



A Case for **Ariel Kafka** of Helsinki's Violent Crime Unit

# NIGHTS OF AWE

HARRI NYKÄNEN





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Harri Nykänen

Translated by Kristian London



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Harri Nykänen, born in Helsinki in 1953, was a well-known crime journalist before turning to fiction. He won the Finnish crime writing award "The Clue" in 1990 and in 2001. His fiction exposes the local underworld through the eyes of the criminal, the terrorist and, most recently, from the point of view of an eccentric Helsinki police inspector.

Men are born, they live, and they die. Few leave any permanent trace of the sojourn. For most, the only memory remains in the photo album gathering dust in the bookcase's bottom cabinet. For some, it's impossible to come up with an reason for their lives, even with a touch of goodwill.

Pehkonen belonged to this latter caste.

If I had been the contemplative type, I would have doubtless dedicated more time to pondering the meaning of his seemingly pointless existence. God alone knew where and why this gadfly had drifted around the earth in the period between his birth and his death, in other words approximately fifty years. I knew a piece here and a fragment there, but as a policeman I just wanted an answer to one question: who killed him?

The late Mr Pehkonen was lying in a recycling dumpster, yesterday's newspaper covering him like a quilt. The early autumn night had been cool, around forty degrees, and a blanket of newspapers was warmer than nothing.

On his head, the deceased wore a bizarre fake-fur hat that looked more like a waterlogged raccoon dog that had been flattened in rush-hour traffic than a piece of headgear. A dark-brown wool scarf had eroded into a rope-like rag around his grimy neck.

There was a deep contusion at his temple, and next to his head sprawled a square-sided cobblestone, a clunker that weighed at least ten pounds. The newspapers mounded into a pillow beneath his head had soaked up the blood that had drained from the wound. The combined odour of printing ink and urine wafted out from the dumpster. As a parting gesture, Pehkonen had done it in his pants.

When I saw the body, the first thing that came to mind was that next morning there would be a newspaper in that exact same paper container reporting about a man who had been found dead in a newspaper container.

Pehkonen's death was as meaningless and insignificant as his life, unless you consider it an achievement to end up a one-column story buried in the inside pages of the national paper and a two-column story in the tabloids. I was sure that somewhere nearby that same day we'd find the guy, who, in a bout of drunken insanity or to assert ownership over a bottle of booze nursed by Pehkonen, had bashed the life out of his pal with a cobblestone. The investigation and the autopsy would be routine in the truest sense of the word. Cremation, an urn paid for by social services chucked into the ground, a couple of handfuls of dirt on top, end of story. What happened to Pehkonen after that was no longer the concern of a detective from the Helsinki police force's Violent Crimes Unit.

The lieutenant on duty had called me about the body, which had been discovered by a paper deliverer, only because he knew I lived right next to where it had been found. The wake-up had come at four-thirty, and I hadn't had time for

my morning coffee yet, so I went back to my place. Around eight I headed into town. I always took the same route: Fredrikinkatu to Iso Roobertinkatu, and once I hit Erot-taja I headed past the Swedish Theatre down Keskuskatu to Aleks where I jumped on a tram.

I was usually able to walk to work in peace, but this time I only made it as far as Fredrikinkatu before being stopped.

I don't know where the Rabbi came from, but there he was, suddenly standing right in front of me.

"Shalom, Ariel!"

"Shalom, Rabbi Liebstein," I responded. I took a step back, but Liebstein pursued.

I glanced around and understood that the Rabbi's materialization hadn't been a genuine miracle after all.

There was a van parked at the edge of the pavement: the congregation's van which I should have recognized and spotted before it was too late. Peering out from behind the van's cargo windows was Roni Kordianski, the congregation's combined super, handyman and driver. Liebstein and Kordianski had been carrying an old ornamental cabinet from the nearby antique shop out to the vehicle, and just at that moment my mobile phone had started to ring, causing my vigilance to flag.

"Nice cabinet."

"The congregation received it as a donation."

"Excuse me," I said, raising my phone to my ear with an apologetic look.

"Detective Kafka."

The caller was my immediate superior at Violent Crime, Chief Detective Huovinen.

"Bad time?"

I glanced into the Rabbi's expectant eyes.

"Kind of."

"We need you pretty fast."

"What is it?"

"Two bodies at Linnunlaulu. One of them in the rail yard. Two tracks are closed, it's holding up the trains. The deceased are most likely foreigners."

"Anyone there yet?"

"Simolin headed out fifteen minutes ago... and a patrolman has cordoned off the area. Forensics is probably already there by now, too."

"I'm on it."

"Call me when you're en route and I'll fill you in."

You wouldn't have taken Liebstein for a rabbi, not by how he dressed anyway. He was wearing a stylish black wool overcoat, a burgundy silk scarf knotted in an almost bohemian fashion, and gleaming black shoes. Still, at least a fellow Jew would peg him unmistakably for a Jew. He had the broad, furrowed brow of a thinker, and it was easy to imagine him, head tilted, reading the Torah at the

synagogue or preaching on the Sabbath. The bridge of his ponderous eyeglasses had chafed tender red gouges into the sides of his nose. The aura of good-natured clumsiness he radiated was, however, an illusion, and I didn't let it fool me. Liebstein dug his nails into his victims with the tenacity of a debt collector.

I didn't have anything against him; he was an amiable and intelligent man. But right now I didn't feel like talking, even amiably and intelligently.

"How are things going at the congregation?"

Good eyesight and quick reflexes had kept me out of the Rabbi's path for over six months. Now some courteous resolve was called for. Otherwise I knew that before I realized it, I'd have made half - or two-thirds promises that I had no intention of keeping.

"Ariel Isaac Kafka," the Rabbi repeated, this time stressing each name. "If you dropped by the synagogue slightly more often to pray, you'd know how things are going there. Can you tell me why you delight me and the other members of the congregation so infrequently with your presence? I saw your uncle just yesterday and we discussed the matter."

Liebstein spoke with an accent, the origin of which was difficult to pinpoint. And that was no wonder, if you knew his background. He was born in Germany, fled from there to Sweden to escape the Nazis, and then moved to Denmark in the 1950s.

"It's the police work... I'm always busy. As a matter of fact, I was just called to a crime scene. Two bodies."

The Rabbi nodded sympathetically.

"I understand, Ariel, don't think that I don't, even though I was born into a slower age. Everyone is busy these days. The whole world is like an enormous clock whose spring has been wound too tight. I'm afraid that before long its gears are going to start flying off."

My phone rang again, this time in my pocket. I fiddled with it blindly and managed to silence it.

"And the mobile phone. It was meant to be a servant, but it has become the master. It has taken over everywhere, it orders and the servant obeys, he runs and runs until he's out of breath and collapses to the ground..."

"It's just that my work..."

The Rabbi raised his forefinger to his lips.

"I understand, I understand," he continued. "You do important work. All of us in the congregation are proud of you. If only we had more frequent opportunities to tell you how proud."

The Rabbi lowered a hand onto my shoulder. His touch felt heavy, almost disapproving, although the expression on his face remained gentle.

"I saw your picture in the paper last week and I told your aunt that, once again you had solved a serious crime. We consider you a blessing to our congregation and to our small community, which has seen such hardship."

Liebstein was exaggerating. The serious crime was an everyday assault that had led to manslaughter, and the perpetrator had been apprehended thanks to surveillance-camera photo published in the tabloids, not me.

The Rabbi smiled and hoisted his rimless glasses farther up his nose. The chafe spots itched, and he rubbed them between his thumb and forefinger.

“Your aunt said that you wanted to be a policeman even before you had your bar mitzvah. Is that true?”

I shrugged. Even the Rabbi didn't need to know everything.

He bent over towards me and whispered as if he were divulging a secret.

“I've always liked detective novels.”

I instinctively furrowed my brows.

“You're a police officer and Satan will ensure that your work will never end. Evil will always walk at your side. And that's exactly why I've been waiting for you to pay us a visit, to reflect and withdraw even for a moment from all the blackness you encounter in your profession. The soul requires rest, otherwise a person becomes as frail as the ashes of burnt silk paper, and eventually crumbles into the tiniest motes of dust.”

“I'll try to come... I'll come as soon as I can.”

“We haven't been able to put together a minyan for three days. Yesterday morning only two members showed up for synagogue.”

I nodded.

You needed ten male congregants thirteen years or older for a minyan. Women were not accepted, but this was a topic I didn't feel like delving into. I would have proposed the best and easiest solution to the problem: accept women into the minyan in Finland, as had already been done elsewhere.

I could sense my gaze wandering towards my destination and my feet taking surreptitious steps.

“Rabbi Liebstein,” Kordianski interrupted apologetically. “They're waiting for you.”

The Rabbi didn't respond, he just looked at me. My mobile began to ring again. Liebstein shook his head and smiled, albeit wanly.

“Have to go, busy busy busy... some day the spring will snap and all the little gears will ricochet off and people will go mad and start killing one another. Yamim Noraim. Remember Yom Kippur, Ariel...”

Liebstein was right: I had to remember. Being born a Jew brought along with it certain responsibilities other than refusing to eat pork. It was almost impossible to skip out on celebrating the Jewish New Year altogether. It began with ten days of repentance, the last of which, Yom Kippur, was the most important. It was the day that the entire congregation prayed together and asked for forgiveness for all of their conceivable sins, starting from masturbating and malicious talk.

The Rabbi spread out his hands to illustrate all of the whirling, twirling gears, springs and wheels in the universe being hurled outwards into eternity, and then he followed Kordianski into the shop.

I gave a sigh of relief, and as I passed the van, I checked my reflection in the tinted side window. Short hair, slightly thinning at the crown, sideburns that reached halfway down my ears, a narrow, introverted face and a high, domed forehead.

I hiked up the collar of my brass-buttoned pea coat and took a few hurried steps

to ensure my getaway before calling Huovinen.

"Where are you, Ari?"

"Downtown, on my way to Linnunlaulu."

"By car?"

"No, but I'll get there just as fast by tram."

"You know that bridge that crosses the railway tracks?"

I conceded that I did.

"You'll find two very lifeless bodies there. Kind of an unusual case, you'll see what I mean. One of them is in the rail yard beneath the bridge. Just kick things into gear and inform me as soon as something comes up. You can bet the media is going to have a field day with this one... That bad timing: were you at one of your people's celebrations where we pagans aren't allowed?"

I told him I'd been investigating a corpse that had been found in a recycling dumpster.

"Someone else can take that. Shalom!" Huovinen said, ending the call.

I knew Huovinen so well that I found it impossible to be offended. We had graduated from the academy at the same time. Huovinen had been the best in the class, and I was only the fourth best, which had aroused a general sense of bewilderment among my relatives. Everyone remembered how my brother Eli had been number one in his class and had been accepted to study law on his first try, and how my sister Hanna's matriculation papers had been the best in the history of our school.

At that time, the burden that Einstein and Oppenheimer had left for less brilliant Jews like myself had weighed heavily on me.

The bridge was cordoned off with police tape, but the officers who were patrolling the site, radios crackling, recognized me and let me through.

I stopped in the middle of the span and gazed towards downtown.

Beyond the rock face, a maze of train tracks immediately began; it looked like a bunch of ladders had been toppled over in the same direction, stopping at the wall of stone and glass formed by the station and a few other buildings. Above the tracks ran a confusing jumble of electric wires; here and there you could see bright-red warning lights.

A large, ornamental pink wooden villa teetered perilously close to the edge of the high rock face.

A double-height express train approached from downtown; its roof swept past only a couple of yards beneath my feet. I could feel the bridge sway from the mass of the carriages.

On the other side of the bridge's railing hung a six-foot-wide flange of corrugated metal. Yellow danger signs had been attached to it. I glanced over the edge of the railing and saw several uniformed policemen on the tracks. A tent had been erected over the rails, so that the tender morning sensibilities of the commuters on passing trains wouldn't be offended by the sight of the body.

"Kaf... Ari!"

Detective Mika Simolin was approaching the crime scene from the direction of the Linnunlaulu villas.

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“I went and had a look down below.”

Simolin was ten years younger than me. He had only been in Violent Crime for six months and still treated me with a respect that bordered on bashfulness.

“The shooting took place here,” Simolin said, indicating a bloodstain on the ground. “Afterwards the killer shoved the body down the slope and jumped or fell from the bridge onto the roof of a train and died instantaneously. I mean the presumed killer,” Simolin corrected himself.

The body lay on the slope that descended from the bridge, almost up against the steel mesh fence running above the rails. A green tarp had been draped from the fence to block the view. A CSI named Manner in white overalls was standing next to the body.

“All right if I come over there yet?” I asked.

Manner glanced up.

“Be my guest.”

I climbed down with Simolin at my heels and positioned myself a little awkwardly next to the fence. The body was lying on its back, partially hidden in the tall grass. It took a second before I understood what had happened to it. The face was like a mutilated stump from some pagan sacrifice: its nose and ears had been sliced off, and what was left was covered in blood.

From day one as a rookie cop, I had prepared myself for my first encounter with a corpse. I learnt how to look in such a way that I skipped over the most disgusting details. I also learnt how to breathe through my mouth. Relying on these techniques, I made it through my visits to the pathology department and the cabinet of horrors that was the police crime museum.

My first body was, nevertheless, an easy case. It was New Year's Eve, and the evening had started out with a hard freeze. Later that night it had started to warm up and lightly snow. The body was found by a late-night partygoer, and the desk officer ordered me and my partner to the scene.

The deceased, a man of about forty, was lying under a large oak. He was blanketed by driven snow, as if he had pulled a freshly laundered comforter over himself and dozed off to the rustle of the wind in the branches. His eyelids and hair were dusted with powder.

The sight was almost beautiful.

Later I came across much uglier corpses, but I learnt to accept death as part of my job, and violence as part of death.

Although the face of the body lying on the embankment was mutilated, you could still tell that the man it belonged to was young and foreign. He had on black jeans, grey running shoes and a black leather jacket. The Adidas ski-cap he was wearing had hiked up far enough to reveal three small holes in his forehead, a few centimetres apart from each other. The blood trickling from them had converged with the gory mess that was his face.

Simolin pulled on a pair of disposable gloves and squatted next to the body. He pointed at the bullet holes.

"Twenty-two?"

"That's what it looks like," Manner nodded. "What about this?" He opened the leather jacket, revealing two stab wounds in the upper torso. "Plus one more bullet hole here in the chest. Someone wasn't taking any chances."

That's exactly what I was thinking.

"When did the call come?"

"Eight-fifteen," Simolin said. "First they said something about a man jumping under a train; they thought it was a routine suicide. Then we got the call about the second victim. There was only five minutes between calls. The first one was from a woman out walking her dog; she noticed a human ear in her pooch's mouth. At almost exactly the same moment, the body was spotted from a passing train."

"You check the pockets yet?" I asked Manner.

"Yup. Nothing."

"Take another look."



Manner searched the pockets of the tight jeans, front and back. The leather jacket had side pockets plus two more pockets inside. Nothing in them either.

"A whole lot of empty," Manner said.

"You'd think there'd be some keys at least."

"But it's still clear it wasn't a robbery."

"Everyone carries something on them... keys, mobile phone, bus pass, money."

"If you shoot someone three times in the head and then stab them twice in the chest, you're going for the kill. If you're just robbing them, intimidation or a blow to the back of the head will do the trick."

"What's the deal with cutting off the nose and the ears?" I asked, looking at Simolin questioningly.

I knew perfectly well that Simolin already had a theory, as did I. All I had to do was tease it out of him. Besides, a wise superior always listens to his subordinate first.

"They did it to make identification difficult. Gorky Park," he deduced. "The victim's face was slashed so that the victim wouldn't be identified."

"Pretty risky business, giving your victim a nip-tuck in a spot like this," I said.

"It wasn't fully light yet," Manner reminded me. "And it wouldn't have taken more than a few seconds... the nose and ears were cut with a sharp knife or shears."

"Have the other ear and nose been found?"

"Not yet."

"But one of the ears got left behind up there, why?"

"Maybe the killer was in a rush and dropped it. It was still semi-dark, and in a situation like that, you're not going to be very eager to start poking around, even though the perpetrator must have pretty steady nerves. Ice in the veins, as my father-in-law would say."

"So where are the shells then? He probably wouldn't have had time to gather them up."

"Maybe the shooter used a revolver. Or else they just haven't been found. We haven't gone over the embankment with a metal detector yet. A twenty-two shell would be pretty hard to spot in terrain like this."

A red-and-white Pendolino clacked northwards under the bridge. On the next track over, a local train approached from the opposite direction. I waited for the noise to die down.

"What else do we have?"

Manner glanced over his shoulder.

"The victim was coming from Töölönlahti Bay, in other words he was headed towards Kallio."

"How do you know?" Simolin enquired. He was an avid student and eager to learn all the tricks of the trade.

"There's no sand in the treads of the victim's running shoes. On the Kallio side the path is covered in crushed rock, which has sand in it, while on this side of the bridge, it's paved. If you came from Kallio, take a look at your shoes. Now, the gun who was hit by the train approached from the opposite direction. There was

crushed rock and sand from the path in the soles of his shoes.”

“How do you know?” Simolin repeated.

“Ever heard of a mobile phone? Siimes is over examining the train body, but we just consulted each other. Amazing what technology can do, isn't it?”

“Has the other victim been identified?”

“No, he wasn't carrying any papers either, just a map of Helsinki and a mobile.”

I bent my right knee to take a look at the bottom of my shoe. Manner was right. There was grit in the sole. There were also a few bigger chunks of crushed rock between the grooves.

“Any sign of a third person?”

“Not yet, but the bridge and the path haven't been examined yet. I'm not sure we'll find much; it's going to be tough, or at least time-consuming. Hundreds of people go through here every day.”

“But why here, in this exact spot?” I wondered. “If the point was to kill this guy, you'd think there'd be better places to do it.”

“Maybe a jealous spat between two gay guys,” Manner suggested. “Those cases can get bloody, and all rational thinking flies out of the window. The suicide also fits that scenario.”

“But the mutilation doesn't.”

Manner considered for a moment. “It could be some sort of revenge ritual, an ex-lover... or the desecrating of an enemy's body. That would fit the foreigner aspect. On the other hand, one thing I've learnt over thirty years is that you never know with crazy people, the motivation can be just about anything, like orders from God or some little green man... I called in a medical examiner just to be sure. Hand me that case?” Manner asked Simolin.

I sought a firmer stance with my left leg.

“Send the fingerprints to be checked as soon as possible. I'll go see how things look down below.”

I left Manner to examine the body and went to see if I could find the easiest way down. Simolin watched Manner work for a moment but then followed me. I stopped at the bridge and waited for him to catch up.

“Call in as many patrols as can be freed up to scour the terrain on both sides of the bridge. We also need to search the tracks; something might have been carried along with the train. I'll call Stenman and Oksanen.”

Vuorio, the medical examiner, was huffing as he climbed the path to the bridge. He was overweight, and the exertion was a strain. He nodded at me but didn't acknowledge Simolin.

“These are going to be the last cases of the year for me. I'm headed to Canada day after tomorrow for some further training.”

Vuorio was an enthusiastic fisherman and hunter, so enthusiastic that he had been to Africa to hunt big game. He couldn't hope for a better destination for an educational exchange.

“Good for you.”

“Over there?” Vuorio asked, looking across the slope.

“Over there.”

"The places they make an old man root around."

Vuorio shook his head but nevertheless started his laborious descent, muttering to himself.

I called my two other subordinates and ordered them to the scene. Simolin was also on the horn; he stood at the railing, scanning around. After wrapping things up, he walked over to me.

"They promised three more patrols to start with..." Simolin looked like he was about to pop, so I asked:

"What are you thinking about?"

"Why the killer struck here, in this spot. What if he had no choice?"

My interest encouraged Simolin to continue.

"The victim was on his way to do something that the killer wanted to prevent, to report something to the police or to meet someone. If the victim was headed towards Kallio, this is one of the last places he could be stopped without taking too much of a risk, and..."

"It's possible."

Simolin's theory was precisely the kind that was useless at this point. At the beginning of an investigation, there's no point sacrificing time to developing too many theories of equal weight. It made more sense to wait for one to have more pull than the others. Simolin knew it himself and shut up.

I looked around for a way I could access the tracks.

"How did you get down?"

"Over by the rail-traffic control centre. It's that square glass building over there. There's a gate."

"Go talk to the residents of nearby buildings while I'm down there. I'll send Stenman and Oksanen to help out as soon as they arrive. Someone must have at least heard the shots, unless the killer used a silencer."

Simolin looked like he still had something to say. Apparently it wasn't very important, because he turned and left.

Getting down to the tracks required a walk of at least three hundred yards along the shore path and across the lot of the traffic-control building. In addition to the crime-scene investigator, three patrol officers and a few men in State Railways overalls were standing on the tracks. I went over to the nearest office and was told that nothing out of the ordinary had been found.

The man who had fallen or jumped from the bridge had incurred surprisingly few injuries from his collision with the train. The only contusions were on his face, which would significantly hamper identification. Still, I could tell that the victim was about forty years old, dark-haired, and looked Arab. He had on a black leather jacket, grey trousers and a pair of black loafers. You could see a black shirt and a silver-grey tie beneath the jacket; he was also wearing black leather gloves.

A train approached from the north and Siimes covered the body with a paper sheet.

"What'd you find?" I asked, even though I knew that the majority of the forensic results wouldn't be ready until a battery of tests and exams had been conducted.

But Siimes knew what I was after.

“Nothing surprising. The guy hit the roof of an A train from Leppävaara, ricocheted from there to the ground headfirst. You don’t have to be a doctor to be able to tell that his neck was broken. Other than that, minor injuries, because the trains tend to brake at this point, they’re going maybe thirty miles an hour, tops. The deceased isn’t carrying any ID, but you can see as well as I can. He looks like a foreigner. These were found in his jacket pocket.”

Siimes held out two plastic bags. One contained a mobile phone and the other a folded map of Helsinki bearing a Hertz logo.

“He may have a car rented from Hertz. They give you a map with the car and this one’s brand new. No marks on it.”

“What about a weapon?”

“Hasn’t turned up, either the pistol or the knife, but he may have chucked them or they may have been carried away by the train. The train was driven to the Ilmala rail yard as soon as the passengers were unloaded, and it still needs to be inspected. Of course I’ve taken gunpowder-gas tests just in case our buddy here is the shooter.”

“Anything to indicate that he isn’t?”

“Nothing except the fact that neither the weapons nor the missing ear and nose were found on him. There’s blood on his hands, and some splatters on the lower part of his jacket.”

I showed him the mobile phone.

“Can I play around with this?”

“Knock yourself out.”

The phone wasn’t on. I pressed the power button but nothing happened. I didn’t know what else to do, so I removed the battery and SIM card, wiped them against my sleeve, and pressed them back into place. The phone started up and asked for a PIN code. I swore. Siimes glanced at me.

“It’s asking for a PIN code.”

“Try one two three four.”

I tried, but nothing happened. I entered the same series of numbers backwards.

“No good.”

“Then try four zeros.”

I entered four zeros and four ones. No good. The minimal skills at my disposal had been exhausted. I was lousy with tech stuff, even though my dad had been an engineer. One of the guys in overalls walked up to me.

“You’re in charge of the investigation?”

I said I was.

“Our chief of security, Repo, asked when you’ll be able to question the engineer of the train that was involved in the collision. Apparently he wants to get home as soon as possible to rest. So if it’s all right with you...”

“Where is he?”

“At the Ilmala rail yard. They’ll tell you where to find him.”

“You can let him know I’ll be there soon.”

“And that means?”

"Ten minutes."

I told Siimes: "If our guys show up, I'm questioning the locomotive engineer. Three more patrols are coming to help scour the terrain. As soon as this area is searched, close up shop. We need to get rail traffic back to normal as fast as possible."

"Done."

A gust of air from a passing train caused the paper sheet that covered the body to billow.

Just as I reached the bridge, a white Ford Mondeo started climbing towards it. I could see that Stenman was driving and Oksanen sat in the passenger seat.

Despite the surname, Senior Constable Stenman was a woman, first name Arja. Senior Constable Jari Oksanen was the same age as his partner. He was a keen player in the police-guild rally club, which is precisely why Stenman didn't let him drive.

I gave them a quick rundown of what I knew.

"Simolin is out questioning the residents of nearby buildings. You two check everywhere else. There's a dog park at the other end of the bridge. Talk to anyone who might have seen something. Find out if there are security cameras in the area and confiscate the tapes. Three patrols will be showing up here soon. Have them scour the slope and along the tracks. At least a pistol, a knife, a nose and one ear are missing."

"A nose and an ear?" Stenman wondered.

"Nose and ears were cut from the deceased."

I held out my hand.

"Keys. I'm borrowing your car. I need to go over to Ilmala and have a chat with the locomotive engineer."

Stenman slapped the keys into my palm.

Vuorio had finished his work and was clambering back up the slope. I waited for a second for his breathing to even out.

"I must admit, you have an interesting case here. It even piques the interest of an old-timer like me."

I let him continue at his own pace. I knew from experience that rushing him was pointless.

"Two weapons? I'd suspect that there must have been two perpetrators. First one stabbed him in the chest twice; either blow appears fatal. Then three shots to the head and two to the chest."

"He was shot five times?"

"Correct. One bullet hit one of the stab wounds so slyly that the entrance wound is difficult to notice. Based on it, though, I can still conclude that the knife was used first and the pistol afterwards. The man was killed deliberately and extremely thoroughly."

I took a moment to consider what Vuorio had told me.

"Two perpetrators would explain why we haven't found either weapon or the nose or one of the ears. Is there anything else?"

"The nose and ears were sliced off pretty handily," Vuorio continued.

“What does handily mean?”

~~“It means that both ears were sliced off with a clean stroke. That takes a determined hand. Nine people out of ten would blanch and be forced to use multiple strokes. Our butcher was the cold-blooded type. He knew someone might show up and acted quickly and efficiently.”~~

Manner had said the same thing. Ice in the veins. If that ended up being the case, it wasn't going to be an easy investigation.

“There's one more item of interest,” Vuorio said. “The deceased was a drug addict. He had used drugs intravenously for years. Some of the needle marks are very fresh, in other words he may have been under the influence when he died. We'll know once the forensic chemist finishes her tests.”

Repo, the head of security for the State Railways, was waiting outside, looking cold. The weather was chilly, and he was blowing his runny nose. Usually the heads of security at large corporations were former cops or ex-military. Repo didn't look like either.

“The driver is still in a state of shock because of what happened. I hope you take that into consideration.”

Before stepping inside, I looked around.

“Where's the train that was involved in the accident?”

“Behind the building, on the maintenance track.”

“Has it been examined?”

“It's being examined as we speak.”

“Our CSIs will take a look at it... Something may have fallen from the man who was hit...”

“If we find anything, we'll let you know.”

The locomotive engineer was waiting in the break room, looking out into the railyard. I sat down across from him. His hands were trembling.

“Coffee?” Repo asked.

“Please. Black.”

Repo took a fire-engine-red mug that read I Love NY from the draining board and filled it for me.

The locomotive engineer stared out of the window a moment longer before looking at me. He was a thin man on the far side of fifty. His face was etched with the grooves of a hard life. He wore bifocals, the only hair he had left was at the back of his neck and on his ears - and now this.

“Who was he?” he asked.

“We don't know yet.”

“I've done this job for over twenty years and no one has ever jumped in front of me.”

The man turned to look out of the window again. I could barely hear his words.

“Did he jump?”

“I was hoping you could tell me that.”

The engineer shook his head.

"I'm not sure... I was about fifty yards from the bridge when I saw them..."

~~"What do you mean, them? Was there someone else on the bridge?"~~

"At least three of them, all men. First they were walking side by side toward the City Theatre, so from the direction I was coming from, from right to left. Then one of them ran to the railing and jumped over it onto the lip of the bridge and began crawling towards the edge..."

The man rubbed his temples uneasily.

"I could see his face when he turned and fell. I could hear him slam into the roof... And then I caught a glimpse in the mirror of him just lying there next to the track."

"What about the other two men? What were they doing?"

"I didn't see them after that."

"I mean, what were they doing when the man climbed over the railing? Did they try to stop him, for instance?"

"I've been thinking about that this whole time. At first I thought that they were trying to help him, to keep him from jumping..."

The driver looked at Repo as if he were entering sensitive territory and needed his approval. Repo nodded.

"Then when I heard what had happened at the bridge, I started thinking harder about it—"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "What did you hear?"

"That a murdered man had been found there."

"Continue."

"Afterwards I began thinking about the whole thing from a different angle, and it seems to me that the guy who fell was afraid... afraid and was trying to get away from those other two men because he was afraid. I saw his face right before he fell, and I'm pretty sure that he was a lot more afraid of them than he was of falling."

"I have a theory," Oksanen said. He was sitting next to me in the police van holding a to-go cup of coffee like all the rest of us except Simolin, who only drank tea, preferably green. I also had a doughnut covered with so much sugar it was impossible to keep from showering it all over the place.

Oksanen's parka was emblazoned with the logo of a German car manufacturer. I knew that he also had a motor-oil company pen, a tyre-company key ring, a car parts-chain pocketknife and an insurance-company fleece. Stenman and Simolin were sitting across from us.

"Or a couple of theories, actually."

Oksanen sniffed his coffee, which Stenman had picked up for us from the Nestlé station at Eläintarha.

It was eleven-thirty in the morning and they had earned their combined coffee break and warm-up. A freezing wind was blowing outside; I was shivering myself.

"The first thing that comes to mind is drugs. Maybe this is a territorial war between drug gangs or something like that. No one heard the shots. Why not? Because the gun was equipped with a silencer. And right off that means we're looking at the tool of a professional killer."

"So where are the shells, then?" Simolin asked. "Five shots and a silencer. The shooter must have used a semi."

"Maybe he picked them up from the ground."

"What about the other theory?" Stenman prodded. She had opened her green oilskin coat, revealing a high-collared Norwegian fisherman's sweater. She managed to blend the freshness of a country girl with the class of a sophisticated woman who frequented Café Ekberg. The combination had its charms, I had to admit.

"The victim was in the wrong place at the wrong time and saw something that meant he had to be killed."

Oksanen's theories were so obvious that I had already considered them. Like Simolin's, though, they were nothing more than theories, and I wouldn't promote any of them above the others until I saw a solid reason to do so. On the other hand, playing around with theories occasionally generated valuable ideas.

"If it was a coincidence, then why did they need to chop off the nose and ears? Plus, the victim would have been shot from behind as he was running away. No doubt he would have hung around waiting to be shot," I said, before going on. "We know that there was a total of three men on the bridge, one of whom evidently fell when he was trying to escape from the other two. And yet the hands of the man who fell to the track were bloody. Based on that, it seems as if he stabbed the man on the bridge, got off a few shots just to make sure, cut off the ears and nose. What were the other two men doing on the bridge, and where are they now?"



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