

Prologue

BY THE RIVER KEMIJOKI—TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 1961

IN THAT YEAR, summer had come early. By the end of May, the hot weather that had started in southern and central Finland had finally pushed warm air also to the north. It had been lovely and sunny during the whole weekend, a rare thing to happen at this time of year, especially in Lapland, and the thermometer had now climbed to the magical level of 25 degrees Celsius. The summer of 1961 could not have started any better. It seemed as if the small shoots on the birch trees had grown to full size over the weekend. At last, it was summer also in Tervola, a village and municipal centre located about 75 kilometres south of Rovaniemi, the principal town of Finnish Lapland.

Two small children took full advantage of the weather. They ran naked from the riverbank down to the River Kemijoki as fast as they could.

“Raisa! You mustn’t go too deep. Only up to your belly. Neither of you can swim yet!” shouted Laura Pekkalainen to her daughter who had started a good old water fight with her cousin Tiina.

Tiina’s mother, Helena Liimatta, looked at her daughter a little worriedly but didn’t say anything. She turned to Laura and shook her head. At the same time, she straightened the towel she was lying on, enjoying the sun. On the towel lay also baby Oskari, Tiina’s little brother, who was only a couple of months old.

The young women wore swimsuits and spread sun lotion on those parts of the body exposed. They had brought many nice things with them: a picnic basket full of pastries and ham sandwiches, lemonade, coffee in a thermos, magazines, and Donald Duck comics for the children. The ice cream they had bought in a local store had already been eaten during the bicycle ride.

“The weather is so great,” repeated Helena, turning her face to the sun that was shining from a cloudless sky.

Laura reached over and increased the volume of the transistor radio lying on the grass behind her. Paul Anka was singing the last part of his hit song of the year:

In the Garden of Eden, a long time ago, there was a story, I'm sure you all know... The music faded away to be followed by the news.

"Hey, let's listen to the news. It's already twelve o'clock!" Laura exclaimed.

Newsflash from the Finnish News Agency. Today, Tuesday the 6th of June, at noon.

Unconditional imprisonment has been called for by the prosecutor of the accused milkmaid Irma Kaarina Vuorinen, for two murders and two attempted robberies. This so-called Poikmetsä double-murder case will today go before the Hollola district's jurisdictional court in Lahti. The case received a lot of publicity three years ago due to the brutality of the murders. In the prosecution report, presented to the court yesterday, it was stated that on the twenty-fifth of October 1958, the accused, Irma Vuorinen, tried to borrow money from her neighbouring farmhouse owner, a widow named Aleksandra Lampinen, and her daughter Eeva Lampinen, in the village of Poikmetsä in the Lammi municipality. When the widow replied that they didn't have money to lend, Vuorinen hit both the widow and her daughter several times in the head with an axe, with intent to kill. The court's verdict on the case is expected tomorrow.

News from abroad: President Kennedy, the youngest president ever of the United States, and Mr Hrustsev, the experienced prime minister of the Soviet Union, seemed to get along well when they met in Vienna during the weekend. Negotiations took place in both the Soviet and US embassies. A hearty atmosphere was felt during the first meeting of the two superpower leaders, eminent sources commented.

President Kennedy met Prime Minister Macmillan yesterday in London...

Laura turned the radio down. "Sounds like a terrible murder case, *again*. A year ago, near Helsinki, we had the Lake Bodom case. Three youngsters out camping were killed in their tent, and nobody knows who the killer was! And a year earlier, those two poor girls were killed in Tulilahti. Buried in a swamp with their tent and bikes. Who knows if the same lunatic is behind both those cases?" said Laura and turned onto her stomach.

"You're right. The world has gone crazy. And it's only five years since young Elli Immo was killed in Kemi, at the gate to her home!"

"Please, don't remind me. Kemi is so near to us. Hey, would you pass me the lemonade? The sun is blistering."

Helena passed the bottle to Laura and stood up.

“Would you look after Oskari? I’m going to take my first swim of the year in the river.”

“Are you sure the water isn’t too cold? You’ll get a urine infection or something.”

“Don’t be silly. The weather is absolutely gorgeous.” Helena started jumping across the rocks leading to deeper water.

“I thought you were going swimming, not rock-jumping! You’ll soon have to get your feet wet when you run out of rocks.”

Helena’s scream scared them all. The children stopped playing at the water’s edge. Laura took Oskari in her arms and stood up to see what was going on with Helena.

Then Helena’s scream ended abruptly. She tried to slow down on the rocks, but she swayed forward and fell into the river, head first. She stood up quickly, glanced at something behind her and started to scream again. Then she ran back to the others, took Tiina’s and Raisa’s hands and dragged them out of the water.

Laura, who had run to the shore, now saw what had scared Helena. First, she thought it was only some driftwood on the waves. But in the wake left by Helena’s flailing, about ten metres from the shore, a dark body floated.

1

39 YEARS LATER—THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2000, AT 01:24 A.M.

LAURA PEKKALAINEN WOKE up screaming, her hair all sweaty. It was almost dark in the room, the green digital display of the bedside clock giving the only light. The time was half past one. The sunny, bright nights of midsummer were changing gradually into the darker nights of late summer, even in Petäjäskoski, a hamlet less than 50 kilometres south of the city of Rovaniemi and the Arctic Circle.

Laura's husband, Patrik, switched on the reading lamp. "Were you having nightmares about the Kemijoki again?" he asked.

"What do you think? It felt so real, almost as if it all happened only yesterday," she replied and rubbed her forehead.

"That damned incident won't give you peace after all these years. Our discovery yesterday must have released a few of those old memories, right?" Patrik said with a calming voice and massaged Laura's shoulders lightly.

She got up, slid her feet into a pair of carpet slippers and headed for the toilet. "It isn't yet two o'clock. Would you make two cups of hot chocolate? I'd love a couple of biscuits too. There's a full bag in the lower kitchen cabinet. Otherwise, it'll be useless for me to try to sleep anymore."

Patrik got up and went to the kitchen. He put two mugs of milk in the microwave. He had no idea where the cocoa powder was, but he didn't want to bother Laura about it. Instead, he started systematically going through the kitchen cabinets one by one. He was so focused on what he was doing that he hadn't noticed Laura enter the kitchen behind him.

"I suppose you're looking for this," she said.

Patrik turned around. Laura placed the cocoa packet on the counter, smiling. "Poor Patrik! Why can't you ever remember where this is kept?"

They sat down opposite each other and dunked their biscuits in the steaming chocolate. Patrik took an old cross-shaped pendant from the table, looked at it from all directions and then, in order to see better, moved it closer to the kitchen chandelier hanging over the table.

"I think this is an old confirmation cross," he said. "The chain probably went missing years ago. Its reverse is a little rough. There might have been some kind of engraving there, but I can't make any bloody sense of it."

“But how is it possible that Tessu started digging right there? Do you think the smell of this old tin box had something to do with it? It could have attracted his nose.”

The tin box was badly rusted, but a mustard-yellow colouring and a tiny patch of red could be seen on one corner. The colours were characteristic of *Tervaleijona*—Tar Lion—a very old and well-known brand of sore-throat lozenges in Finland.

“There’s some old, hardened, oily-looking grime inside,” she went on.

“Do you remember if that was the exact place where the kids found the woman’s clothes all those years ago?” Patrik asked. At the same time, their dog, Tessu, padded into the kitchen. The Irish setter shook his head noisily, his long ears flapping. Then he sat by the table, raised his muzzle and seemed to pick up a scent from the tabletop. Laura pushed the tin box closer to the edge, and the dog sniffed more eagerly.

“Roughly on that spot, as far as I remember how that part of Romsinmutka woods looked at the time. There’s that rock in the shape of a spitz dog. You saw it too, the same as it’s always been. Tessu was digging near the rock. I think the kids found those clothes a bit nearer the road... There were lots of bushes already back then, and the clothes were thrown between them.”

“I have an idea,” Patrik said. “When we go to that theatre in Rovaniemi on Monday, we’ll leave a bit earlier and take this to the police station. After that, we’ll have enough time for a quick bite before the show. That might give you some peace. What do you think?”

“We can’t bother them with this. They’ll laugh us out. Two senile fools!”

“Let them laugh if they want. Everybody in Tervola remembers this wasn’t solved at the time, so this cross could throw some light on the case. Or it has nothing to do with it. One way or the other, we’ll take it to the police on Monday. But finish your hot chocolate, and let’s get back to bed. We’ll think about it more in the morning.”

THE FOLLOWING DAY, early Friday afternoon. The town of Naantali, in the south-west corner of Finland, was basking in the tender, languid embrace of the late-July sun. Only a few wispy clouds were sailing in the azure sky, and the temperature was just under 30 degrees Celsius. Not a sigh of wind could be felt in the air. It must have been one of the hottest days of the summer, and of the new millennium.

A year-old, black Audi A6 2.5 TDI saloon stopped in front of the Naantali Spa hotel. The driver scanned around for a vacant parking space. When he couldn’t find one near the main entrance, he reversed the car without any hesitation onto the end of the full row of parked cars. This

halved the width of the roadway, but that would have to be enough for his fellow drivers.

The Audi driver, a charming, grey-haired man around 60 years of age, looked into the rear-view mirror and removed his white vicar's collar. Then he changed from his violet dress shirt into a black-and-grey striped one and climbed out of his car. He stood beside it and smoked a small Hofnar Lilliput cigar, slowly looking around a couple of times. Then he dropped the cigar butt on the asphalt, crushed it under his Italian leather shoe and strode determinedly towards the main entrance of the hotel. His tall bearing radiated self-confidence, and his posture was faultless despite his age.

Two other men, also around sixty years of age, sat inside Naantali Spa's *Tammikellari*—The Oak Cellar—restaurant, sipping large beers. They talked calmly and quietly so as not to be overheard by the people at the nearest tables. Most of the restaurant's tables were empty at this time of day, but the men had chosen a suitable table in a corner, as far from the bar as possible.

One of the two had a respectful beer belly and his head was completely bald. He was only about 165 centimetres tall, making him look even portlier. He wore a white dress shirt, no tie, and black dress trousers. The sweat on his forehead indicated that his clothing wasn't the best choice for the current weather. He had put paper tissues under his armpits, but it didn't seem to help. His shirt was wet, and the dark splotches under his armpits reached halfway down his sides.

Whereas his companion seemed like a person who still took good care of his condition. He was harmonious in every aspect. He had short-cut, blond hair and a blond beard. He wore casual clothing—chequered knee-length shorts and a yellow polo shirt with a green crocodile embroidered on the left breast. And in the famous Finnish way, he wore socks under his brown sandals.

"And speak of the devil!" The bald-headed man glanced up as the man with the blond beard stood up and went to greet the man approaching their table.

"Hello, Aarne. Will the Holy Father take a seat?" the man with the blond beard said, shaking hands firmly with the new arrival. "Would you like the same beer as us? Jaakko and I already started. I'll get you one."

The bald man, Jaakko, rose from the table and put out his hand in greeting.

"Hello, Simo. Hi, Jaakko," the third man said, shaking Jaakko's hand. "A barley broth from the medicine man would be most welcome! I suppose we'll have more drinks with the food later?"

“Yeah, when we’ve chosen something from the menu. I must say, I’m starting to get hungry. I’ve been golfing since morning. They have a wonderful course here,” said Simo, leaving to get the beers.

“And how’s our travelling salesman doing? Business strong as usual? Judging from your belly, you haven’t been starving,” laughed the cleric, Aarne, as he sat down and patted his friend’s belly.

“Better than ever. This five-year-long boom has enabled me to expand also to the Baltics and Russia.”

“I was at an event nearby in Turku, to do with my old position. I came straight from there. This couldn’t have been planned better.”

Simo arrived holding a large beer. He brought with him a waitress to take their orders.

While waiting for the food, the three men chatted about this and that. They covered how the children and wives were doing, and their own recent exploits. Another particularly interesting talking point was their latest cars. Occasionally, the peals of laughter emanating from their table were loud enough to draw stares from the other guests.

The men had held these get-togethers at least once a year, over several decades already. In between, they would call each other now and then and ask how they were doing in life. It was obvious that their friendship, which had started when they were young, was still strong.

They spent an easy-going couple of hours eating and talking. Then the three men went out front near the entrance for a smoke. They took their final puffs amid silence prior to going their separate ways.

Extinguishing his cigarette on the pavement, Simo broke the silence. “Anything new on the northerly winds? At least in my direction, it’s been completely calm.”

The other two men both reported calm winds, but they all fell silent again as two small children and their parents walked past. The children were thrilled and, judging by their vivid chatter, the family was going to visit the *Moomin World* theme park, located on a small island joined to Naantali’s marina.

“Hopefully it’s not the calm before the storm,” said Jaakko, smiling, when the family had moved farther way. After shaking hands, they all parted. Jaakko and Aarne walked towards the parking lot, and Simo disappeared around the corner of the hotel.

It was almost four o’clock, and the sun still shone from an almost cloudless sky.

2

ON MONDAY, THE last day of July, Detective Sergeant Sonja Friberg from the Rovaniemi unit of the *Keskusrikospoliisi*, the National Bureau of Investigation, sat at her desk in an open-plan office. The NBI's office was located on the fourth floor of an office building on Hallituskatu, a busy thoroughfare in Rovaniemi's centre. There was the usual commotion—phones ringing, colleagues chatting over the partitions, detectives and patrol officers leaving and entering the office.

Friberg's phone rang. A duty officer from Rovaniemi's central police station informed her that he has visitors from Petäjäskoski. An elderly couple who have a slightly odd story to tell. Therefore, the officer thought it best to send the couple to DS Friberg. If she was free, that is.

The central police station and NBI office were situated in the same office complex, but they were different units both physically and organisationally and were located at almost opposite ends of the building, a distance of a few hundred metres. The central police station was in wing 1A, the NBI in wing 3B. Normally, Friberg would have asked a client to walk from the station to the NBI with the help of the duty officer's directions but, now that the visit concerned an elderly couple, she promised kindly to come and meet them at the station.

A few minutes later, Friberg picked up Mr and Mrs Pekkalainen from the information desk. They returned to the NBI by walking around the corner of the building and entering an inner courtyard, then entering through a door held open by Friberg. As they waited for an elevator, Mr and Mrs Pekkalainen happened to notice that the wing's first floor was home to the National Land Survey's Lapland office, including a small shop run by *Karttakeskus*, the National Map Centre.

Soon they were on the fourth floor standing in front of a grey, steel door. On the wall to the right, below a big doorbell, was a sign that read:

National Bureau of Investigation (NBI),
Rovaniemi Unit
and
National Traffic Police

Friberg opened the door with her keys and led Mr and Mrs Pekkäläinen into a workroom used by detectives for interviews and hearings.

“Please, sit down. How can I help you?”

The Pekkäläinens sat down on the chairs indicated by Friberg.

“Well, I don’t exactly... know how to start,” said Laura Pekkäläinen, hesitating.

“In that case, it’s usually best to start from the beginning.”

“A friend of mine and I found a woman’s body in River Kemijoki near Tervola in the early summer of 1961. As far as I know... she had been killed, and who had done it never came to my knowledge or any other’s... I presume they didn’t get to know the murdered woman’s name either. I mean... as far as I know.”

DS Sonja Friberg’s ho-hum attitude evaporated immediately. She bent closer and asked, “And...?”

“In the previous summer, that’s 1960, around midsummer, our eldest children and their friends were playing in Romsinmutka woods and found some pieces of women’s clothing, including underwear, which had been strewn over bushes and tree branches. That place, I mean, where they found the clothes, is a couple of kilometres upstream from where we later found the dead body.”

“OK, yes. But these things took place almost half a century ago, so I don’t think it’s—”

“Well, last Friday, I was picking blueberries with Patrik in Romsinmutka woods, somewhere near where the clothes were found in 1960. Our dog, Tessu, dug up a rusty *Tervaleijona* box. Very rusty, but one corner had enough colouring left for us to recognise the brand. The tin box had some hard stuff inside... like a lump of solidified oil. We brought the box with us.”

“I see,” said Sonja Friberg, taking the tin box in her hands. She sniffed it. Was it her imagination... or could she really sense a faint whiff of tar?

“I went to see what Tessu was digging,” said Patrik Pekkäläinen, opening his mouth for the first time, “and I saw something shiny in the loose soil.”

“Which was...?” asked Friberg.

“A pendant for a woman’s necklace. A kind of confirmation cross... in bad condition. There’s an engraving on it, but I couldn’t figure out what it says, not even with the help of a magnifying glass.” Patrik Pekkäläinen took the cross from his shirt pocket and placed it on the table in front of DS Friberg.

“Is that so? This is getting more and more interesting. Would you wait a moment?” Friberg went to the corridor and stepped into another room. The sign on the door read: *Detective Inspector M. Edelmann*.

“Markus! Come and meet an elderly couple with a rather curious story,” Friberg said from the doorway.

Behind the desk sat a tall man in his mid-fifties with straight, blond hair cut short and parted on the left. He wore dark dress trousers and a light-coloured dress shirt without a tie. Friberg thought that, from a certain angle, Inspector Edelmann strikingly resembled Frank Drebin, played by Leslie Nielsen, from the movie *The Naked Gun*.

Markus Edelmann looked up from his papers. He smiled, placed his reading glasses on the table and looked at Friberg. “By all means. Just wait a moment, Fräulein Sonja.”

Friberg turned around on the spot, closed her eyes and clenched her teeth. *The old fox is throwing around his German quips again. Fräulein Sonja, indeed! He calls me Miss only when he's in a good mood. Any other time, our der Alte calls me Friberg... Jesus!*

She opened her eyes, puffed and marched back to the hearing room. Inspector Edelmann rounded his desk and followed leisurely.

“Markus Edelmann. Good day, good day!” Edelmann shook hands with Mr and Mrs Pekkalainen and sat down on a chair held out by Friberg.

Then Laura Pekkalainen repeated, almost word for word, the same events she had told DS Friberg.