

*Lilo Thurman*



**Under the orange tree**

**THE FIRST PART OF THE HUMANITY TRILOGY.**

# Under the Orange Tree

Lilo Thurman

Part One of the Humanity Trilogy

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Kustantaja: BoD · Books on Demand GmbH, Helsinki, Suomi

Kirjapaino: Libri Plureos GmbH, Hampuri, Saksa

ISBN: 978-952-80-8522-5

## This book is dedicated to...

The entire Trilogy of Humanity is dedicated to the worlds' best  
pop song ever written "Blank Space" (songwriters: Taylor Swift  
/ Max Martin / Johan Shellback).

*All the characters, places, and stories in this trilogy are “fictional”.*

*You may notice that I haven't mentioned my personality. This is because my personality has completely changed. Or, to put it more accurately, I completely changed my personality. I invented [], my alter ego.*

**- Neil Strauss: The Game - Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists**

*Perhaps some more sensitive readers may find certain scenes in  
this book difficult, but in a work that explores humanity, we  
cannot ignore its uncomfortable aspects.*

# Prologue

Dear Taylor,

I am your devoted admirer from Finland, right here on the borderlands of Russia. I'm not sure if the location really matters, but we are a small nation of just over five million people under Russia's shadow, and we have experienced Russia's cruelty several times throughout history.

I have written three books, and they tell not only of cruelty but also of love and everything related to human life.

I've dedicated this trilogy—'The Trilogy of Humanity'—to your song 'Blank Space' (songwriters: Taylor Swift / Max Martin / Johan Shellback).

*So it's gonna be forever, or...*

The parts of this trilogy:

**Part 1:** Under the Orange Tree. This is a different kind of detective story. In the first part of the trilogy, we meet social media star Katariina and her identical twin sister, Liina, who is a psychiatrist. The theme of this book is racism. It explores why we must not let fear take control.

**Part 2:** Run Wild, Child. The theme of this book is religion and how it often treats people harshly. In the name of religion, one person mistreats another.

**Part 3:** If You Had Looked at Me. The final book's theme is love. What can love drive a person to do? The consequences can be catastrophic, yet people cannot help but love. This part is a celebration of love and its creative power. It touches upon birth, death, and all of life in between



# 1. Ebrima

The sun's rays raced with the wind on the salty, black skin that clung fearfully to the ship's rusty deck. Waves rolled over the men in swells, drenching them with spray and lifting them up and down lightly as if by a giant's hand.

The skyscrapers of Tripoli had already faded into a faint blue line on the curved horizon, beyond which lay their entire lived life.

Ebrima forced himself to smile, but he didn't want to look into the eyes of others, for he didn't want to see fear in their gaze.

The Mediterranean is a grave.

Ali's words echoed in his mind.

But it wasn't autumn now; the weather was lovely. From the ship's funnel, white smoke billowed, dispersing into the wind like the morning mist over the fields of Maiduguri.

The captain stared stoically ahead, chewing on khat. He navigated the waves one by one, steering the helm with each crest.

All was well; they had a new beginning ahead of them. Ebrima tried to calm his mind.

He closed his eyes. Images flooded back into his mind, haunting him.

He began to sing silently in his mind a song that took him back to a time when all was still well, a Nigerian children's song.

*L'abe igi orombo*

*N'ibe l'agbe nsere wa*

*Inu wa dun, ara wa ya*

*L'abe igi orombo\**

*Under the orange tree,*

*we play and dance,*

*we are happy,*



*we are excited,*

*beneath the orange tree.*

*I don't know how to begin, but you need to know. You don't have to forgive me or comfort me, even though I know you have a big heart. I've prayed, but what good would it do now? Nothing will bring back Zahra or Mumma - nothing can undo what's been done. I can only start anew. I promise to do everything in my power to get you to me - everything I can and more. You know how diligent I am - even though I've acted foolishly. I promise not to spare myself. I love you!*

"Hey, wake up, the engine died."

Ebrima jerked and looked questioningly at the man beside him, who was wearing a bright orange life vest.

"What?"

"We're adrift," the man sternly said as if Ebrima could do something about it.

Ebrima looked around and saw panicked people. The ship had turned sideways, and no smoke was coming from the funnel. Waves splashed buckets of icy water over the side.

"The Mediterranean is a grave," the words echoed in his ears.

The captain was bent over the engine. But they were drifting; there was nothing to be done.

Dark clouds painted the sea with shadows, pierced by raindrops a little further away in a unified front.

Water splashed onto the deck.

"Stay put," someone shouted from the other side.

The ship gulped down water with each new wave.

"Help, the ship is sinking," someone panicked.

"Shut up," another snapped.

The water didn't have time to drain back into the sea before a new wave splashed more water onto the deck.

*This isn't real.*

Frantic glances, desperate attempts to bail water with bottles, seawater already reached their knees.

The waves tossed them like rags, and the pendulum motion intensified until soon the ship would take on water properly. What would happen then? Ebrima didn't want to think about it, but the thought struck his consciousness just like those waves of the Mediterranean.

He picked up his backpack and grabbed the railing. Disbelief, despair, resignation. Nothing he could do would change this situation.

Suddenly, the ship tilted sharply, and water struck him with massive force.

The center of gravity had crossed. The sea flowed freely over the side. As the next wave hit, Ebrima felt his feet give way. Was he going to drown now?

"Óloqun, help me," he prayed as he crashed into the sea. "God, whoever you are, help me."

The body knows what to do when it plunges through the surface into the cold, raging, icy sea. Adrenaline floods the brain, saltwater fills the mouth, and it feels the sting in its lungs.

The sea was freezing foam, and for a moment, Ebrima didn't know where the surface was. He coughed up seawater but forced himself to calm down.

Water seeped into his mouth.

Bodies floated in life vests all around, screaming in panic.

Ebrima swam towards a body floating nearby in a life jacket, carried away by the waves like a giant wig lying face down. He pulled the man by the shoulder and turned him over.

The man's head fell to the side, revealing lifeless features. Not even bubbles came from his mouth. Guilt and fear of death raised the stakes.

Driven by some other force, Ebrima stripped the man of his life jacket and let him sink below the surface. He felt a moment of relief. He wasn't going to die.

Then he saw, just a few waves away, the pale blue bottom of a boat floating upside down in the waves. He immediately started paddling towards it.

Ebrima tried to grab the vessel, but the barnacle-covered bottom scraped his skin raw. Just as he was about to catch hold of it, a wave swept him further away.

"Grab my hand!"

Ebrima looked in the direction of the voice. The man who had been sitting next to him earlier was holding onto the propeller of the boat. Ebrima swam toward the man and grabbed the outstretched hand.

"Thank you!"

Together, they might survive.

The man climbed up first. Ebrima pushed him up from below. Then he grabbed his hand and climbed up next to the man. They pressed their stomachs against the boat's curved bottom, hands still holding, trying to ignore the waves.

They were there for a long time; the waves calmed down, and the day turned into night. They were still alive. The stars illuminated the sea, where dozens of people still floated. No one screamed anymore; it was a quiet moment. Would they die here, on the curved bottom of the ship?

Ebrima didn't know if he was still conscious. Were things actually happening, or was everything just imagination? He heard the engine roar intensify and saw the headlights sweeping over the sea.

*Is there anyone alive?* A megaphone echoed.

He gave in.

## 2. Ansakoski

"Jukkis!

Chairman of the Finance Committee, Jukka-Pekka Ansakoski, stopped in the middle of the stairs of the parliament building and glanced back. His young assistant ran toward him, waving a bundle of papers as if he held a sensational surprise. "Did you see the poll?" the assistant asked energetically.

Ansakoski looked at the man questioningly. "What poll?" he asked, even though he knew the assistant would tell him everything he needed to know.

"Jukkis, you're the next Prime Minister of Finland! Did you see?"

"Oh, yes! I'm sorry, but I do have to go."

"Why, what's up?"

"I'm heading to the party headquarters. I won't be available but leave a message if you need me," Ansakoski said, waving his hand as he hurried down the stairs.

Polls were just polls. The real measure of popularity would be during the elections—next spring. At least young men would vote for them, but they also needed support from other groups: women, the elderly, homosexuals, and people of different colors. But at the same time, they couldn't lose the support of those who couldn't tolerate anything different.

Sunbeams lingered for a moment on the outer wall of the Contemporary Art Museum, along which the shadow of a riding warlord advanced determinedly. Ansakoski walked through the city center, enjoying the hustle of the street. He could see how people reacted to him. Many had immense prejudice, but the political game felt surprisingly good now. If he spoke, many people listened. Their parties task was to open the eyes of those who still trotted like racehorses, believing in a world that didn't exist. Old parties couldn't

change the situation. They were needed because they didn't have the same structural corruption as other parties.

How much is a person willing to do to gain advantages for themselves? There would be a stop to the corruption now, they would make sure of that!

Suddenly, Ansakoski felt raindrops on his forehead. He hastened his steps and instinctively brushed his thinning hair with his hand. On the corner of Kalevankatu, the same beggar woman persisted, with a clunky tin cup in front of her.

Who on earth gave money to beggars? After the elections, things would change. They would do what they had promised.

Suddenly, his phone rang.

Ansakoski stared at the screen and decided he would call Anniina back later. Was his wife still worrying about that fox carcass?

As he hurried his steps, Ansakoski tried to avoid puddles. Beneath Hotel Marski's awning, a crowd stood waiting for the rain to stop; glancing at the sky, he decided it would be fine to continue.

The party office was almost around the corner, and just thinking about it put him in a good mood. Every other party's office paled in comparison. They had developed from a small student group into one of Finland's largest, most powerful parties.

While admiring the party office's handsome facade, Ansakoski looked up too late to see a convoy of cars speeding past him, splashing water onto him. Cursing, he strode across the street to the door of the magnificent building. He hadn't noticed the car that followed him, monitoring his every move. He climbed the stairs to the party office's door, opened it, and stepped inside.

After turning off the alarms, Ansakoski removed his wet coat and grabbed some kitchen towels to dry himself off.

He looked around taking in the room. Almost nothing had changed in this old bank hall since his active days; the new generation clearly respected tradition. Everything exuded dignity; the herringbone

parquet was still in good shape, and the light green tile Swedish stove stood as an ornament among old campaign posters, now admired for its beauty rather than its function.

'Take the lead! Don't flop!' read a poster attached to the stove, and Ansakoski smiled at the slogan that he'd always loved. This was their spiritual home—a place where they had united so many different voices to achieve the most important goal: giving a voice to those who wouldn't otherwise be heard.

Ansakoski pulled out his phone and glanced at the screen. Anniina had tried to call again.

The image of a bloody carcass thrown into their yard earlier that morning flashed in Ansakoski's mind. The morning sun had hit the animal in a way that made it look like a piece of art. Anniina had screamed hysterically and demanded round-the-clock security as if that would solve anything. Let it be! Fox girls weren't dangerous, except perhaps to themselves and legitimate businesses. Idealists shouldn't be incited, so they wouldn't get excited!

Ansakoski called his wife.

*"Currently unable to connect to the mobile network. Please try again later."*

He tried again, but the same thing. A symbol at the top of the screen indicated that the phone had no network connection.

Suddenly, the entry buzzer rang.

Ansakoski glanced at his watch.

Well, at least the visitor was on time.

He hurried to open the door but as the newcomer entered, Ansakoski immediately realized it wasn't the person he was expecting. He swallowed.

The man was dressed in a security guard uniform and looked at him without expression. He handed him the security company's card and Ansakoski took it and nodded.

"Can I come in?" the man asked in English.

Ansakoski turned to guide the man inside, but it was a mistake. Out of nowhere, a sharp blow struck the back of his head. A piercing pain engulfed him, causing his vision to blur. Ansakoski didn't have time to realize he was losing consciousness, and he fell like a ragdoll onto the herringbone parquet.

### 3. Katariina

The bristles of the brush pulled shiny lines that looked like fresh wounds onto the canvas, where a plump lady lay languid with her red nails. Katariina was curious to see what the painting would reveal. It couldn't be forced out, but she knew it would come in due time, as always, if she just had the patience to keep adding new layers. She looked at the painting with her head tilted and squeezed more white paint onto the palette. She would calm the image by covering the background landscape with snow. The phone rang just as she was about to twist the cap back onto the tube.

*"So it's gonna..."*

Liina's name appeared on the screen.

"Hi, sis," Katariina chirped.

"Is everything okay with you?" Liina asked.

"Yeah, everything's fine over here, don't worry about us."

Katariina glanced behind her at Tumppi, who was playing on his phone on the couch. The boy was curled up into an indistinct bundle, his corkscrew curls bouncing with the movements of the world's most adorable boy.

"Good. Is it okay if I stay here overnight? I'll come pick up Tumppi first thing in the morning."

"Yeah, of course, we'll be good," Katariina reassured her.

Liina could easily get nervous but Kaatariina thought that she should focus on Mehdi; that's why she had brought Tumppi to her anyway. After bidding farewell to her sister, Katariina stared thoughtfully at Tumppi. What could they do tonight? Maybe Tumppi could watch a movie, and she could work.

"Tumppi, you're staying at my place for the night," Katariina said, smiling.



Tumppi glanced at Katariina inquisitively but then returned his attention to the screen.

*Everyone gets to be exactly what they want.*

Katariina picked up her phone from the table. There were just a few likes and no messages from anyone. Katariina posted a story about her upcoming program.

***On Monday, Katariina Heikkilä LIVE will be taking on health technology. Join me!***

Katariina smiled at her creation. *There we go.*

When the leader of the Finnish populist party—a sharp-tongued critic of the opposition—is found brutally murdered, the case becomes fodder on social media and in the press. Police strive to keep the details out of the public eye, but tensions rise, and rumors swirl wildly.

Katariina, a journalist and social media influencer, and her identical twin sister, psychiatrist Liina, wake up to a reality where they are suspected of this violent murder. Are the sisters keeping secrets from one another, or is someone trying to frame them? But who would have it out for them?

How does the family lineage of a young African refugee, a decades-old stoning sentence, and a sapphire-eyed girl relate to what seems like a politically motivated murder? Can the young man who risked his life to escape his home country somehow avoid his family's curse?

As Katariina unravels the details of the murder, she uncovers dark secrets that may put her family at risk. Does she dare face evil head-on to save her loved ones?

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