

Tua Laine

# RESURRECTING JACK



TUA LAINE grew up in Finland, but has spent most of her life as an international nomad in faraway places, from Bahrain to Russia, and London to Alabama. *Resurrecting Jack* is the abridged English version of her first novel, *Ei tässä elämässä, Jack*, published in Finland in 2020. Laine translated the novel into Finnish by herself. She holds an MA in English and Russian literature. Her short stories have appeared in online and print magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. She now resides in Helsinki and Lisbon..



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This is a work of fiction. Although its form is partly that of an autobiography, it is not one. Names, characters, incidents and the timeline are either the products of the author's imagination or unreliable memory, or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to real people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Some parts have appeared before, in different forms, in *Rosebud*, ♀WF, and *Absinthe*.

## Quotations

Irving Berlin, *Anything You Can Do (I Can Do Better)*—p.27

D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—p.46

Herman's Hermits, *I'm into Something Good*—p.85

Leonard Cohen, *Dance Me to the End of Love, Various Positions*—p.297

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*—p.300

★ Quotes on the back cover were translated from Finnish by the author.

Cover Kari Brownlie

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# ALBATROSS TAKEOFF No 117

*Helsinki, 2022*

It's taken me forty years to write this book. Dozens of drafts in desk drawers, computers and emails (for backup), and even in my dreams. I'm not like Camus' Joseph Grand; it was never the first sentence that I couldn't get right. No, I've written dozens of those. And scores of the first five pages to hook the reader. It was always the end that eluded me. Not to mention the perfect words and sentences I'd written over the years that refused to come together and soar. Pieces of the puzzle went missing with my first husband, and I just couldn't make them up.

When I'd polished the manuscript so much it stopped moving and started stinking, I buried it for over a decade. My New Year's resolution for 2019 was to give the book one more chance to live. I dusted the manuscript off, sent a query to a publisher and was offered a deal three weeks later.

After the deal was done, I drove my editor crazy changing the manuscript even while she was proofreading it. I can't help it, I told her. It's like an albatross around my neck, not letting go till I get the story right. She threatened to come and tear off the bird's legs if I touched the copy one more time. I guessed she'd never seen an albatross take off from land. It's not a pretty sight, even with legs.

And when it was finally all done, the book on display in the window of the downtown Helsinki bookstore, I learned how wrong I'd been about the things that really mattered.

We need to talk, my stepson Niko said when he called me for the first time in decades.

I had to rewrite the book one more time. This is the director's cut. The one with the missing pieces. The final, final version of my story.

Unless, of course, Mariam decides to get in touch.



# THE PLAYWIFE DEAL



# EVE

*Alabama, 2001*

Jack keeps me company when I clean house, hovering just beyond my range of vision.

Happy now, Ilsa? He asks when I scrub the bathroom. Wouldn't you rather be lunching in London, rescheduling Russia's foreign debt over some nice Stilton and port? He wipes a disapproving finger along a dusty picture frame.

I stopped being a banker a long time ago. I stopped living Jack's way a long time ago. I don't clean the way we used to, moving all the furniture, wiping down doors and windows and picture frames, scrubbing and polishing Saturday mornings away. Life's too short. Now I wait till the dust bunnies grow restless and growl when I go near, then run the vacuum over the middle of the room, just enough to scare them back into hiding.

Russian cleaning, my mother used to call it, only what shows. My kids grow entire ecosystems under their beds. Being too hygienic will give kids asthma and allergies anyway. No way I'd let that happen to mine.

Go away, I tell Jack. This is my choice. It's messy but mine. Noisy and warm and funny, sticky and smelly and wet. Real life. All mine. Just the way I want it.

It sounds good, but isn't all true.

I almost miss the doorbell, don't hear it for the racket the vacuum is making. Americans like their appliances loud, I've read, because they equate noise with power and efficiency. And not only in appliances.

Blackie barks and runs to the door.

I open the door and Jack is there, a shadow in front of the sun.

The dog growls and I grab his collar. The man takes a step back, the sun hits his face. It's not Jack. Of course, it's not Jack.

I tell Blackie to stay, step out and pull the door shut behind me. No strangers in the house, not in America. Without the big black Lab, I wouldn't have opened the door.

The man looks bemused.

"I hope I'm not too early." The voice is older than the face, the accent vaguely English. His hair is pulled into a ponytail.

"I was vacuuming, didn't hear you."

I wait for him to go on but he doesn't, keeps on looking at me till the silence stretches into a void that warps time. The world shifts a little, and I see myself from the outside, standing in a house of mirrors, on the brink of eternity.

It *is* him.

"Can I help you?"

He looks surprised, hesitates.

"I'm Tony... Tony Vance. I'm looking for a friend of mine. "John... Goodman."

"Goodman? Sorry, doesn't ring a bell."

Still he doesn't move. "What's the street number? These driveways are confusing."

Centuries of silent scrutiny.

"Uhm..." He rummages in his pockets, shrugs. "I must've left the address at the hotel. Hate to be a bother but could I use your phone?"

"I'll get the cordless. The dog doesn't like strangers in the house."

The man is smoking when I come out again. His cigarettes and a silver lighter are on the porch rail. Marlboro's. Jack's brand.

"Sorry it took so long. It was in the breadbox. Kids."

"Glad you found it before it got toasted."

He takes the phone and dials. I watch his fingers dance on the keys.

"It's local," he says, smiling.

Darn. I turn away. Maybe I should go back in. But then he'd have to ring the bell again. I decide to go check on the fruit trees in the back.

Peaches, think peaches. Good, sane everyday thoughts. Squirrels. That's it. Peaches and squirrels.

Fallen fruit dot the ground under the trees. The air smells of rotting peaches and damp grass. I pick a soft fuzzy fruit and another, careful not to trouble the yellowjackets, busy finishing what the squirrels sampled. We may have to trap them like H is suggesting, and give them a ride to the state park. Having gorged on peaches, the fruit of life of Chinese mythology, the squirrels probably think they are immortal by now because they totally ignore the fake snakes I've hung from the trees.

The man is behind me when I straighten up. The familiar aftershave takes my breath away and I stumble, peaches in hand like some Eve in a twisted tableau. He takes hold of my elbow, steadies.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you."

He lets go but the memory of his touch lingers. I'd rub the spot if not for the dripping peaches in my hands.

"Peach?" I offer before noticing the squirrel-gnawed spot. "There are more. Good ones. On the trees."

He looks up, spots a black snake hanging from a low limb and takes a quick step back.

"Oh, it's not real. Rubber snakes, to scare the squirrels. Not that it works. Have one!"

"A squirrel?"

"Or a peach. Take as many of both as you want. I'll even give you a recipe for squirrel stew from a cookbook I have. *White Trash Cooking*. It has possum too. And roadkill."

I shut myself up too late. I always talk too much when I get nervous.

The man chuckles. "I think I'll pass. I left the phone on the porch. Thanks again."

"No problem. Hope you find your friend."

I throw the peaches into the woods and go fetch gloves from the garage. I'd better pick up the rotting peaches before the yellowjackets become immortal too. The man has made it almost to the bottom of the driveway. He has Jack's back but not his walk. Jack didn't limp. Feeling

my gaze, the man turns and waves, a quick twist of the wrist, almost like the English royals do it. I blush and spin away. He must think I'm nuts. Maybe I am. I'm starting to believe in my own tales. Lots of people smoke Marlboro's and wear Monsieur Dior, even today.

The first year or two, I saw Jack all the time. The first time, he was standing across the tracks at Bank tube station in London. I'd been working late; the station was deserted, with just a lone man on the other side of the tracks, reading a paper. He must have felt me staring since he looked up and froze when our eyes met. By the time I'd run to the other side, he was gone.

Then there was that banker in London who could've been Jack's twin. Phil something. And the famous actor whose picture the newspaper ran next to Jack's, inviting readers to guess the real McCoy. I still can't bear to watch his movies.

Mostly I saw Jack in a crowd, a glimpse from the corner of my eye. I never knew what it was, the same height or coloring, neatly pressed jeans or a crisp denim shirt. Or a whiff of Monsieur Dior in the air.

When Leo was born, Jack went away. And now he's back.

Jack is dead, I tell myself, a handful of ashes I keep in a porcelain jar way back in the downstairs closet, next to the photo H hates so. Did I really have to keep Jack's photo on my desk, H asked soon after we moved to Alabama. It was the last thing he saw leaving for work in the morning, the first thing coming home at night. I was sorry, I said, and turned the photo face down. Later still, I put it in the box with the other mementos. Leo was almost two then, and I was pregnant with Nea. It hadn't occurred to me H was still jealous of Jack.

The box is hidden deep under the Christmas decorations, loved-to-pieces stuffed toys and baby clothes I can't bear to part with. I expect to find the photo on top but it isn't. Jack's letters are, and his neat hand catches me like a bump in the road. I put them aside and dig deeper.

After the funeral, I'd purged Jack's files of me, leaving nothing for his ex-wife Anna to find. On second thought, I'd also taken Jack's notes and

correspondence with his other women. I'd keep them safe till Niko grew up and wanted to know about his father. Your father was a remarkable, complicated man, I'd tell Niko. Not easy to understand. Here, I've kept these papers for you.

I haven't seen Jack's son for years. Can't really blame Anna. Maybe I was a little crazy back then. Niko must be well over thirty now. I could see him on the street and not recognize him. I might as well throw the papers away. I don't know how much Anna knew back then. No point in hurting her now, after all these years.

The photo I'm looking for, Mikkel's shot of Jack on our wedding day, is wedged to the side of the box. I've never liked it much; Jack's hair is too coiffed and his expression goofy—almost a grimace. Still, it's the best I have.

The man at my door had Harrison Ford-gray hair and too-even, too-white teeth for someone with an English accent. And his nose looked unfamiliar. A nose job and all caps, perhaps. But a ponytail and two earrings on one ear?

You think you'll remember it all, every mole and mark, the curve of a lip, the crease of an ear, but that's not how it goes. Years go by and details disappear, airbrushed away by time. The images grow blurry and hazy until all that remains is a presence, and pictures yellow with age.

I shuffle the envelope with the newspaper clippings and condolence notices. A photo falls out and lands on the floor. It's grainy and gray, a snapshot enlarged too much. Rolling dry hills, a drop down to the sea; a picnic table and some people I don't know. And Jack, almost not there, a shadow at the edge of a stranger's holiday snapshot.

The date and time are printed in neat black ink on the back. The cruelty still takes my breath away.

*Tipasa,  
September 4, 1981*

It won't be long, I can tell by the shadows, an hour or two at most. The ticking of my watch grows loud in my ears. I close my eyes and

reach for Jack in the moment just before. I want to shake him and shout at him, warn him. I want to plant worry in his too-calm gaze, a tremor in the too-steady hand that's holding a match to a pipe.

Beware, beware, I shout.

But Jack can't hear me for I am the future, the real future. The cruel premonition about to come true.

# GIRL MEETS BOY

*Helsinki, 1975*

I met Jack the night Piet and I broke our three-year engagement. It wasn't a surprise—we'd been dividing photos and books and engagement presents for weeks—but it hurt no less, and my sister Kara took me out to forget. We went to a new disco in the Helsinki harbor—Kara, her new boyfriend and I—and drank Cuba Libres and talked about life and love till the new boyfriend tried to hold my hand under the table, and Kara took him outside to sober up. They've now been married for fifteen years and that night has never been mentioned.

I followed them to the coat check but turned back. I was feeling great. I never drank the hard stuff, and the rum and Cokes had gone straight to my head. Plus, I was a free woman, and there was an unusually good selection of cute guys in the disco: a tall, dark boy just my type at the end of the bar and a blond, blue-eyed beauty next to me.

Two men, a tall one in a gray-green sweater, and a shorter, swarthier one in a business suit, were coming up the stairs when I went back down.

"Oh, good! You didn't leave. Let's dance!" the sweater said when I passed him.

He sounded like we knew each other. I glanced over but was fairly certain—allowing for the Cuba Libres—we'd never met before. He looked quite old, too, and his hair was way too long in the neck.

I almost said no but remembered my manners. Nice girls don't say no to dance invitations, except from drunks, so I followed the sweater to the dance floor. The pretty dark boy started talking to a girl and the blond one left, so the sweater and I kept dancing. Then the bar was suddenly closing, lights turned up bright, waitresses clearing tables.

The sweater and I were the only customers left. His name was Jaan but everyone called him Jack. He was a diplomat and lived in Paris. I was a college student, a free woman and drunk. It seemed only natural to propose to him.

“Will you marry me?”

Jack laughed and declined. He was separated but not divorced, and had a son. Marriage was out of the question for now, but he offered to take me home.

Outside, Jack offered his arm. “My car is round the corner.”

The sea was black and very still, too close to freezing to mind the wind that bit to the marrow. I was concentrating on buttoning my jacket. The buttonholes seemed to have gotten lost or stolen because they were nowhere to be found.

A shadow lunged from a doorway. Jack took a quick step back.

“Ilsa?” the shadow said in Kara’s voice.

“My shishter,” I muttered. “I forgot. Not that she’s my shishter. About them waiting.”


“Nice to meet you,” Jack said politely.

Kara glared at him and the boyfriend hung his head and said nothing. He was shaking pretty badly. Kara’s lips were a tight white line and she wouldn’t meet my eyes. “Shorry,” I said to no one in particular. I had no idea how long they’d been waiting in the cold wind.

“Oh well,” Jack said. “Come on kids, your taxi is round the corner.”

A stranger with too-long hair and hairy nostrils was sleeping in my bed when I woke up. My head was threatening to implode, Kara wasn’t talking, and the boyfriend crept about, nursing an impressive-sounding hangover. Hungover as I was, too, I reckoned I’d have to handle future love crises without Kara’s help.

It was almost noon when Jack woke up. I made him tea and toast, desperately wishing him away, but he kept on eating and drinking and conversing politely with my sister as if waking up in a stranger’s bed was



Two years after their wedding, Ilsa's first husband Jack Lind, a Finnish diplomat, comes home from a business trip in cargo. Not allowed to see him again, Ilsa can't believe Jack is really dead, but expects him to walk back into her life one day.

When a man who could be Jack finally turns up at her door twenty years later, Ilsa has two teenagers and a picket-fence marriage in Alabama. What would she do if the man at her door was really Jack? To know the answer, Ilsa has to rewrite her past.

'Written with wry humor, *'Resurrecting Jack'* explores the recesses of the human heart to show what expedients human psychology is capable of, in the grip of love, in order to deny the apparently undeniable.'

Robert Grossmith

'The plot grabs you and doesn't let you go. The novel is an amalgam of Ilsa's current life, her past with Jack, and excerpts from her manuscript. The reader wonders what is true and what is imagined, and how they would want the story to end.'

*Eeva, on Ei tässä elämässä, Jack\**

'The novel turns her grief into a complex mystery while taking the reader on an armchair trip from the Soviet Union to Bahrain, London and Alabama, and observing the changing relations between men and women along the way.'

*YLE Kulttuuriyökkönen, 25.8.2020, on Ei tässä elämässä, Jack\**

\*Translated from media reviews for the Finnish edition, published in 2020



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