. Carefully phrasing his remarks to hide the fact that he hadn't the faintest idea about any of it. How would he? Then the police chief suddenly appeared, Nurmela, facing forward, very upright in the sunlight, in front of those countless windows. August, thought Joentaa, and he thought that he must talk to Nurmela. If you judged by what Nurmela was saying, the criminal investigation team had everything under control.

The photo of the unknown woman came onscreen. The one that had already been published soon after she was found, in the hope of tracing family members. Now that the woman was dead, it might arouse a little more attention. Joentaa looked at the picture and tried to memorize it as the news presenter turned to other subjects. A beautiful woman, he thought. A woman ... a woman who somehow seemed faceless. A clear, pure, unrecognizable face.

He went on staring at the TV set for a while, neither seeing the pictures nor taking in the words, then stood up and, without stopping to think, called Tuomas Heinonen's mobile number. Heinonen answered after a few seconds.

"Hello, Tuomas, Kimmo here," said Joentaa.

"Kimmo," said Heinonen. As if he hadn't linked the name to a face yet.

"I just wanted to ..."

"Nice of you to call," murmured Heinonen.

"... wanted to call again," said Joentaa. "How are you doing?"

"I'm in hospital," said Heinonen.

"Yes, I know. I could come and see you again."

"Yes."

"How are you doing, then?" Joentaa repeated.

"Hm?"

"Tuomas?"

"Sorry ... I was just ..."

"What is it?" asked Joentaa.

“Nothing, I was only ... sorry. How’s things with you? Say hi to the others for me.”

“Yes, I will. We had ... I had a funny sort of day today. Do you remember Larissa?”

“The woman standing naked in the doorway last Christmas when I told you about the stuff I’d lost gambling?”

“That’s right,” said Joentaa.

“How could I forget her?”

“Exactly,” said Joentaa.

“That was kind of a nice Christmas Eve,” said Heinonen. “In spite of everything.”

Joentaa nodded, and a smile instinctively spread over his face as he thought of that crazy Christmas Eve. First Larissa or whatever she was called had appeared on his doorstep, then a totally confused, deeply upset Heinonen had arrived in a Santa Claus costume – Heinonen who was always self-controlled, sober, reserved – telling him about the failed present-giving at home, and how he was busy gambling his family’s money away betting on football matches in the English Premier League.

Almost a year ago, thought Joentaa.

“I only saw her that once. Are you two ... are you still together?”

Together, thought Joentaa.

“I don’t know. She’s gone,” he said.

“Gone?”

“Yes, she often goes away, she often stays away, but this is the first time she’s left the giraffe behind.”

“Ah. Okay,” said Heinonen. “Giraffe?”

Joentaa heard a pattering sound in the background, and Heinonen didn’t seem to be listening to him very attentively.

“I mean the key to the house. It’s on a giraffe pendant.”

“Mmph.”

“So of course I’m worried. Because it’s something new. I mean, for her to leave the key here.”

“Hm? Yes. Yes, that figures,” said Heinonen.

“Well, tell me how you are,” said Joentaa.

“Me ... fine, I’m fine,” said Heinonen. “Doing this and that. Tomorrow it’s a family therapy session.”

“A what?”

“Some therapeutic method. Depth psychology, I think that’s it.”

“Sounds like ...” said Joentaa, but then he didn’t know what it sounded like.

“I did it once before when I was ... at my first stay here, and it was okay,” said Heinonen.

“What’s all that pattering in the background? Is it something on the line?”

“Hm?”

“There’s a kind of pattering sound at your end.”

“Oh, that’s from the laptop.”

“Ah,” said Joentaa, and Heinonen suddenly began giggling.

“Sorry, Kimmo, I won’t lie to you, I’m so glad you called.”

“Yes.”

“It really ... it means a lot to me. No one but you ever calls. Except for Paulina, of course.”

“Of course,” said Joentaa.

“I’ve just been placing a few bets,” said Heinonen.

A moment of silence.

“Aha,” said Joentaa.

“There’s an ATP major on in the States,” said Heinonen.

“Aha,” said Joentaa.

“Tennis,” Heinonen explained. “The tournament’s showing live on Eurosport, so I can watch it all happen and see the results of the matches.”

Joentaa nodded, looking at the screen of the muted TV set, where a woman clad entirely in red was soundlessly forecasting sunny weather.

“I know it’s ridiculous,” said Heinonen.

“I’ll come and see you,” said Joentaa. “When would be best?”

“An evening would be good. It’s all ... all very open here. We can go out any time and get a drink down by the water.”

“Let’s do that,” said Joentaa.

“With the weather staying so fine.”

“Yes ... well, better go to sleep now, Tuomas. And do stop ... stop placing bets of any kind.”

“Okay.”

“And if there’s anything I can do, call me any time.”

“Thanks.”

“See you soon.”

“Yes, see you soon. And tell Larissa hello from me when she comes back.”

“I’ll do that.”

“If she remembers me, that is.”

“I’m sure she does. I’ll just tell her hello from Santa Claus.”

It was a moment before Heinonen laughed. “That’s right ... that stupid costume I was still wearing.”

“Sleep well, Tuomas,” said Joentaa. “And no more tennis tonight.”

“Night,” said Heinonen.

Then Joentaa sat in the silence, watching with only half his attention as the bald man on the screen stood on the edge of a swimming pool in the sun, shooting people down with an outsize gun.

Late evening entertainment.

He stood up, turned the TV off, and went down to fetch his laptop.

He sat on the sofa, started the computer, and waited.

He had no new messages.

He sat there with the computer on his lap, and thought of Tuomas Heinonen sitting on his bed in his small room, also with a computer on his lap, watching tennis.