

FINNISH WEIRD

EMMI ITÄRANTA • JENNY KANGASVUO • TIINA RAEVAARA

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INTRODUCTION

JOHANNA SINISALO *RARE EXPORTS*

Once upon a time, there was a distant, small Northern country with a difficult, broken past. It was geographically caught between two great empires and so its national language was subordinated at times to the language of its western neighbour, at times to that of its eastern one. In spite of the fact that country had had both a thriving folk culture and a highly creative tradition of oral poetry throughout its history, the first attempts to give the national language an official role happened as late as one hundred and fifty years ago – just about one hundred years before I was born.

As you may already have guessed, that country is Finland.

Of course there had been newspapers and books in Finnish before the 1860s, but there had not been much fiction. And when the writing of fiction started, it was mostly realistic.

As realistic narrative is solidly anchored in the empirical, in that which can be proven and authenticated, this is perhaps one of the reasons for its popularity in Finland. One of the greatest functions of literature in our country has been the depiction of history and human destiny in a form both easily approachable and recognisable, and realistic literature has thus become an important part of the Finns' collective memory.

So, it was no surprise that during the 20th century the realistic genre became the correct way to write, whilst other genres were seen as deviations from this norm. One could generalise that until recent decades these deviations did not represent 'respectable' literature in Finland – we have had a tradition of reading fiction as if it were always somehow documentary, not as a piece of someone's wild imagination or allegory or satire. Of course, fantastical elements have not been completely non-existent in Finnish literature, but during its history these exceptions have been very rare, and non-realistic books have been mostly targeted at juvenile audiences. In Finland, we have always had very high quality writers who have written children's books, for example, **Tove Jansson** and her outstanding *Moomin* stories. But when talking about adult audiences, it was pretty clear that a book with anything unrealistic in it was considered

a fairy tale, with the exception that if it had space travel or ghosts, it was something for young boys only.

And look at us now! After barely a couple of hundred years of written literary tradition and decades of gatekeepers who have shunned works including elements of fantasy as cheap escapism, Finnish writers now create fiction that is a phenomenal mixture of sf, fantasy, horror, surrealism, magic realism – you name it. It's highly original, fresh and surprising, sometimes it celebrates elements of our rich folklore and mythos, sometimes it soars sky-high in sf worlds, sometimes the stories are almost realistic, but have that little weirdness or twist that makes them something other than mimetic writing.

How is this possible? As it turns out, some of the things that may have seemed like obstacles and restrictions, have ended up being blessings.

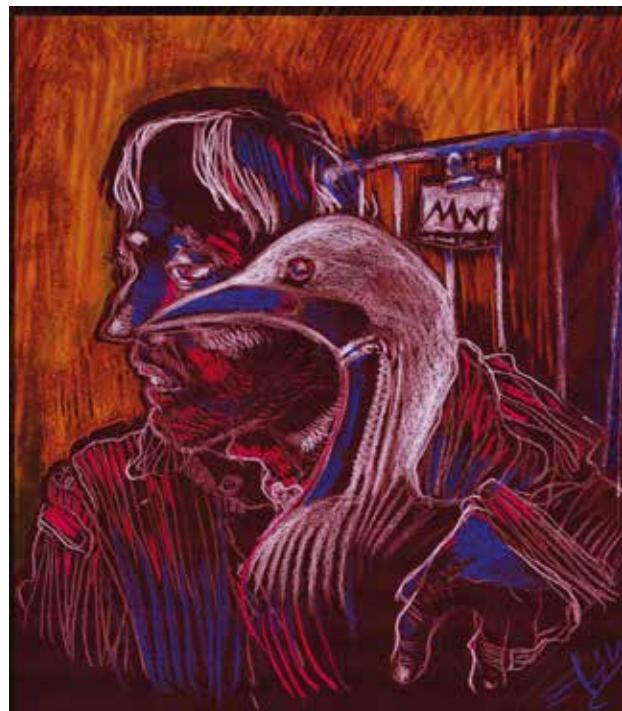


Illustration for 'Gordon's Story'

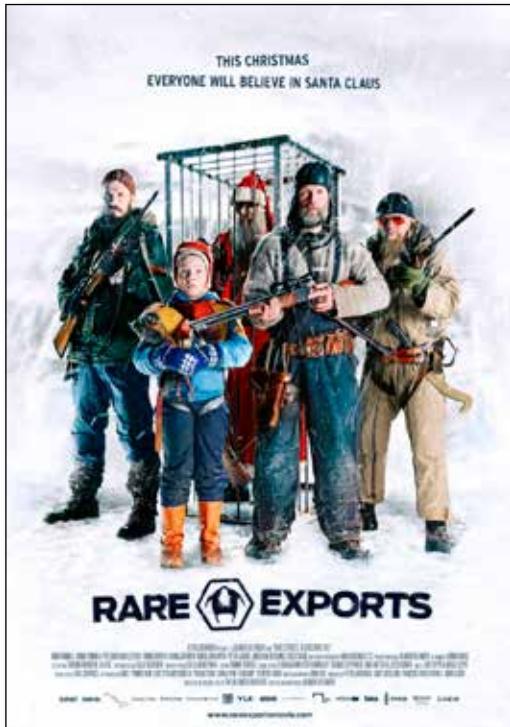
The short history of Finnish literature and the late arrival of Finnish translations of most sf and fantasy classics – along with the relatively late birth of fandom – created an atmosphere where there was no deep tradition of ‘the proper way’ write genre fiction, and there has never been that big a divide between science fiction and fantasy. Everybody of course understands the differences between genres, but basically the fans and writers of science fiction and fantasy, as far as Finnish fandom is concerned at least, have never been separate groups. Of course there have been people who prefer sf to fantasy or vice versa, but we have not had any artificial barriers between genres – all non-realistic writing has been covered as ‘that particular stuff which we are interested in’ and treated mostly with an equal acceptance.

This is to a great extent due to the circumstances in which Finnish fandom was born. In the late 1970s and early 1980s both genres were just as marginal, and the fans of sf/f naturally teamed up. Probably because of this, the current generation of writers is a rather heterogeneous group. Although (or because) they have shared the same fanzines and the same conventions, clubs and writer groups, the same people write science fiction and fantasy, horror and magical realism, and they write in genres not yet invented. In some cases, drawing the line between genres is very difficult, if not impossible. In fact, many writers – including myself – consider the whole subject of drawing lines between genres restricting and completely unnecessary. This might be one of the reasons why Finnish non-realistic fiction is so diverse, and because it cannot really be classified, it can be seen only as literary fiction – not a representation of a certain genre.

The hegemony of realism has also served as a challenge. Because of the youth of the literary tradition, Finnish genre writers have not had time to retreat into a self-made ghetto. Quite the opposite: they have been playing a very active role in the literary fiction scene, convincing the wider audience of readers, critics and prize juries that they are to be taken seriously. The genre barriers have come down with a deafening crash, the number of titles that include elements of fantasy, magical realism, science fiction, surrealism, horror, or that are combinations of these elements, has boomed in recent years.

Also the number of works translated from Finnish into other languages has soared, accompanied by international critical acclaim, awards and award nominations.

It is not only the younger generations who have embraced the winds of change. When I edited *The Dedalus Book of Finnish Fantasy*, an anthology of non-realistic short stories and novel excerpts, I was delighted to notice how



many of our highly respected and lavishly awarded authors who normally use realism as their main tool, had also recently experimented with elements of myth, magic and the fantastic.

For years I have longed for an honest, simple term that could cover all this fantastic literature. When I saw the Finnish movie *Rare Exports*, a dark, but somehow slightly comical tale of the grim origins of Santa Claus, I knew. It was just weird. It was weird in a very Finnish way.

I promised myself that from that point on, if somebody asks me which genre my works belong in, I will proudly announce that I write Finnish Weird.

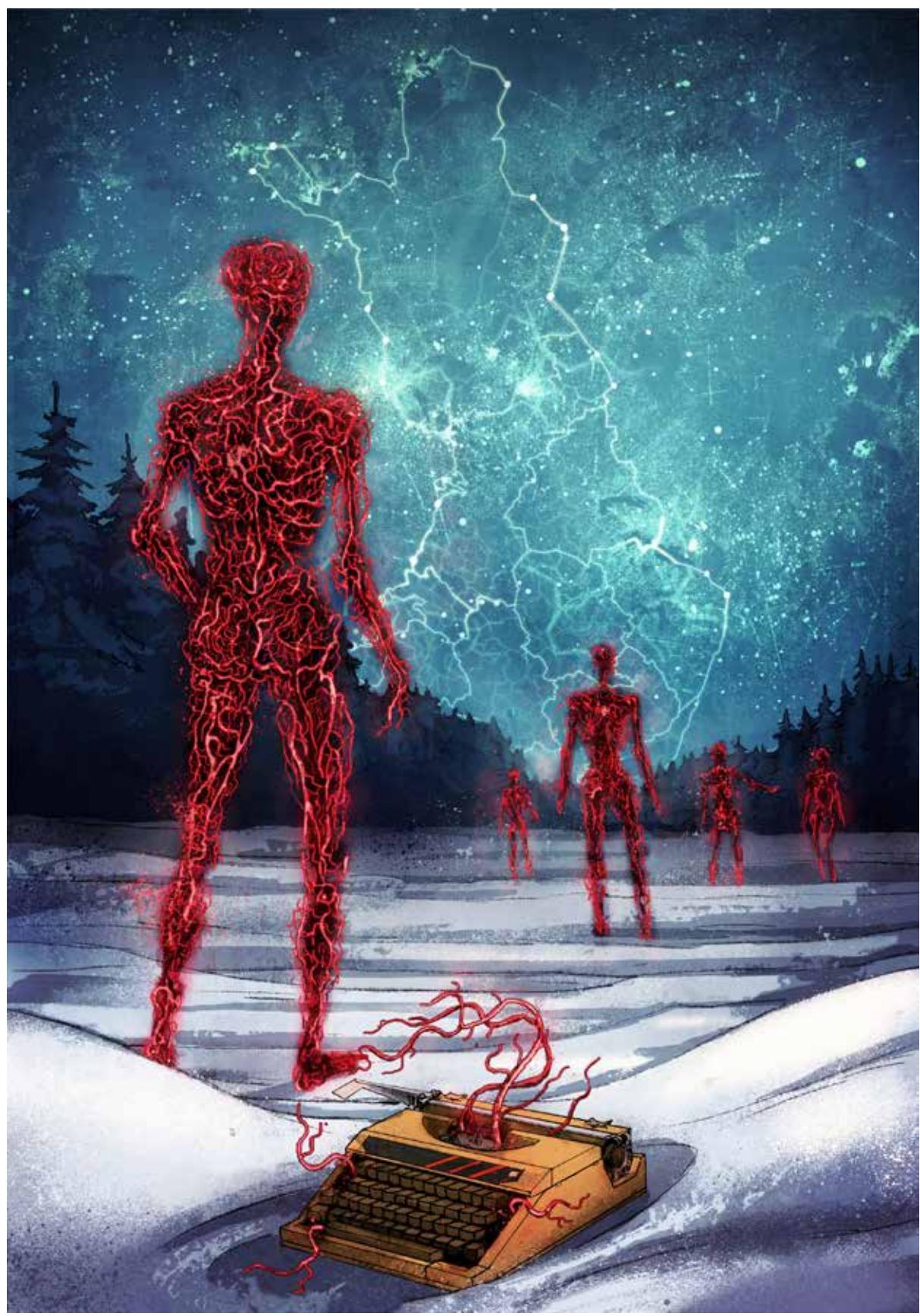
You will discover more Finnish Weird pioneers in this very magazine.

I'm not trying to say that we Finns reinvented the wheel – new weird – and are trying to claim it as our own, not at all. What I am saying is that Scandinavian countries did not invent crime stories either, but in the wake of the international success of detective and crime fiction from Sweden, Norway, etc., ‘Nordic Noir’ has become a label for a certain quality of story.

In my opinion, the label ‘Finnish Weird’ is also a brand – a brand that promises a roller-coaster ride of highly original prose from very diverse writers with truly personal styles. We are weird and very proud of it.

JOHANNA SINISALO

FINNLAND. AAPINEN.
FINNLAND. BLUE.
FINNLAND. COOL.
FINNLAND. DRAMATIK.
FINNLAND. EDUCATION.
FINNLAND. FOLKLORE.
FINNLAND. GLEICHHEIT.
FINNLAND. HILJAISUUS.
FINNLAND. ICE HOCKEY.
FINNLAND. JÄRVI.
FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR.
GUEST OF HONOUR 2014.



JUSSI K. NIEMELÄ

FINNISH WEIRD FROM THE LAND OF THE NORTH

Far away in north-eastern Europe there's a dark and cold land where people are gloomy and stern, snow covers the fields and forests, and Santa Clause makes his home.

The melancholy atmosphere of this land and the peculiar sense of humour of its people gave birth to Finnish Weird, the original literary style of many Finnish writers. The term was coined by the famous author **Johanna Sinisalo** in December 2010 after seeing the Finnish movie *Rare Exports*.

The plot of the movie is about excavating the true Santa from Korvatunturi in Lapland. The film features stuff that's quite weird and at the same time very Finnish: mythology, folk tradition, ominous natural scenery, fearsome wildlife, snow, forests, strange characters and creatures, and last but not least, laconic, darkish Finnish humour.

JOHANNA SINISALO'S FICTION AS THE EPITOME OF FINNISH WEIRD

In the heart of almost every Finn lies an atavistic relationship with nature, something mysterious, a persistent call of the wild. This is a thing all writers of Finnish Weird tap into. Johanna Sinisalo (b. 1958), in particular, has utilised this relationship, or primal instinct, in her books ever since her Finlandia-Prize-winning *Troll: A Love Story* (published as *Not Before Sundown* in the UK; the original Finnish version was published in 2000 as *Ennen päävänlaskua ei voi*).

In this trailblazing, original work, she also incorporated aspects of Finnish mythology and intertextual references to Finnish literary classics. I think it is safe to say that *Troll: A Love Story* is the epitome of Finnish Weird and the genre's first de facto representation. Indeed, Sinisalo herself has continued to include many of these aspects in her later literary works, but you can find them in her earlier short stories as well. Needless to say, there are also loads of sarcastic humour and biting satire in Sinisalo's novels and short stories.

In her later novel *Birdbrain* (2008) you can see this motive particularly clearly. The plot is about a couple trekking in a rough and tough environment. As they journey ever deeper into the forest, they gradually delve deeper and deeper into the human psyche. There are concentric atavistic layers hidden in the story that come forth as you read on. In the end it's basically the human animal,

naked, without any help, against the terrible, amoral forces of nature and humanity itself.

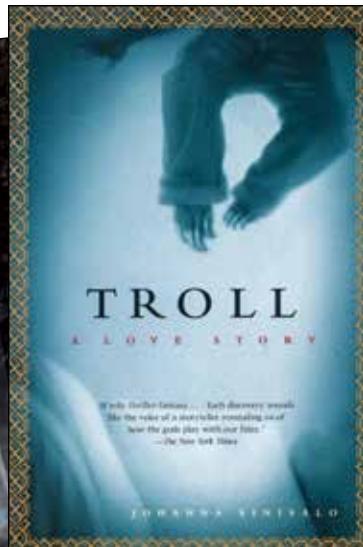
Many of Sinisalo's works utilise this primal juxtaposition of us, humans, against nature, red in tooth and claw. Moreover, she shows that humans not only are part of nature, but at its mercy, all the time, even without being aware of it. When they eventually realise the harsh facts of their condition, it's usually too late.

Thus, there's the call of the wild versus the fear of the unknown built into many Finnish Weird stories from the very outset. Usually it is us, or something hidden deep within us, that is the most fearsome unknown we can find. Indeed we often appear to ourselves as the ultimate terra incognita.

However, it is important to notice that, for many Finns, the forest is also a safe haven, and nature a place of relaxation, recreation and refreshment. So, the duality between safety and the fear of the unknown is at the heart of our relationship with natural settings. The forest can be your best friend, but something evil may, and usually does, lurk there.



Johanna Sinisalo



Sinisalo has written that ‘weird’ is a term that encapsulates all ‘diagonal’ or hybrid or as yet unnamed approaches to everyday situations and societal problems. She gives Kafka’s famous short story ‘Metamorphosis’ as an example of a diagonal approach to otherness. By diagonal Sinisalo means some other angle than reality, or as a matter of fact, any angle other than reality that’s not possible to pigeonhole into any established genre. Hence, ‘weird’.

As for Finnish Weird, here’s what Sinisalo herself says in her essay ‘Weird and Proud of It’:

‘For some reason the community of weird writers in Finland is thriving and of a very high standard. Courageous writers, each forging their own path, are producing touching, believable and memorable stories that can’t easily be pigeonholed as belonging to any pre-existing genre. Common features of their work include the blurring of genre boundaries, the bringing together of different genres and the unbridled flight of imagination. In their stories, a man might take up residence in his wife’s thigh, dreams might disappear from Europe altogether or whales may give birth to shamans. They – or perhaps I should say we – are weird and proud of it. In fact, the trend is so clear that we should give it a name all of its own: *suomikumma*, “Finnish Weird”.’

As we can see, in the end it’s all about literary pigeonholing: Finnish Weird is a large overall genre, an umbrella term that encompasses all diagonal, that is to say, non-realistic approaches to any story we can’t label as science fiction or fantasy without being unjust to both the author and the readers. There might be, and usually are, quite a lot of realistic ingredients in the story, but something odd happens all of sudden that sheds a diagonal light on that reality and this is where the ‘weird’ steps in.

The Blood of Angels (2011) is the third novel by Sinisalo translated to English. The book’s chilling vision of the disappearance of bees came out in UK this year.

LETTERS FROM THE CITY OF INSECT-LIKE CREATURES

The award-winning **Leena Krohn** (b. 1947) is one of the best-known authors of Finnish Weird. During her long and productive career she has published many novels and short stories in Finnish. Her works include uncanny creatures, places and metamorphoses. Only recently some of her works have been translated into English.

Krohn wrote about strange mathematical creatures early on, and they have been featured in her books many times since.

The eponymous book *Matemaattisia olioita tai jaettuja unia* [*Mathematical Creatures or Shared Dreams*] brought her the Finlandia Prize in 1992. Krohn’s tales are cryptical and mysterious in a haunting and highly original fashion.

Her breakthrough novel was *Tainaron: Mail from Another City* in 1985. It is a dreamlike story written in the form of letters the protagonist sends to her or his friend. The name of the letter-writer isn’t revealed, neither is the name of the recipient of the letters.



Leena Krohn

A creature called Longhorn acts as the protagonist's guide to Tainaron. They visit strange places and meet many different types of insect-like creatures in the city.

Krohn's wonderful depiction of various plants, buildings and beings is a prime example of Sinisalo's diagonal approach to everyday situations.

Krohn's novel *Datura (Or a Delusion We All See)* (2001) features a protagonist who starts using datura seeds, which are mildly hallucinatory. This creates a mundane reality full of surreal elements, funny incidents and peculiar characters. In the end it's impossible to say what has really happened and what has been delusional. Was everything just a hallucination caused by the datura seeds?

The author tells her stories with warm humour and pungent satire. The magazine *The New Anomalist* and the paranormal shop where the narrator works are quite appropriate backgrounds to weird happenings and meetings with strange individuals.

Her latest work, *Hotel Sapiens – ja muita irrationaalaisia kertomuksia [Hotel Sapiens and Other Irrational Tales]* (2013), is a most extraordinary collection of tales connected by the mysterious Hotel Sapiens, an uncanny place somewhere in a post-apocalyptic world.

Hotel Sapiens is inhabited by many creatures besides humans. There are terrifying nuns, living shadows, mirror-beings and somewhere behind the scenes, the ruling Guardians, or Clocks. The nuns are nurses, helpers and instruments working for the Guardians. They are half biological, half artefact, a sophisticated synthesis of life, nanotechnology and AI.

There is also a character called Descartes, though not the original one, and another man called Mr Higgs, or Higgs Boson. They're called ghosts, but actually they're reanimated replicas or reconstructions of famous thinkers. Most of these reconstructions are transient beings that last only for the length of a lecture they have come to hold at the Hotel Sapiens.

A particularly charming character is a mathematical thing, a luminous Gaussian normal distribution curve that has taken a concrete form. It looks like an inchworm, but shines with blue light in the night.

DEEP BENEATH THE FOREST-COVER

In Finnish folk tradition the forest is a cunning creature that can lure and trap a person beneath its cover where the person loses her sense of time, place and direction. She can be close to her friends, but she can't see them, nor they her. That's what being beneath the forest-cover is all about: hiding in plain sight.

Sari Peltoniemi (b. 1963) has written many books that cleverly combine Finnish folk mythology and weird



fiction. Her short story 'The Golden Apple' is available in *The Dedalus Book of Finnish Fantasy* (edited by Johanna Sinisalo) (2005).

The narrative is about a teacher, Rea, and her son Tuisku. It has a wan and ritualistic quality below the realistic surface. The story portrays a strong contrast between innocence and corruption. Nothing supernatural actually happens, but nevertheless the tale is about some ominous yet benevolent force that hides behind everyday life. There's an element of sacrifice and punishment for evil deeds.

Peltoniemi's artistically ambitious youth novels bear the same hallmarks. They feature elements of traditional horror iconography like vampires and other such creatures, and on top of that they show the author's mastery of Finnish folk mythology.

A teenager may encounter odd beings, grow herself a tail, get dark hair on her body when the moon is full, find herself related to an elf or fairy, find herself able to communicate with the dead, turn into an animal or meet zombies and deceased small babies in the middle of a Halloween celebration.

Peltoniemi uses alternative history and wild, natural settings as a backdrop to her weird stories. She includes ecological and moral themes as a subtext for skilful depictions of everyday family life. Often key issues aren't resolved: the author just poses an important question and lets the reader ponder what the answer might be.

In Peltoniemi's prose, growing up is ingeniously juxtaposed with metamorphoses, threatening happenings and dangerous encounters. This is a classic representation of a diagonal approach to the quotidian that Sinisalo writes about. All this is an allegory for awakening sexuality, the hormonal turmoil of puberty.

The conflict, the otherness, lies within and without the young protagonist. Growing up implies the ability to resolve these conflicts that dwell ‘deep beneath the forest-cover’.

THE MYSTERIOUS CORRUPTION OF PRINTED BOOKS

Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen (b. 1966) is one of the foremost authors in the field of Finnish Weird. His brilliant debut novel *The Rabbit Back Literature Society* (originally published in Finnish as *Lumikko ja yhdeksän muuta* in 2006) includes a fascinating mix of the realistic and fantastic. The book has been garnering rave reviews in the UK media.

The story includes library books that change their content overnight. The text is just corrupted while the book is on the shelf and there’s no explanation for it. **Dostoevski**’s antihero Raskolnykov might have killed his landlady in the original version of *The Crime and Punishment*, but what if the reader reads it for the very first time and doesn’t know it? How can she differentiate between the original and corrupted version?

Jääskeläinen also makes his mysterious heroine, Laura White, the founder of the Rabbit Back Literature Society, disappear in the novel. She vanishes all of a sudden, and the author gives no explanation for this strange occurrence. This repeated, unexplained mystery skilfully mixed with realistic narrative is the treasure trove of the novel.

Jääskeläinen hints at other worlds hidden in the structure of perceived reality. At the same time he obviously suggests that the text itself has many layers, meanings and possible interpretations.

Dark, playful humour is one of the most enjoyable aspects of Jääskeläinen’s style. His characters are robust and yet somehow intangible, just like real persons. There are numerous tasty references, intertextual and metafictional, that point outside the story for those who wish to seek them.

Jääskeläinen is a virtuoso in the technical execution of his innovative ideas.

So far Jääskeläinen has published three novels and an award-winning collection of short stories in Finnish. He has also written short stories for various anthologies and is renowned for his variable creative style.

Jääskeläinen’s short story ‘A Zoo From the Heavens’ from 2000 is included in *The Dedalus Book of Finnish Fantasy*. The story ‘Those Were the Days’ can be found in the new e-book *It Came From the North: An Anthology of Finnish Speculative Fiction* edited by **Desirina Boskovich**.



Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen

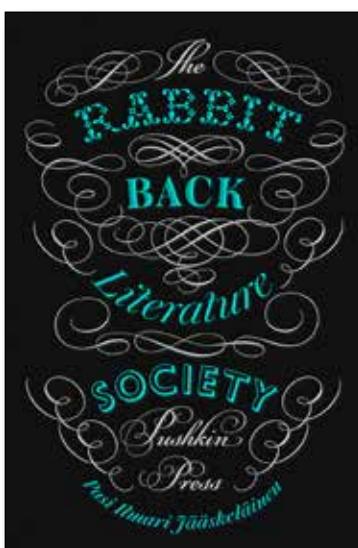
BLEAK FUTURES

Maarit Verronen (b. 1965) is probably the leading dystopian in the field of Finnish Weird. She has won many literature prizes for her novels and short stories. Recently her novels have become more and more dystopian.

Verronen approaches societal and environmental problems in the diagonal fashion Sinisalo mentions in her essay on Finnish Weird. Usually Verronen’s protagonist is somewhat humble and deviates from the norm, maybe a bit disenfranchised, too. Her milieu is most

likely urban, harrowed by pollution and genetic manipulation. The settings usually include ominous security forces coupled with Orwellian slave-societies.

Verronen paints quite bleak landscapes, though humanity, in the form of an average individual, prevails in the end. Sometimes her protagonists don’t even have a name, they’re just wanderers or searchers. Very often they are cogs in the faceless government machine, poor blue-collar workers and such, just trying to eke out a living in desperate circumstances. There’s really no hope in sight, but you have to cope, nonetheless. You can’t stop living your life, no matter how gloomy the situation.



Her latest novels also feature oceans and islands, and the element of air is at the fore. There's ubiquitous technical surveillance and unseen malevolent powers are strongly present, while the protagonists work in difficult conditions for minimum wage. Many characters are subjected to medical testing, and in one of her novels the protagonist literally is a small person, due to a staged documentary film where she was made smaller with medical technology. Despite this, she still manages to make a difference in the world.

Verronen depicts a world where the climate has already changed and people are genetically modified to suite someone else's purposes, usually taken advantage of by the powers that be or exploitative employers, like faceless security companies, pharmaceutical giants or entertainment businesses.

The leading class is portrayed only from afar, for instance, behind the steering wheel of a massive hummer, wreaking havoc on the nameless streets. Occasionally the protagonist may encounter someone from the higher echelons of society. The key characters are usually exploited and downtrodden workers or guinea pigs who are powerless to change their situation.

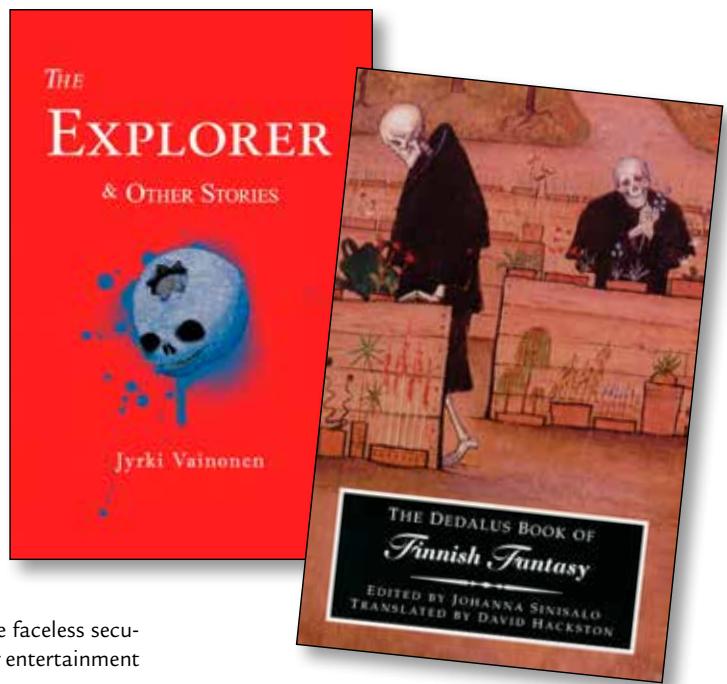
However, amidst all this misery there shine some rays of hope. Verronen's silent, humble heroines and heroes survive despite the hardships and keep on leading their meagre lives in natural settings, on the coast or a forest plot, maybe farming their own food.

Verronen is a staunch defender of humanity and the small person against the oppressing forces of the labour market and the government. The weirdness in her prose is beautiful, melancholy and truly ghastly, sometimes even harrowing.

Verronen's style is very clear and precise, her subject matter timely. The devastating problems featured in Verronen's stories are already present in our world, but she has managed to bring them to the fore by projecting them into the near future with weird elements.

A recurring motive in Verronen's work is trial by fire, that is, spiritual growth by overcoming obstacles of the most difficult kind. There's no heroic Phoenix rising from the ashes in the end, but at least there's a chance of survival and safety, however tenuous that may be. Thus, there are dreams of something better, no matter how tentative and humble, but obviously something lasting to build upon.

Two of Verronen's short stories from 1996, 'Black Train' and 'Basement, Man and Wife', are featured in *The Dedalus Book of Finnish Fantasy*. The e-anthology *It Came From the North* has one more, a story called 'Delina'.



HOW WEIRD CAN IT GET?

Jyrki Vainonen (b. 1963) has established his reputation on the surreal and unheimlich. His first collection of short stories won the *Helsingin Sanomat* literature prize in 1999.

Vainonen is one of the trailblazers of Finnish Weird and, indeed, some of his esteemed younger colleagues, like the Runeberg Literary Award-winning **Tiina Raevaara**, list his work among their major influences. Not only is Vainonen's style darkly humorous, but he's a master of the macabre, too.

In his short story 'The Explorer' (included in *The Dedalus Book of Finnish Fantasy* and Vainonen's own collection in English, *The Explorer & Other Stories*) Vainonen writes about a man who moves into his wife's thigh one night and lives there, exploring the landscape. The protagonist just disappears from our world and starts observing his wife's inner reactions inside her thigh. Vainonen gives no explanation of how this is possible – it just happens.

The story is very odd and tragicomic. There's lost love and intimacy, hidden secrets and betrayal. The end is disquieting, yet somehow serene.

The ultimate riddle of life, it's inexplicableness, is at the core of Vainonen's stories. He makes subtle moves towards the absurd and surreal. Something extremely weird is lurking underneath the surface of the everyday.

In Vainonen's short story 'The Pearl', the protagonist, Jan Stabulas, works as a menswear mannequin at the department store. He has a crush on the department head, Therese Wolkers, and at home, in front of the mirror, he experiences an uncanny metamorphosis literally making his bones crunch.

The funny, macabre tale exudes deep, primal sexual undertones. At the same time it's a beautiful story about a desperate crush and the protagonist's melancholy loneliness and wistfulness. The mirror shows the inner dual nature of Jan Stabulas and eventually he accepts it. A small flirtation and the crush that follows have dramatic consequences.

His other *Dedalus Book* story is 'Blueberries', also found in *The Explorer & Other Stories*. The narrator is a strange bone-collector who gradually finds out a shocking truth after having discovered a skeleton in a forest nearby his home.

This tale shows chillingly how all life can be an illusion, a lie, and how terrifying it finally is to have to face the truth after living many years without suspecting anything. A casual finding while picking berries leads to a chain of events that change the course of the protagonist's life permanently.

Vainonen has published three short story collections and four novels in Finnish. His English short story collection is composed of stories from all three of his original Finnish collections.

MORE WEIRD FINNS

There are many other Finnish Weird authors that merit attention. Some of them, like **Anne Leinonen** (b. 1973) and **Marko Hautala** (b. 1973), are featured in the in the e-book *It Came From the North: An Anthology of Finnish Speculative Fiction* published by Cheeky Frawg Books.

Eija Lappalainen (b. 1975) and Anne Leinonen have written an excellent dystopian trilogy, a real page-turner. It has all the hallmarks of Finnish Weird. For example, the world where the story happens is very eerie and desolate with many strange creatures. Moreover, Leinonen has recently published a masterful novel *Viivamaalari* [*The Line Painter*] (2013) about a totalitarian future society with distinctive weird elements. In 2006 she put out a collection of short stories full of Finnish Weird. The title story 'White Threads' is included in *It Came From the North*.

Marko Hautala is definitely one of the best psychological horror writers in Finland, and all his novels are paradigmatic examples of Finnish Weird, though they



usually don't include plainly supernatural elements. Hautala's novels have been translated into Italian and German. His story 'The Laughing Doll' is also featured in *It Came from the North*.

Saara Henriksson (b. 1981) has published two novels and several short stories about weird subjects. Her debut novel has a deep ecological theme and utilises a courageous narrative device among more traditional narratological choices, using a whale as a point of view narrator.

Essi Kummu's (b. 1977) charming novel *Karhun kuolema* [*The Death of a Bear*] (2010) which tells the story of a family living in northern Finland includes a fairytale-like relationship to bears and the ghost of a mother residing with her daughters.

Juha-Pekka Koskinen (b. 1968) has written numerous short stories and novels, some of them realistic or historic, some Finnish Weird. His novel about Vlad Tepes in modern Helsinki is one of the best Finnish horror novels of recent years. Koskinen's historical novel about Rasputin was a nominee for the 2013 Finlandia Prize.

J. Pekka Mäkelä (b. 1962) has published six novels, some of them science fiction, some more like Finnish Weird. He has

also translated many science fiction and music books. His debut novel is about time travel while his latest novel *Muurahaispuu* [*Ant Tree*] (2012) is very close to the themes found in other Finnish Weird classics.

Hannu Rajaniemi (b. 1978) is one of the most renowned science fiction writers in Finland. His two novels *The Quantum Thief* (2010) and *The Fractal Prince* (2012) have been written in English, published by Gollancz, and only later translated into Finnish. Rajaniemi lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. His short story 'Elegy for a Young Elk' is included in *It Came From the North*.

Last but not least, **Boris Hurtta** (b. 1945) is the true pioneer of Finnish Weird in Finland and a father figure to many contemporary authors. He has written an astonishing number of novels, short stories and articles on the subject of horror, adventure or weird fantasy. Hurtta is a well-known bibliophile and regular visitor at Finnconcs.

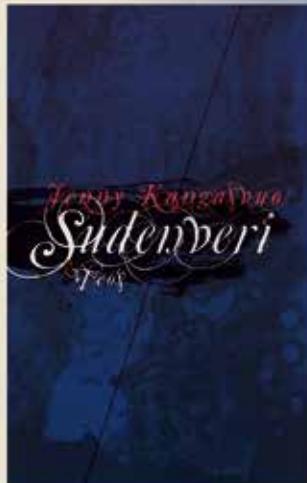
JUSSI K. NIEMELÄ



Leena Krohn

HOTEL SAPIENS AND OTHER IRRATIONAL TALES

A unique explorer of reality whose universalist fiction has in the Finlandia Prize 2013 nominee Hotel Sapiens acquired yet another fascinating chapter.

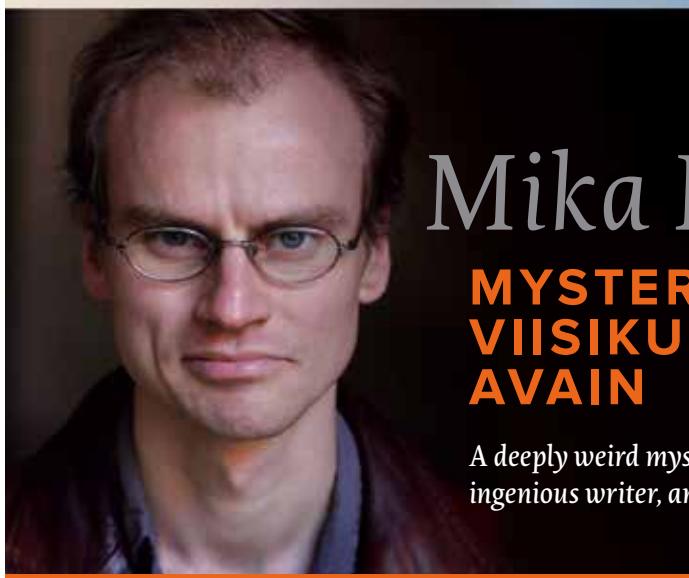


Jenny Kangasvuo

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"A literary pearl born out of Finnish myths and femininity."

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EMMI ITÄRANTA

THE WORDS WILL FLOW AS LONG AS SHE CAN MOVE HER HANDS

Words, sentences, fragments, stories. Texts surround **Emmi Itäranta**, always. They're in the notebook in the pocket of her bag. In the depths of her computer. In the air of her apartment in Canterbury. In her daily schedule: she sets aside a portion of nearly every day for writing.

Writing and the worlds created through writing have occupied Itäranta's life for years, even though her writing has only reached the reading public in the past few years. Itäranta's first novel, *Memory of Water* (originally published in Finnish as *Teemestarinkirja*) won the science fiction and fantasy novel competition organised by the Teos publishing company in 2011. The rights to the novel have since been sold to, for example, Harper-Voyager in the US. In Finland the novel has also won several awards and has received high praise in both magazines and literature blogs.

Just three springs ago Itäranta was in the same position as many other Finnish writers: her novel manuscript was ready, but there was no publisher in sight. Writing seemed at the same time important and futile. Well, perhaps not futile. More like odd: writing took up a great deal of time, but where was it leading to? Nowhere?

'I could never not write, even if nobody ever reads my texts', says Itäranta. Now she has readers. Now it is easier to allow her schedule to form itself around the text.

'I have arranged my life pretty much around writing. When I was writing *Memory of Water*, I only took on temporary jobs. Right now I am lucky that I can concentrate on just writing. This situation might not last forever, and of course, I am under a lot of pressure to do well with my next books. Nothing is certain. I am, however, very grateful for the way things are now.'

'My aim is to keep writing for as long as I can move my hands.'

FROM DRAMATURGE TO PROSAIST

Writing took Itäranta from Tampere, Finland, to Canterbury, UK, already in the late 1990s. Itäranta had studied theatre and drama at the University of Tampere and did an exchange semester at the University of Kent.

Later she returned to Finland, graduated as a Master of Arts, rejected a career as a researcher and took various theatre and writing jobs ranging from being a dramaturge for one of the channels of the Finnish national broadcasting company and doing the PR for the Pyynikki summer theatre. She also made a short film, dramatised **Neil Gaiman's** short stories into plays for the Tampere-based *Tukkateatteri* theatre company and wondered what she should do with her life.

Write.

But it's not easy to get a permanent job as a dramaturge in Finland.

In 2007 Itäranta applied to the University of Kent and was accepted to study creative writing. This decision made other parts of her life easier as well: as long as her then-boyfriend and now-husband, Spanish **José Casal**, lived in Canterbury and Itäranta herself in Tampere, much energy was spent on planning trips and organising life in two countries at the same time.

The Master's programme for creative writing at the University of Kent included writing a short story. Itäranta had a rough idea, which she had already written a short story about in her Finnish writing group before moving abroad. The text was a glimpse of something, which Itäranta felt had the makings of a longer story. At the time, she was following the news covering the lack of water in various countries. She had also long been interested in the Japanese tea ceremony, where tea is seen as a valuable luxury item. Both themes swam around separately in her head until one day they collided with each other.

'What if there was a world in the future in which tea ceremonies were a privilege of the select few? Not

**'I COULD NEVER NOT
WRITE, EVEN IF NOBODY
EVER READ MY TEXTS.'**

because tea was the luxury item, but because clean drinking water would be. And if there was somebody in that world whose task was to guard one of the last springs and to hide it from the powers that be?’

Itäranta knew she wanted to write a novel about the elements, but was not sure if she could carry such an extensive structure. She began writing, but for a long time she felt she was really writing a short story.

‘After seeing the first three pages, one of my teachers told me, “This is not a short story, it’s a novel”, She encouraged me to keep writing my text until it was complete’, Itäranta says.

The process took two and a half years. She finished just before the deadline for the Teos competition.



NOT ONE FOR THE SHORT FORM

Emmi Itäranta made her entrance onto the field of Finnish speculative fiction with *Memory of Water*. She had worked behind the scenes of Finnish fandom through, for example, the Finnish Tolkien Society. While still living in Finland, Itäranta was involved in choosing the winner for the Kuvastaja award given to the best Finnish fantasy novel.

Many speculative fiction writers have first made a name for themselves through short stories, but for Emmi Itäranta, the short form – at least to date – has not seemed to be her thing.

Before *Memory of Water*, Itäranta had had four short texts published: an essay ‘Parallels Lost’ (Legolas, 3/2003), a short story ‘Shaman (tm)’ (Alienisti 1/2011), a fragment of *Memory of Water* in English in a local anthology in Canterbury (2010) and a collection of six prose poems in the *Arctic Species* prose poem anthology in Canterbury (2011).

‘I was previously very concerned about not being comfortable with the short form. Now I see it is a skill, which I can learn later’, says Itäranta.

Now it is ‘later’. Alongside her new novel script, Itäranta is writing a short story for a Finnish anthology to be published in 2015.

What appeals to her with novel-length texts is the ability to throw herself into world building in a way that is not possible in the short form – more fervently and with more details. She also likes the flexibility of the long form.

‘I can twist the plot into different directions many times, and the characters have room to grow and change in a way that is not possible within the confines of the short story. I think it is possible to get closer to the characters in a novel’, she reflects.

‘I’m not saying it is not possible to create an interesting world in a short story – that requires the skills of a virtuoso – but it is possible to explore the world in more depth within a novel. Both as a writer and as a reader, I love sinking into a fictional world for a long time.’

The combination of working in the long form and her writer’s perfectionism ensures that Itäranta really gets to sink into the story she is writing for a long time. Itäranta knows she is a slow writer, but her background in drama helps her to create the framework for writing. Building the dramatic arc makes the process clearer. She does not want to jump unprepared into a completely unknown world, and just see what she comes across.

‘I plan the basic structure of the plot loosely at the very early stages. It helps me keep moving if I get stuck

EMMI ITÄRANTA IS WRITING HER SECOND NOVEL IN TWO LANGUAGES AS WELL.

with writing. I usually write the dialogue of the scenes first, and some short descriptions in parentheses. Then I start adding meat to the bones and extending the descriptions to include action and milieu.

Even her early drafts are polished. When Itäranta was writing *Memory of Water*, she did not rush through the story and return to fine-tune on the second round of writing. Instead, she built the foundations properly, examined, reflected – and created almost ready text right from the beginning.

'I wrote *Memory of Water* one chapter at a time. I only moved onto the next chapter after I had polished the previous one to, what seemed to me, an almost ready state. I am a slow writer and I'd rather spend time in creating depth. I try to get into the heart of scenes, characters and motivations. You can fix the surface later, but if the deep structures are wrong, they are much more difficult to change later.'



She also spends a lot of time on research. For *Memory of Water* she researched, among other things, how global warming and the rise of sea levels would change the borders of continents and water systems. What Finnish places would turn into seaside towns? What towns and areas would disappear beneath the water? What plants could grow in Lapland if the climate changed radically and what would mosquito swarms be like then?

'The scenario was extreme, but possible, at least in principle. When I was writing I had a map and a calendar where I would mark down the places and locations of the most important events.'

ONE STORY, TWO LANGUAGES

The language of *Memory of Water* is poetic, descriptive and lingering:

'I looked at mother, who sat behind the window. She was colourless, faint in the middle of a bright day like an image in an old book. She looked at me as we walked away, looked even when I was no longer looking at her, I am sure of it.'

The novel uses the same poetic style in both Finnish and English. Part of the reason why the writing process of *Memory of Water* took two and a half years was because Itäranta was writing her story in both languages at the same time, one alternating chapter after another.

TEEMESTARIN KIRJA [MEMORY OF WATER]

'The world is running out of water. Mankind has overcome an enormous disaster and is now struggling under the lack of fresh drinking water and in the iron grip of a military regime that controls the remaining water resources. Only the technology buried in rubbish dumps and the diaries of tea masters remain as reminders of before. Noria is the last in the long line of tea masters, and it will soon be time for her to take on the title of a fully learned tea master – and a secret carefully guarded by her predecessors. In a time and age when hiding water is the worst of all crimes, the gaze of the military is inevitably drawn towards the tea master's house...'

– From the publisher's introduction

'The Master's degree programme at the University of Kent meant I had to write in English, but I also wanted to get feedback from my Finnish writing group, so I wrote the text in Finnish, too. It was slow, but the text became more polished than it would have been writing in just one language', Itäranta explains.

Right from the beginning she thought about how to tell the same story in two very different languages. Her choices had to be made in a way where neither version would hit a linguistic impasse. This method of writing was not, in her opinion, an unproblematic one.

'I thought about how sentences and words would translate from one language to the other already while writing, and sometimes that may have simplified the language unnecessarily. The English language has a

huge number of words, with countless shades of meaning and tone, but the grammar is fairly simple. Finnish, on the other hand, has a relatively limited lexicon, but the grammar is complicated and the few words available can be used to express a great deal. In order to find balance between the languages, I had to make some compromises.

'I like the malleability of Finnish, its expressiveness and what it sounds like and feels like in my mouth when spoken. I would have probably used Finnish with more daring had I not been thinking about the English equivalents when writing. On the other hand, using two languages stripped away superfluous words and unnecessary decorations, because I had to think about the way each sentence worked several times. If I felt the language was not flowing properly one day, I would read poetry rather than prose to help me along, because the language of poetry is often more surprising than that of fiction. The visual quality of poems helped me to see the text in a new light.'

Itäranta cannot really recommend using two parallel writing languages at the same time to anyone. It is hard work to not only make progress in two concurrent blocks of text, but also to maintain uniformity between the two works. When Itäranta's Finnish writing group had discussed the text and Itäranta had decided to make changes based on their suggestions, she had to update both versions.

Or rather: should have.

Because when Itäranta went through the English version after the Finnish one was published, she was faced with words and details she had meant to change while she was editing the Finnish manuscript ages before. Some of the changes had, however, remained in a state most writers are probably familiar with: 'I'll remember to change this when I encounter it the next time - but just now I can't be bothered'.

A year ago Itäranta felt sure she would never put herself through the wringer of writing in two languages ever again, but now she is already working on her next novel, and writing it in both Finnish and English.

'I chose English as my language again because the American publishing house HarperVoyager contracted me for two books, with *Memory of Water* being the first. The second novel will most likely not see the light of day until 2015', says Itäranta.

'At least now I know how to keep track of every single comma.'

The new story is a kind of 'urban fantasy'.

'However, there isn't a single vampire, demon, angel or werewolf in it', laughs Itäranta.

'The novel deals with invisible, underlying power structures and identity.'

**'THROWING MYSELF INTO
SPECULATIVE FICTION IS
A GRANDER ADVENTURE THAN
EXPLORING THE MUNDANE.'**

ADDICTION THROUGH IMMERSION

Although Itäranta sought help for her writer's block from poetry, she is actually surprised to notice she does not read much poetry. She is as astonished to notice how little so-called realistic fiction she reads. Slowly she has realised that even as a reader, she is more focused on speculative fiction than she thought.

'I always claim I read other things besides speculative fiction. Looking at the list of the books I have read over the past few years I discovered that at least 80% of everything I read is speculative fiction in one form or another. The same goes for television series and films.'

Itäranta thinks she goes for speculative fiction for the simple reason that she loves to immerse herself in the world of stories. Speculative fiction is nothing if not immersive: in it worlds are emphasised because they often differ from the surrounding, mundane reality. Itäranta points out that the world of the story still needs to be plausible and consistent in its internal logic. In good speculative fiction, all the pieces fit together.

'I probably ended up writing speculative fiction for that same reason: I want to visit fictional worlds. If you can imagine a world that is different from the one we are used to, why not use that ability? I have noticed that, when I write, the world, or at least the key idea of the world, comes to me first. The characters and stories follow afterwards. Writing is sort of like exploring a strange, surprising world, one that constantly reveals new sides of itself. This is why I feel throwing myself into speculative fiction is a grander and more attractive adventure than exploring the mundane.'

The world was the first thing created for *Memory of Water*, and the reality that surrounded the main character Noria dominated the writing process for a long time. New details and prospects of her grim vision of the future kept opening up all through the writing process, and when editing the story, Itäranta had to move the milieu descriptions around a great deal.

'In the editing phase I noticed that I had introduced elements midway through the story that should have

been described right at the beginning. This was because I wrote the chapters chronologically, and when setting out, I did not yet know what the locations looked like or how some devices worked. Many things became apparent during the journey.'

GIFTED WITH A FINNISH IMAGINATION

Because Emmi Itäranta lives a bit further away from the core of Finnish Weird and Finnish literature in general, she notices it when she comes across it in, for example, Canterbury or London.

Sometimes she notices familiar names.

'I always feel delighted to run into Finnish Weird in one form or another. It might be a *Moomin troll* comic book on display at a book store, a novel by **Johanna Sisonalo**, **Hannu Rajaniemi** or **Leena Krohn** on a library shelf or a trailer for the *Iron Sky* movie on the Internet. While not hugely visible, you can find Finnish Weird in book stores that specialise in speculative fiction, such as *Forbidden Planet* in London.'

Itäranta keeps track of what Finnish literature comes out in English, because she likes introducing it to new people.

'I like to give Finnish books as gifts to my friends who do not speak Finnish and who may not have ever read a Finnish book.'

Mainstream novels are still the most often translated ones, but Itäranta thinks the wind may be changing soon.

'So far Finnish Weird has been a small phenomenon, but especially the comprehensive blog posts of **Jeff** and **Ann VanderMeer** have given it priceless visibility. There is room for growth as well as a lot of potential', exclaims Itäranta.

STORY FIRST, GENRE SECOND

Itäranta knows full well that, from the viewpoint of speculative fiction, Finland is still divided into two different countries, even though genre literature has started to gain interest and visibility amongst so-called mainstream readers. On the one hand, Finland has active speculative fiction readers and writers, but on the other hand, for the longest time, the mainstream simply could not have cared less. Novels, which gained the most visibility, focused on scrubbing meat sauce stains from table cloths, despite all the speculative movement under the surface.

The boundaries are finally breaking, and even those readers who know nothing about speculative fiction are exposed to the phenomenon. The borders leak in a small country in many ways. In Finland, speculative



EMMI ITÄRANTA

Who?

Emmi Elina Itäranta, born in 1976, double Master of Arts, columnist and novelist.

Favorite film right now?

I really loved Martin Scorsese's Hugo. It is a beautiful love letter to the magic of movies and one of the few 3D films where three-dimensionality is not just decoration, but instead supports the story and brings added value.

Motto?

I have never felt the need to come up with a motto for my life. But I do try to keep in mind that it is better to try and fail than never try at all. You usually always learn something from failing.

If you were an animal, what animal would you be?

Some solitary and nocturnal animal, preferably one which stands the cold better than I do. Perhaps a snow leopard.

What's the best moment of the day?

It depends on the day!

Where would you rather be right now?

In a warm climate, a quiet street café, with a steaming cup of good tea, a notebook and an unhurried day ahead of me.

fiction has efficiently absorbed meat sauce stains into itself and its own imagery. Many things can grow from a sauce stain - and kitchens in worlds other than Finnish ones may suffer from spilled food.

'Here you can see the differences of language areas. The Finnish book market is so small that in order to survive, speculative fiction needs to cross genre borders into the mainstream to find an audience in other places than just the marginal fandom', Itäranta says.

'In a large, Anglo-American language area, there are readers for speculative fiction even when it remains tightly in its genre box. From the viewpoints of esteem and "being taken seriously", genre elitism still exists. It is still very rare to see pure speculative fiction competing for large literature prices, such as the Booker, Orange or Pulitzer.'

Itäranta hopes to be rid of categorisations altogether at some point, both in Finland and elsewhere. After all, the divisions are artificial: few works cleanly represent only certain types of structures, story elements or patterns.

'I find it strange to choose or evaluate literature based on its genre. The story comes first and genre second, and in 2014 it should be self-evident that each genre contains both excellent literature and substandard garbage – and of course everything in between. It is possible to write anything both well and badly.'

Itäranta's own novel is an excellent example of how boundaries are breaking. *Memory of Water* has gained so much visibility that even readers who are normally suspicious of speculative fiction have read it. A newspaper journalist, who claimed only reading realistic novels, read *Memory of Water* because the lack of water combined with tea ceremonies seemed like an interesting theme. 'I don't like science fiction, but to my surprise, this was good', she marvelled.

At least for one reader, 'science fiction' had suddenly become a touch less scary.

FANDOM IS A TWO-EDGED SWORD

The banner of speculative fiction is blowing vigorously in book and film markets right now, but Itäranta sees the fan-culture of speculative fiction as a two-edged sword. One which may eventually cut off the road for reading masses altogether.

'On the one hand, active fandom has striven to promote the visibility of speculative fiction and to do away with genre borders. This has brought speculative fiction closer to the mainstream. On the other hand, fandom is strongly communal, which is rare for other genres of fiction. To people who are not in fandom themselves, this may make science fiction and

fantasy enthusiasm appear as hobbies for a small circle of freaks.'

The past few years have been a golden age for fantasy in particular. Is there still room for science fiction or horror to get as big?

'The commercial potential of fantasy has been noticed to the point of over-exploitation. Other forms of speculative fiction are still in the margins' Itäranta points out.

She refuses to categorise, for example, the *Twilight* novels and films as horror, even though they include classic horror story characters.

'They are romantic entertainment, which contain a fantasy element derived from horror imagery but stripped completely of all horror. Paranormal romance is a sub-genre of speculative fiction, which is coming out of every nook and cranny. I am not very interested in it myself, but I cannot think of a reason why it would not work if well written'.

Itäranta reads relatively little horror or hard science fiction, which emphasises science and technology, though she does not rule either of them out completely. If a story is well-written or it just captures the imagination, why not go along for the ride.

She also points out that those genres that are not a particular reader's favourite ones may at best shine a light on new aspects to the reader's own truths. The biggest obstacle to an experience is not picking up a story because of its blurb or title.

'Genre should never be used to evaluate the literary merits of a book. In my opinion, one of the most important functions of fiction is to show the world in a new light and to question the self-evident. Speculative fiction suits this purpose well, because it is not restricted by the tricks of realism. Speculative elements, such as alternative histories, parallel universes, future societies or life-forms from other planets can be used to efficiently draw attention to truisms and ask whether things could be different', Itäranta ponders.

Surprisingly many things could easily be the opposite of what our conventions or illusions dictate.

‘ONE OF THE MOST
IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS
OF FICTION IS TO SHOW
THE WORLD IN A NEW LIGHT.’

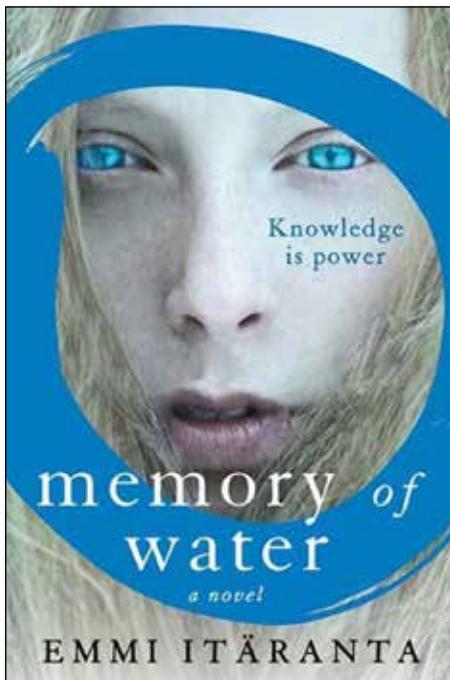
'At best speculative fiction raises various "what if" scenarios, both good and bad. It also shows the limitlessness of the human imagination and through that, our ability to cope even in the most extreme circumstances.'

Even though artificial genre definitions often needlessly direct our reading habits, Itäranta sees a point in using such definitions. They also have a lot of good in them.

'A definition usually tells us something about the work at hand, even if sometimes quite clumsily. Genres can also be used to help with writing, because knowing their conventions gives tools for building a story: you can use and break genre elements, you can play with them and steer the readers' expectations', she points out.

Even though Itäranta has been a reader of speculative fiction, right from her childhood when she used to withdraw to read, the type of reader or writer she is was not born of her reading habits and was most certainly not a conscious decision.

'I have never deliberately thought that I will write science fiction, fantasy or horror. I have just begun writing a story, and almost invariably some sort of speculative element has just made its way in my texts.'



MARIKA RIIKONEN

Translated by Marianna Leikoma
First published in *Tähtiveltaja*-magazine 2/2012



TIINA RAEVAARA

VISIONS FROM THE FORGE OF IDEAS

Her stories teem with flying creatures, machine people, powerful descriptions of nature and an ever-present threat lurking under the surface. They can equally well contain nightmarish visions, a destroyed world and things left unsaid, hidden between the lines. **Tiina Raevaara's** books are challenging but rewarding.

Much of her writing brims with the presence of nature. It is, therefore, natural to talk with the author at a summer cottage on the shore of Lake Saimaa, where mosquitoes, a screaming bird making its nest on the waterline and the author's dog constantly interrupt our interview.

Tiina Raevaara is an author of the new generation: her debut novel, *Erääänä päivänä tyhjä taivas* [One Day, An Empty Sky] (Teos) came out in 2008, and she won the prestigious Runeberg Prize in 2011 with her short story collection *En tunne sinua vierelläni* [I Don't Feel You Beside Me] (Teos). Both books contribute to the image of a versatile writer, whose prose is nuanced and sentences beautifully constructed.

Raevaara has connections with the Finnish speculative fiction community, as her short stories have been published in the Usva webzine, among other places, and her stories have won many awards in science fiction and fantasy competitions. In spite of this, Raevaara cannot be branded as a straightforward genre writer. Rather, her writing operates freely and picks up material from many different genres. She draws her themes from the subconscious, the world of nightmares and visions, but sets them against the backdrop of reality, presenting them as facts.

'I LIKE BOOKS
THAT ATTRACT
INTERPRETATION.'

SYMBOLS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

'It seems that something more than clothes has sunk into the moss – something far heavier. I thrust my hand into the warm swamp, and grope around for a moment until I get a better grip on something firm, like a branch the width of a wrist.'

– 'Ospreys', 2010

Raevaara's writing is full of symbols, and it would be easy to start interpreting them through psychoanalysis, for example. The author herself, however, does not want to provide ready-made models for interpretation, and there are no particular theories behind her stories.

'In my first novel, for example, the forest was seen as feminine. I think every interpretation is highly valuable, even if it differs from my own conception. On the whole, it's wonderful that people are interested in examining the story at such a detailed level.'

The novel *Erääänä päivänä tyhjä taivas* has been interpreted in many different ways. Some readers have seen it as a concrete description of a post-apocalyptic world, whereas others view it more as a symbolic journey into the landscape of the mind.

'Personally, I like books that are not easy, but attract interpretation. They may not even contain any absolute truths, but the text should somehow entice the reader to draw her own conclusions.'

Raevaara is satisfied if her writing is considered ambiguous.

'If I have managed to write something like that, great! Usually I start out writing a concrete story, but then something I had not planned at all creeps in.'

There are also themes that the author returns to again and again.

'Metamorphosis is one. And swamps. Birds and flight, war, machine people. On the other hand, these are all just phases in my career as an author. In practice, I live in sort of a constant stream of change.'

Raevaara already has several beginnings for new novels, though it is not yet clear which of them will be finished next.



TIINA RAEVAARA

Facts

Born:
Kerava, 1979

Studied:
University of Helsinki, MA (Biology) in 2001,
PhD (Genetics) in 2005.

Hobbies:
Walking in the forest with her dog and playing
floorball with cultured people from Porvoo.

Favourite childhood classics:
E. R. Burroughs' Mars and Tarzan books, Agatha
Christie's work and the Famous Five books.

Favourite scenery:
A thick forest with no other people in it.

Favourite music:
Right now especially Led Zeppelin and Kate Bush.

'I can't consciously choose which text will start flowing. Especially in the case of short stories, the process is unpredictable. One story will flow easily all the way from start to finish and another story won't, no matter what I try. I am always surprised by how the writing and story creation proceed.'

PREHENSILE SURFACES OF THE MIND

'I don't remember what first made me think of the monster.'

– 'Matildan kuolema' ['Matilda's Death'], 2010

Raevaara gets ideas for her stories from many different things. Ideas can arise from the landscape, from something happening around her or from something she reads in the newspaper or the music she happens to be listening to. For example, the idea for the broken-winged black-throated loon in 'Gordon's Story' came from an actual black-throated loon with both wings crushed that Raevaara found by the side of the road. 'Nälkä' ['Hunger'], on the other hand, is based on a wartime story told by the author's grandfather.

Raevaara's writing is often characterised by sensuous descriptions of nature. Swamps, birds, bats and insects. These descriptions also flow from her own experiences.

'In a way it's ridiculous, because a personal experience is hard to pass on to the reader. The nuances are lost, and the tiny differences are not obvious to a reader who does not see how significant the experience is.'

As writing exercises, Raevaara constructs short stories that must contain certain things or objects that she has specified. The use of the subconscious is emphasised in her writing in other ways, as well.

'The human mind, everything we remember and think, the subconscious and even conscious memories, it's all a cauldron that takes in everything we have experienced, seen and heard. Human personality and inborn characteristics are the current that moves the things gathered in the cauldron. Each person's mind is full of different things: my mind produces certain kinds of stories, another person's mind will produce others.'

Raevaara does not translate her dreams directly into stories, because she feels that dreams are, on the whole, difficult to turn into literature. Dreaming and sleeping are, however, fruitful sources for stories.

'If I have a problem with my writing, for example, if I don't know how to build a certain plot, the solution often comes to me right before I fall asleep.'

Raevaara has taught herself to remember these insights even in the stupor of sleep. The prehensile surfaces of her mind are ready to catch hold of these ideas born on the borderline of sleep.

Strange and inexplicable things happen in her short stories. The atmosphere is important, and many of the experiences are difficult to put into words. Feelings of fear and alienation are tangibly present.

‘Writing these stories comes naturally to me, I don’t categorise my writing in a certain genre.’

Various monsters are also familiar figures to Raevaara. They creep into her writing even when she has no intention of writing about them. For example, the short story ‘Matildan kuolema’ [‘Matilda’s Death’] was originally an exercise for a writing course where the assignment was to write a detective story.

‘Suddenly there was a monster in my realistic story. “Matildan kuolema” is the very story in which I found my own voice. I discovered what I want to write about and what I want my writing to convey.’

THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR

‘Where does this story really begin? It does not begin until later, from the moment you asked me to write everything down. Everything before that moment I have just tried to remember.’

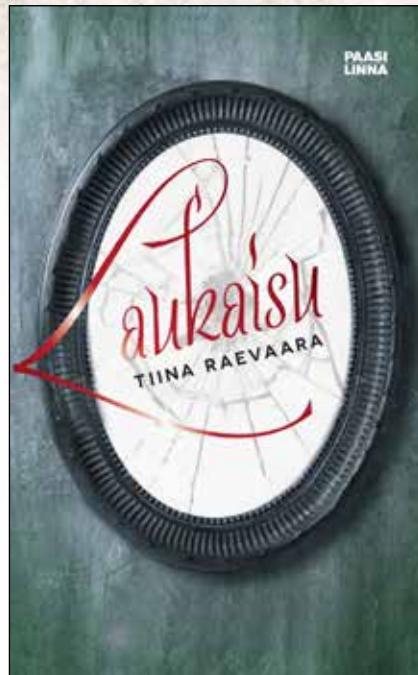
– ‘Gordon’s Story’, 2010

For Raevaara, the most important things about writing and language are narration and the narrator. They are significant even when the story has no obvious narrator. The choice of narrator defines the character of the whole story.

‘Language is born through the narrator. When I start a novel, I need to have a narrator first, only then can I start writing. Even if I know what the plot is going to be like, I can’t start earlier. I have to understand why the story is being told in exactly the way it is.’

In practice, this means that Raevaara may have to wait for a long time for the narrator of the story to mature. She had written the first pages of her latest novel, *Hukkajoki* [Wolf River] (Teos, 2013), already in 2006. Since then, the story has gone through a complete metamorphosis, but the narrator has stayed the same throughout.

The short story collection *En tunne sinua vierelläni* contains good examples of the different styles of narration



employed by Raevaara. In ‘Gordon’s Story’, the bird narrator relates the story of a human patient sharing the same hospital room. ‘Karthunköynnös’ [‘Bindweed’] consists of letters sent by S to M – but who are they really? In the short story ‘My Creator, My Creation’, a machine person speaks in imperfect sentences, but still in a very delicate and human style.

But do the narrators leak from one story to another, do they form a kind of continuum?

‘I have noticed that many characteristics of a previous narrator carry over to the next one. I may be able to let go of the language, but the emotional state is easily transmitted from one narrator to another. However, after a few steps the situation looks quite different.’

COMPETENCE IN SCIENCE

‘Sticks his finger into me and adjusts something, tok-tok, fiddles with some tiny part inside me and gets me moving better – last evening I had apparently been shaking. Chuckles, gazes with water in his eyes. His own hands shake, because he can’t control his extremities. Discipline essential, both in oneself and in others.’

– ‘My Creator, My Creation’, 2010

Raevaara has a solid background as a researcher. She has a PhD in genetics from the University of Helsinki, and she has worked in a research team studying dog genes. She frequently gets asked about the influence her background in science has on her fiction, and she is quick to answer.

‘I can’t think of myself as a researcher any longer, because that work is done at universities. I still have my education, of course, my knowledge of the world won’t suddenly disappear. If anything, my background can be seen in the fact that both as a researcher and a writer, I am interested in the same things – such as dogs.’

In 2011, Raevaara published a non-fiction book, *Koiraksi ihmiselle* [Becoming a Dog for Humans] (Teos). It is an easily accessible book on the evolution of dogs and a fascinating peek into the shared history of humans and dogs.

‘I had long thought about writing a popular science book on the subject. After all, I had worked as a science

RAEVAARA CAN BE CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE TOP NAMES IN FINNISH WEIRD.

journalist and taught courses on the popularisation of science.'

She found the book's subject in her own research.

'The evolution of dogs is interesting and unique. Dogs are the oldest domesticated animals, and they have lived through all the great upheavals of human history.'

In addition to her career as a scientist and author, Raevaara has participated in numerous social causes. She has committed homeopathic suicide in an event organised by Skepsis ry (the Finnish association of skeptics), exchanged Bibles for pornography and defended the rights of wolves in her science blog. Does an author have to be socially active?

'I don't think that being socially active is in any way an author's responsibility. Not everyone has the desire, passion, time or interest for it. On the other hand, I have always respected and admired authors who use

their own publicity to bring forward issues important to them.'

Among the issues closest to her heart Raevaara lists large predators, old forests, the rights of sexual minorities and protecting children from abuse.

THE POWERS BEHIND THE WRITER

'Joona is not sure whether dogs have hearts in the metaphorical sense. Taikai is a bundle of instincts and senses – instincts driven by senses, a bundle of computer programs packed in dark fur, devoid of such elements as heart or cordiality.'

– Hukkajoki [Wolf River], 2012

Raevaara can be considered one of the top names in Finnish Weird – a unique writer whose language and choice of subjects would undoubtedly make an impression even outside Finland. Samples of her work have been introduced abroad and have generated a certain level of interest. However, the jackpot is yet to be hit, as the marketing of a Finnish writer abroad is a job demanding patience, often a process taking up more than a decade.

The biggest problem in taking over the world is probably the fact that Raevaara's oeuvre is not yet very extensive. Her first novel was not such a great success that



ERÄÄNÄ PÄIVÄNÄ TYHJÄ TAIVAS [ONE DAY, AN EMPTY SKY]

Tiina Raevaara's debut novel *Erääänä päivänä tyhjä taivas* is, in principle, a post-apocalyptic survival story. In practice, the book weaves a metaphorical journey into inner space, where fairytale imagery meets the alchemy of the subconscious.

The nameless female narrator is travelling towards her home. Past the gateway guarded by an old man, through the dusky forest, under the empty sky, to the other side. The internal geometry of her house reflects its external chaos: strangely winding corridors, windowless rooms, locked doors, unmarked routes.

Within the house, which is twisted with illness, await 19 similar brothers and a fear-ridden, stern father. Where is the mother?

The novel's unique imagery titillates and entices. Its dreamlike narration, painted with sorrow and anxiety, spirals inexorably towards the enigmatic core of the nightmare. The book's narrator grasps smells, feelings and tiny details conveyed by eyesight. The impression thus created surges over the reader and grabs a tight hold.

– Abridged version of Toni Jerrman's book review in *Tähtivaeltaja* 3/2008

it would have piqued the interest of foreign publishers. Her short story collection, on the other hand, has many merits, but publishers are usually not interested in short stories. *Hukkajoki* may well be the novel that launches the author's career abroad.

The Runeberg Prize that she won in 2011 brought not only a monetary award, but also some attention, although there was no great onslaught of media coverage. General interest in and awareness of her work have, however, increased.

'Now, if ever, I can write what I want, because I know that people like what I do.'

An integral part of an author's job is her relationship with her editor. Raevaara's cooperation with **Maarit Halmesarkka** at Teos seems to rest on an excellent foundation.

'I worship my editor. I have always found it terribly difficult to show my half-finished work to anyone. Even when I took short story writing courses, I always contributed stories with a finished arc. If I showed something half-written, nobody had any idea what I was aiming for.'

Indeed, Raevaara needs to have a sufficiently close relationship with her editor to be able to reveal an unfinished manuscript. She sent *Hukkajoki* to her editor half-written, something she had never done before.

'In principle, I'm writing the story only for myself, but nowadays I feel that I'm also writing it for my editor. She understands what I'm attempting to do as a writer.'

'During the last round of edits for *Hukkajoki*, I finally realised that it would be better for me to accede to many of the changes suggested by my editor, although I had originally rebelled against them. I can handle a short story, it is easy to see at a glance. But when I'm rewriting a whole novel, I can't grasp the entire arc of the story myself, I just have to trust my editor.'

WOLF RIVER

'It is hard to leave Wolf River, sometimes even impossible.'

– *Hukkajoki*, 2012

Raevaara's ambiguously titled second novel, *Hukkajoki*, came out in the autumn of 2012. The Finnish title could be translated as either *Wolf River* or *Last River*.

'It must be the most realistic story I have ever written, even though it does not stay completely within the bounds of reality.'

In her first novel, everything happens here and now, there are no expectations of the future. This time the writer was aiming for a rambling, extravagant style. The

EN TUNNE SINUA VIERELLÄNI [I DON'T FEEL YOU BESIDE ME]

On the cover of her short story collection, Tiina Raevaara states that she doesn't feel me beside her. However, the book's narrators do get beside the readers, up close and into the hollows of their minds.

The opening piece of the book is 'Gordon's Story', and here already the author heaves everyday experiences overboard in no small way.

The events of the story take place in a perfectly ordinary hospital – if one does not take into account the fact that both the patients and the staff are birds. The central character is a black-throated loon who has been wounded in the bird wars and gets a human roommate, a man who is turning into stone. The worlds of bird and man are not the same, even though they live side by side.

The story 'Kaivo' ['The Well'], dipping into the horrors of reality, also stirs the imagination. A formless painting hides the fantastic story of a red cottage and fertile field, the children coming from the well, Sonja who loves them, and the cruel Master who is seeking escape. Great ovens and dried bodies. And a seer who is caught by the lure of the painting.

'Kaivo' delves its way deep into the reader's mind and simmers there like radioactivity from a nuclear weapon.

– Abridged version of Toni Jerrman's book review in *Tähtivaeltaja* 3/2010



main character in *Hukkajoki* is Joona, who is lost somewhere in Northern Karelia.

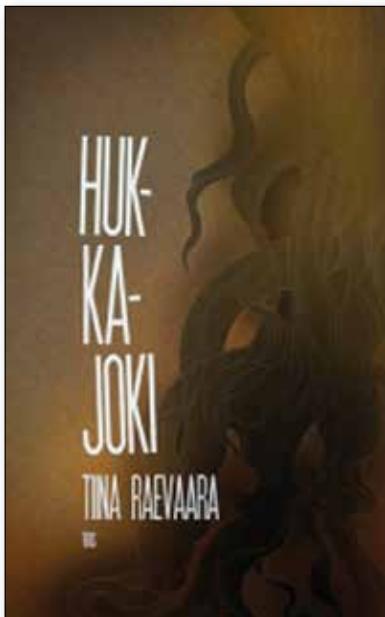
'I enjoyed writing the book more than anything. Of course it had its own tough and boring moments, but I liked the characters. One of them was even someone I would like to know for real.'

Hukkajoki starts suspensefully: in the middle of the night, in the freezing cold, Joona is driving to escape something. He is accompanied by his wolfish dog Taika. An unusual meeting leads him to the house of Amanda and her daughter Dora.

Hukkajoki is a strange place, people come there and stay there.

People are lost, they have secrets, and the wilderness surrounding them has a will of its own. Both people and animals possess an inexplicable primal force.

The rambling mentioned by Raevaara is clearly visible in the narration: the point of view travels adroitly back and forth in time and place, a few scenes are provided to sum up details of the characters' history, hopes, and disappointments. At the same time, a three-dimensional overall picture is built of the characters.



Raevaara is not afraid to make her characters eccentric and imbue them with oddities. But everything is told in a natural and believable manner – details breaking from realism furtively insinuate themselves into the reader's consciousness.

The book's narrator plays with the reader. Just enough is revealed to hook the reader. And when one riddle is solved, another takes its place. In the beginning of the book, Amanda receives an important letter, but its contents are not revealed. Only gradually is the reader given hints for constructing his or her own interpretation of what

the letter might possibly mean.

Reading the novel, one is forced to speculate often about what it all is about, what the narrator's role in the story is – and how much the reader is, perhaps, being deceived.

Since *Hukkajoki*, Raevaara has already published a new novella.

'*Laukaisu [The Gunshot]* (Teos, 2014) is not speculative fiction, but so-called realism. It is the story of one day and one person, and deals in part with family murders. Such a gentle subject...'

TIINA RAEVAARA

Short stories published in English

'My Creator, My Creation' ('Luojani, luomani', translated by Hildi Hawkins and Soila Lehtonen)

- In the magazine *Books from Finland*, 2010 (<http://www.booksfromfinland.fi/2010/05/my-creator-my-creation/>)
- In the anthology *Best European Fiction 2013*, Dalkey Archive Press 2013

'Ospreys' ('Kalaasäkset', translated by David Hackston)

- In the anthology *New Finnish Fiction*, Gummerus 2006
- In the anthology *It Came from the North*, Cheeky Frawg Books 2013

'Subterraneous' ('Maanalainen', translated by Petri Salin)

- In the webzine *Usva International* 2007 (<http://www.usvazine.net/arkistousvaint07.htm>)

Raeavaara's work has also been translated into other languages, including German, Hungarian and Russian.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF KROHN AND GIGER

'Day by day I grow more firmly attached to the house; it sucks me close to itself, until I am like everyone else living here: a parasite, completely at its mercy.'

– Eräänä päivänä tyhjä taivas, 2008

Raeavaara avows to being a great fan of **Leena Krohn**. She discovered Krohn's work half by accident during high school, when a Finnish course required reading modern Finnish literature and the teacher gave her a list of books to choose from. Krohn's short story collection *Matemaitisia olioita [Mathematical Beings]* was the first book that Raeavaara could get at the library. It made an impression and led her to the rest of Krohn's work.

'Krohn has recurring themes and a compelling need to say things, which is admirable.'

Especially the novella *Tainaron: Mail from Another City*, containing two stories, has stuck in Raeavaara's mind as a masterpiece.

'The book has a fine, wistful atmosphere of longing. The entirety of the stories remains unexplained, even



though it is tempting to try to interpret it. *Tainaron* can be thought of as a fantasy, an allegory, but even this conclusion cannot be considered certain.'

Raevaara describes enthusiastically how Krohn uses the facts of insect life, such as metamorphosis and the activities of ants, in her writing. Mythological details and biological and morphological facts are all included.

Raevaara has also met Leena Krohn.

'Some of the finest moments in my life as an author are when I discover myself sitting on a panel discussing things as an equal with people who have been important role models or mentors throughout my writing career. It's kind of a holy feeling.'

In general, however, Raevaara does not like to speak of role models.

'I would like to be my own kind of author and not develop towards a certain goal or do something that somebody else has already done. But of course, there are always writers who influence me.'

One such figure is **Margaret Atwood**, whose versatility and wide range as a writer Raevaara praises.

'**Gaétan Soucy**'s *The Little Girl Who Was Too Fond of Matches* (2000) is one of the best novels I have ever read. The narrator has a huge effect on what is told and in which way. The atmosphere of the book is closed, narrow, and the story is difficult to pin down anywhere. The time of the events is revealed in only a few scenes.'

Raevaara is also a fan of the *Alien* movies. She saw *Aliens* at the age of ten at a friend's birthday party.

'The fear actually stayed with me until I was 20. At its worst, when I was 10-15 years old, I was afraid to stay home alone at all. When I went to bed, I was scared of monsters hiding in the corners.'

Operating with fear has obviously been good for the author's psyche, because her head now generates such diverse visions.

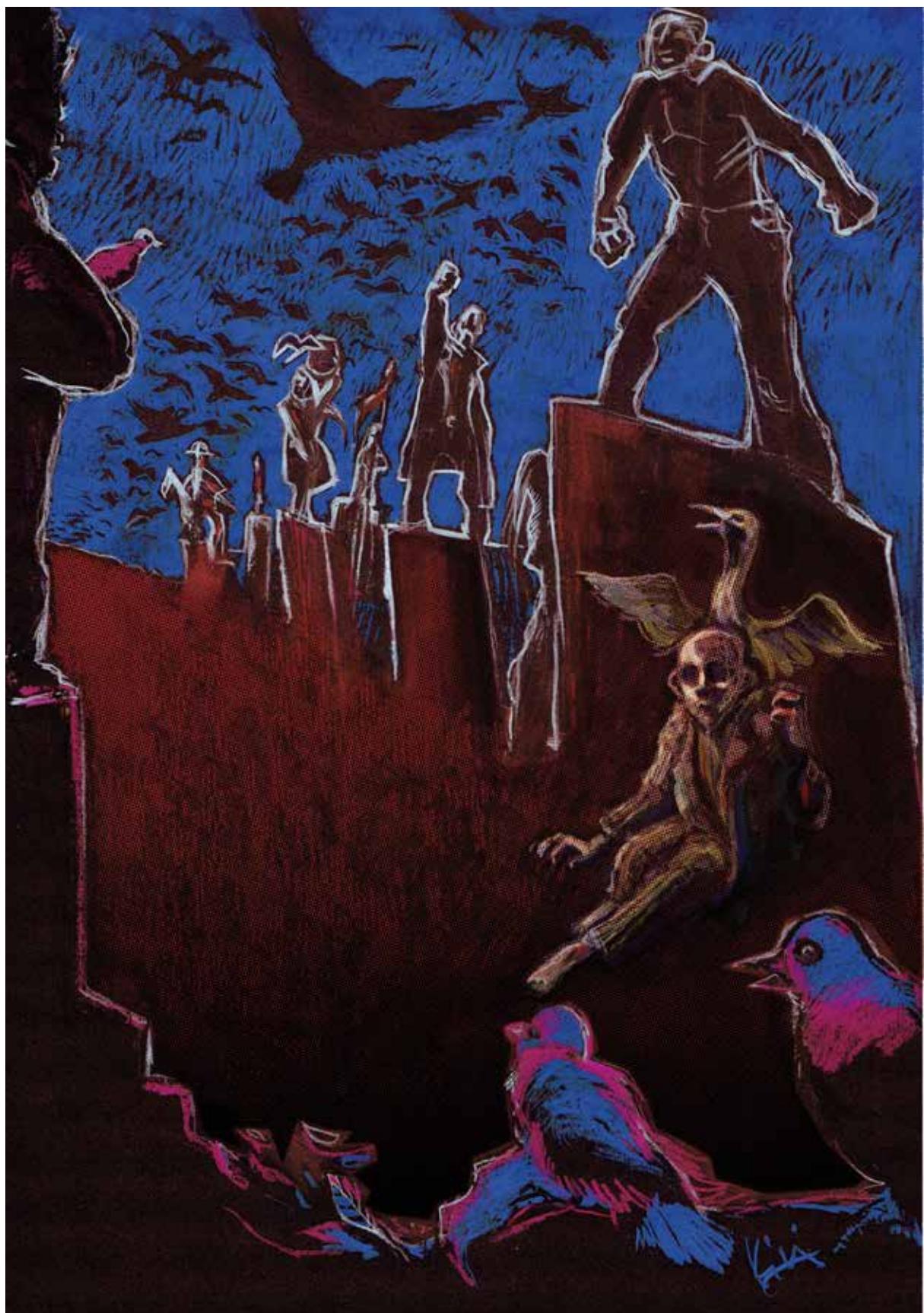
'I like the idea of chains and continua and knowing that I am part of a certain tradition. **H.P. Lovecraft**'s ancient god Cthulhu was influenced by **Alfred Lord Tennyson**'s poem *Kraken* (1830), which describes in great detail a squidlike being sleeping under the sea. **H.R. Giger** designed the alien in *Alien*, and his paintings have been inspired by Cthulhu. One of my short stories is, in turn, inspired by a painting of his.'

Raevaara aligns herself comfortably with the century-old continuum of the horrible, grotesque and weird. It will be interesting see where her unique work finally ends up.

The interview is over. The writer's car starts with a rumble and disappears down the country road. A glimpse of something can be seen between the tail lights: a fish with feet. The sign of Cthulhu.

ANNE LEINONEN

Translated by **Sarianna Silvonen**
First published in *Tähtiveltaja*-magazine 3/2012



TIINA RAEVAARA

GORDON'S STORY

You were moved into my room sometime in the early summer. You had already spent almost a year in the city's central hospital, a huge tin-roofed colossus over which I had often flown. I assumed that the windows of its top floors would have provided fine views far over the sea. 'Too dirty and small,' you croaked and shook your head in so far as you still could.

Here in the birds' hospital, the windows are covered with grilles so that nobody can plunge through them. The glass is still clear, though, the trees in the courtyard and the clouds in the sky can be seen as clearly as outside. But you were not interested in the outdoors.

At first you were wary of me. You thought I wouldn't notice, but from the corner of my eye I saw you watching me intently, turning your face away the moment I stirred. Embarrassed, you gazed elsewhere when I stretched my wings, filled my beak with water to drink, smoothed my feathers. If I made a sudden move, you flinched.

'I've never known a bird before', you explained later.

Your staring didn't bother me – it was really only later that I realised it was actually good for me. You were afraid of me! Nobody else would have shied away from such a broken-winged wretch.

For the first weeks, you did not interest me at all. I wallowed deep within my own problems. Those few times that anybody, even a doctor, came to visit you, I tried only to not hear, to withdraw into boredom. Nothing related to you interested me. Nothing had interested me ever since I was injured.

Entirely uninterested, I noticed your habits: you wrote extensively in a small book, you had obvious trouble getting the pen to stay in your hand. You didn't seem to read anything, you didn't look out the window, nobody visited you.

My disinterest faltered when I noticed that one of your arms had stiffened. When you had been placed in your bed, I had thought that your left arm stuck upward because it was in a cast. Then I happened to see the nurse taking off your gown and dressing you in a new one. Your arm wasn't in a cast, it wasn't even splinted, it just stuck rigidly up towards the ceiling.

Now there's a fate to rival mine, I thought. This thought, pleasing in itself, disappeared quickly, however. What does a human really need a second arm for, I reflected. Not like a bird needs his wings.

One morning you fell on the floor and cursed in pain. Nobody came even though you shouted, and you couldn't reach the emergency button. Your arm was still pointing towards the ceiling.

'Could you –', you croaked and looked at me with your water-covered eyes, ' – could you ask someone to come help?'

I raised my neck, opened my beak slightly, and let out my best and most piercing scream, even though my voice was still hoarse from long disuse. Kluiie-ku-kluiie, the entire room echoed up to the corridor. You startled and pressed yourself against the floor.

The porter, a bright-beaked blackbird, rushed into the room, claws skittering on the floor and wingbeats brushing the corridor walls.

'Tsee-tsee-tsee!' he nagged in agitation. 'No shouting indoors!' Then he noticed you lying on the floor.

'My dear Mr Gordon', the porter said in a suddenly solicitous tone, 'what on earth are you doing on the floor? In your condition, you shouldn't let yourself fall.'

You didn't answer. When the blackbird had called for more help, I noticed that you found it difficult to be touched by birds. You squeezed your eyes shut, held your breath, and tensed your muscles when a group of thrushes lifted you back into bed.

After this, you were to me a human who was afraid of birds. That's by far the best thing a representative of your species can be branded.

'Why is your arm like that?' I finally asked you. The morning at the hospital had been busy – hence quiet in our room, because the nurses and doctors had spent their time caring for and placing new, urgent patients. The house echoed with hasty screams and squalls, beds were moved between floors with a clatter, the nurses' wingbeats sounded faster than usual. The noise made my skin feel cold and my feathers ruffle. A big battle, I thought. A lot of wounded patients have arrived from somewhere. That is why I spoke to you. I felt weak.

'I'm stiffening completely, bit by bit', you answered, not turning your face towards me. 'I'm turning to stone.'

The wounds under my wings stopped aching at that moment.

'You humans have strange diseases', I said. My voice was cold and ringing next to your soft croaking.

'Everything that is soft in me becomes hard in the end', you continued. 'I will become a human stone.'

I tried to lift my wings up, thought about what the air current would feel like against my side feathers, how the wind would hit my face. How my beak would pierce the surface of the water. How the water's coolness would soak through my feathers.

Where does this story really begin? It does not begin until later, from the moment you asked me to write everything down. Everything before the moment I have just tried to remember. But birds have a good memory, we don't forget.

'Would you do me a big favour?' you asked. For the first time you dared to look me in the eye – your gaze wandered from one of my eyes to the other. I pushed my beak closer. You tried not to flinch.

'Would you take my notebook from the drawer of my nightstand?'

I opened the drawer and took out the black notebook and pen attached to it.

'Can you write?' you asked, ' – I'm sorry', you continued immediately, 'I don't really know birds.'

I told you about my skills, my schooling, my work before the war. You nodded along with my speech.

'Could you write down what happens?' you asked after a moment of silence. 'Soon I won't be able to write any more.' You showed me your right wrist, which would no longer bend properly. In my eyes, human hands had always been angular and rigid.

'What do you mean by "happens"?' I asked. 'Should I keep a diary for you?'

That's what we agreed: I would finish writing your story. In reality, you had not been able to write for a long time, at least twenty pages were full of just scribbles. That is why I started off right on our first day together.

You had never known birds – and I had never known humans, even though we live side by side.

'You have gorgeous eyes', you told me one day. 'Such a beautiful colour, burgundy perhaps. Or plum.'

Your eyes were water, transparent and reflective at the same time. You stretched out your right hand laboriously and grasped a drinking glass.

'I miss water', I said suddenly, just like that, and instantly felt ashamed. Why should I reveal my weaknesses to others?

You nodded – I had already noticed that your neck had started to stiffen too. 'I also used to like swimming', you sighed and then coughed for a while in

your familiar, hoarse way. After the bout of coughing, you asked me something you had wanted to ask me for a long time.

We black-throated loons are haughty, rather long-necked, sharp-eyed and very quick-moving. Diving champions among birds. Thus, I was ordered to join the combat diving division. The battalion included other black-throated loons, as well as red-throated loons, great crested grebes and Slavonian grebes as well as terns and ospreys for aerial support.

The day was supposed to be quiet. It was our third week at our new posting near the harbour where there was next to nothing for us to do. Trench warfare had sapped our strength, it had dulled and numbed us and had not provided even those occasional surges of adrenaline that had kept the troops alert during the attack stage of the war. We were sunning ourselves on the shore cliffs after having spent the morning fishing.

Suddenly the sky was filled with enemy flyers, they darkened the sun and their screams pierced our ears. 'To the water!' the grebes yelled. 'To the air!' commanded a common tern, the youngest among us, spreading his wings and taking flight. The sky was full of wings, the glow of sunlight upon beaks and feathertips.

I was hurrying towards the water and could just barely see a dark, broad-winged, gigantic shape above me, but I was already on my way towards depth and silence. The enemy's mauling claws had sunk into my wings, but I could no longer feel them.

'Will you be able to fly again someday?' was your long-prepared question. You looked at the bandages covering my sides.

I felt like screaming, stretching my neck and letting out a long, sorrowful shriek, but I contained myself.

'The doctors won't say. Wings are the hardest to heal. Many birds have lost their ability to fly even though their wings seem to have healed fully.' I stretched out one of my wings, the one closest to you, and noticed how heavy it felt now that the muscles were atrophied with lack of use. Fragmentary ulnar fracture, my medical report had stated, referring to both wings.

You reached out your hand, the one that still worked, and touched my feathers. New ones were already growing in to replace the ones that had been damaged.

The same night, a squalling sound approached us from the corridor. We were eating our supper – it was always the same, two pieces of toast with tuna fish filling. I didn't like hospital food, but I was happy to eat the tuna from your toast too. You had already stopped eating and lay on your bed stiff-necked and

eyes closed. You had a habit of stroking your chin with your remaining functioning hand.

The door to our room opened and a rather young crow barged in. He was all tattered wings and tail, bloody chest feathers, beak hanging open. The skin on one of his legs had torn open so that the knee ligaments could be seen. The crow had croaked himself hoarse so that only a desperate wheezing remained. One wing was almost torn off, and a bloody stain was left at its height on the doorframe.

Kluieee, I screamed, because I recognised the look in the crow's eyes. You couldn't say a word, your skin was perhaps paler than ever, your eyes even more transparent.

Kluieee! I screamed again, but the crow was too quick, rushed against the window, and crashed his beak through the glass. Beneath the sound of breaking glass we could hear a softer crack as his skull fractured. Bird skulls are especially strong, but even they cannot survive direct collisions.

It took many moments – too many – before anyone had time to come and help. Sounds were still heard from the corridor and other rooms: ao-oooo, yelled the eiderduck in the neighbouring room. Somewhere sedge warblers started their anxious cacophony. The thrush nurses raised their voices and tried to quiet the house down. The crow rested slackly, caught on the window, one wing glued to the edge of the broken glass, black eyes reflecting the light from the ceiling lamp. The fear was gone, silence had taken its place.

Finally the door opened and a raven, the head physician of the hospital, stepped in.

'His mind could no longer endure, I take it', the raven said in a low, wheezing voice. 'Such a young bird.'

Ravens' eyes are exactly same as crows', I noticed then. Like they could be one and the same.

'Why are birds at war?' you asked at night – it was dark, but neither of us could sleep. Your voice had started to grow fainter, maybe you were already too petrified to speak. I didn't point it out to you.

'Don't you know?' I asked. 'The bird war has been going on for decades.'

Your sheets rustled, perhaps you tried to shrug your shoulders in a human way or turned your face towards me. 'I've never been told. Humans don't talk about the affairs of birds.'

We wage war for decades, we die, we suffer, we kill each other, and you don't talk about it!

I just grunted. My throat ached. A faint light shone through the window and revealed the red stains left on the glass.

'We humans hardly ever wage war', you said, and I knew saying it was difficult for you, as if you were chastising me. But it was true: birds and humans have

always lived side by side, among each other, and only birds wage war.

'Does the war bother you?' you asked. And clarified your question, 'Do you ever dream that the wars would end, that all you birds could live in peace, lead a really...?', your voice faltered for a moment, 'bird-like life?'

I grunted a bit, but only enough to make you think I was contemplating the matter. You couldn't understand. I appreciated your respect for birds, but nobody can understand birds except birds themselves. Take me, for example, a black-throated loon: my beak is sharp and strong, even life-threatening. I can dive fast and deep, I can stay under for a long time, I have excellent eyesight underwater. Not all aquatic birds are very good flyers, but we loons are hardy, we can fly in any kind of weather.

What about cuckoos, masters of infiltration, putting their own children in foreign nests as spies?

And black woodpeckers, black as evil incarnate, forehead red as a cinder. Their beaks could pound holes even in the concrete wall of the hospital.

And those others, the enemies: hook-beaked, broad-winged hawks and eagles, or claw-footed owls, masters of the night?

And you ask me why we are at war!

The raven was worried about you. It was new to you to have someone worry about your condition: it was a change, something about your disease had changed. You didn't say anything and talked of other matters instead – that's how I noticed it.

The raven frowned while going through your reflexes, narrowed his eyes while feeling your arms and shoulders; his black feathers were so very black next to your pale skin. When the raven's examination was finished, he turned his head and looked at me.

There was a time when I didn't like ravens at all. They are too foolhardy, they trust each other too much. A bird must above all rely on himself.

I understood that the raven wanted me to leave the room. It was a bad sign – that he wanted to speak with you privately.

'My physiotherapy is starting soon', I grunted and pulled my wings against my sides so quickly that my scars twinged with pain. You didn't look at me – you looked at the window. Did you ever dream of flying?

The physiotherapist, an elderly jay, wondered at my hurry. I stretched my back muscles, practiced flight moves, did everything three times as quickly as usual. The jay chuckled, hustled around me, and scolded me – and suddenly stood still, crest raised up.

'Kluie-ee, what is it?' I asked, but my thoughts were with you. This is your story even when you are elsewhere.

'You will be up in the air soon', the jay said and gave a sharp, jayish laugh.

It was true, my wings felt better than ever. Airy, nearly strong enough to bear my weight.

When I returned, you did not look at me. I raised my wings, and you didn't look.

'How are you?' I screamed. My voice echoed in the corners, but you still didn't stir. I jumped next to your bed and pressed my beak against your cheek.

Your eyes were filled with salt water.

'My heart is starting to turn to stone', you whispered. Your voice was a metallic rasp, the grating of two stones against each other. 'That I could take, perhaps', you said, slightly louder now, 'but my thoughts - what if my thoughts turn to stone before my heart? What am I without my thoughts?'

I stepped back, sat on my tail, and let out a long call that reverberated off the walls, twined its way through the chink in the door to the corridor, made the bullfinches in the waiting room chatter and the northern lapwing, who worked as porter, plead for silence via the central radio.

War is the most beautiful thing in the world. Nothing is grander than the red of blood on white feathers or the piercing, ear-shattering shriek of seagulls attacking the enemy. Even the enemy is grand, a flight of broad-winged owls covering the moon.

Would I still enjoy it all? Would the wind force my eyes shut, would the water squeeze my sides as I dove to hide from the enemy? Life was still waiting for me, but it was about to leave you.

As I wrote this, I had to ask,

'Who will read your story?'

You could no longer turn your face towards me, so I turned in my bed and jumped off the edge to land on your bed.

'Anyone', you said and swallowed. 'It's not important that it be read, only that it be written.'

'Your eyes are so very beautiful', you sighed, but I had already jumped down. Or maybe you thought I wouldn't hear.

I had always been skilled at writing. I had been encouraged to write first in kindergarten, later in school - after my schooldays I had written for my own pleasure, until I had for some reason stopped.

Getting up to speed was, therefore, difficult. The words didn't flow, they tangled together, sticky and coarse. I talked to you about this, sometime slightly after you had asked me to write your story.

You smiled bitterly. 'We forget so much, forget how we could live, even if it could be a thousand times better than our current lives.'

*

Ravens may be more intelligent than loons, but we have sharper beaks.

I stopped the head physician in the corridor, spread my wings in front of him. 'What is wrong with my human? Nobody can just turn into stone!'

The raven turned his head aside to see me better. The bump above his beak was greyed with age, but his gaze was still stern. 'It's a human affliction.' He raised one wing and started to preen his black feathers with his beak. 'I've heard that it's being encountered more and more often. That they really do turn into stone.'

I swayed my head from side to side, but the raven was not frightened. 'Krra-ha!' he said. 'They can't cure it themselves either, that's why their hospitals are bursting with similar patients.'

'Do something! Anything!' I couldn't make my voice sound as threatening as I would have liked.

'Unfortunately, we have no way of helping Mr Gordon. Humans have their own crosses to bear, we birds have ours. We can only be with him, try to alleviate his suffering.'

No more light could be seen from the corridor. My night lamp was lit, yours had been dark for a long time.

'What will I do when you are dead?' I asked. A tremble passed through the roots of my feathers, tickled my skin, and made me think of other loons, my brothers, their beaks rubbing my neck. How long ago it had all been.

I bent above you so that your face was shadowed. One of your eyes shone coldly - when you humans turn into stone, your eyes turn into jewels.

'I won't die', you said - or actually, you said, 'I-own-di-hie,' because your speech had started to slur many days earlier.

'Yes, you will', I retorted, because we loons like to call things like we see them. 'When you're completely petrified, you will be dead.'

'Fly', you muttered and concentrated on keeping your voice clear. 'Flili-iie-ash-faaa-hr-ash-caan.'

'Fly as far as you can?'

'Fie-nn-ah-ponn!'

'Find a pond? What would I do with a pond?'

Your good eye had filled with water again and the other one also glimmered with moisture.

We loons are not very family-oriented. We enjoy spending time with other birds, but in our souls we are always alone. Like all birds, we are raised in large flocks, among hundreds of age-mates. Childhood was a stressful time, a time of constant screaming and pecking, chattering and wing-waving.

The oldest loon I knew was forty years old, gray and already unable to fly. He had taught in the strategic university, but had finally quit teaching.

When he was a nestling, life had been completely different. Each loon couple had lived apart, chosen their own small lake or swamp pond, found a tussock, laid their eggs and raised their own young in silence.

Is that the kind of pond you meant?

I was afraid of the day when your eyes would be completely dry – bright and shiny diamonds. Your mouth would be forever slightly open, your skin glow like marble, your thoughts so hard and sharp they could no longer come out of your mouth.

Your thoughts have become lodged among my own. Today, we flew over a forested area. The green was dotted with small, bright-watered, rock-shored ponds. I suddenly thought of you.

I had certainly seen ponds before – viewed from above, the ground is full of ponds, big ones, giant ones, or small ones, dark or bright. But today I was viewing them with your eyes, tried to see myself in a life far from all of this. I couldn't.

Today, I saw something totally different. We were cleaning up the vestiges of battle on a large plaza built by humans, surrounded by your houses, your streets. This place was clearly your territory, but it was now full of bird bodies. That is what I have been brought down to: a collector of bodies, even though I could fly.

Still, I want to do what is expected of me. I want to fight next to other birds, other loons and our brothers in arms, against our enemies. Day by day I fly higher, my wings get less tired, I can meet the wind and dive through storm-tossed waves.

The plaza had been built for statues. You humans had arranged your statues in rows, sometimes straight and sometimes random. Now the stony surfaces of the statues were spattered with bird blood, feathers, and plumes. Even though I was supposed to collect our own, take back as much of them as possible, I went around looking at the statues, flying from one's shoulder to another's head, looking through the stony faces.

I couldn't find you among them. I can't believe that you treat your own in such a way, place them in a plaza as ornaments.

Then I thought: you don't wage war, but at least you are remembered. The ones who have not yet turned to stone come to look at those who have. New people are always born, new people are always petrified. Nobody disappears, everybody is remembered.

Who would remember me, a black-throated loon?

And you still have this, my writing, Gordon's story. I still continue, I will write as long a story as I can.

This, too, I write:

Your last morning was restless. Nobody knows in advance which morning will be their last. I know that now, but didn't know it then.

What made it restless was the swan who had been brought into the room next door. He had swum into a mine and lost his eyesight and hearing, and one of his wings had been torn to pieces. We heard about the swan from the cleaner, an old bean goose, whose incessant clucking annoyed me and seemed to paralyse you.

'Mr Gordon doesn't want to hear that!' I shouted at the goose. She just clacked her beak and continued her verbal torrent. I jumped on the chair next to your bed. Your expression was actually peaceful, even slightly happy. You humans often smile in such an imperceptible way. I smiled back quickly, but the goose was still clucking. 'Even his tail is charred black', she went on, 'his skin smells of smoke and ashes dribble on the floor. Ka-ka-ka-ka-ka!'

I laid my head on your arm. It was cool, as cool as the bed's metal edge. You didn't look at me. The goose's voice now carried from the corridor, as she pushed her cart and lamented the swan's fate. I pushed my beak under your arm, and you didn't flinch. I closed my eyes – with my eyes closed, I am not afraid of anything. Your skin smelled like sun-warmed rock. I raised my head. Your eyes sparkled wonderfully, shone with a dry radiance, reflected the clouds visible through the window and the bright lamp on the ceiling.

Kluieee! I shouted into your ear. You didn't stir. Kluieee, I yelled again and could even make out the sound echoing in your auditory canal.

The door behind me opened and the raven walked into the room. His claws scratched against the floor.

'Mr Gordon has already left us', he said. 'Krah-ah! Mr Gordon has been all stone since last night.'

I was too late to write down your last moment.

How could I explain this to you?

It seems unfair that you died, but will be preserved forever. You humble and timid human, you who were afraid of birds and war.

I, on the other hand, I who got better, I who carry on with the war, I will not be preserved, I will finally disintegrate into the wind, dissolve into the water, disappear into the ponds and woods where you wanted me to end up.

Loons are the sound of waves against the shoreline. Humans are forever.

TIINA RAEVAARA

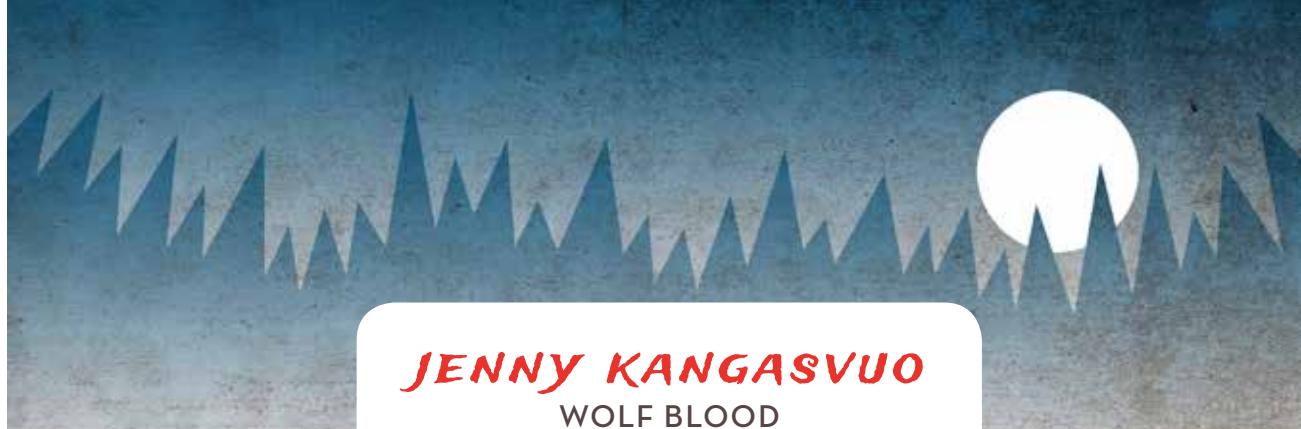
Translated by Sarianna Silvonen

First published in the collection

En tunne sinua vierelläni, 2010



SP



JENNY KANGASVUO

WOLF BLOOD

‘It’s funny that werewolves are the trend just now. Actually, there’s something really odd in the subject coming up simultaneously in the stories of several writers. When I started writing my novel in the early 2000s, werewolves only appeared as single elements in horror literature. Or as a comic relief in B-movies’, says debut novelist **Jenny Kangasvuo**. Her novel *Sudenveri [Wolf Blood]* (Teos, 2012) takes the werewolf myth into Northern Finland.

Werewolves do indeed seem to be everywhere these days. For instance, they have a significant role in the popular movie series *Twilight* and TV-series *True Blood*.

Sudenveri received honourable mention in a major writing contest for science fiction and fantasy novels organised by the Teos publishing house in 2011. The contest winner was **Emmi Itäranta** with her novel *Teemestarin kirja* (Teos, 2012; published in English as *Memory of Water*). Critics have praised *Sudenveri* for its credible and original treatment of the werewolf theme. The book also won the Kuvastaja-award of the Finnish Tolkien Society as the best Finnish fantasy novel of the year.

FROM THE SOUTH AND THE NORTH

Jenny Kangasvuo majored in cultural anthropology in university. She was born in south-western Finland, but she moved to Inari, a large district in Northern Lapland, when she was ten years old. During high school she dreamed of becoming a visual artist. However, she didn’t get into art school, and went to the University of Oulu instead.

‘And there I stayed for 18 years’, Kangasvuo laughs.

At the moment she’s a part-time university lecturer in cultural anthropology and is writing her dissertation on Finnish bisexuality.

‘Teaching and writing the novel have taken up a lot of time, so my dissertation has, unfortunately, taken a back seat.’

Kangasvuo also draws, though recently not very much, she says. Earlier on, she sometimes illustrated Finnish sf/fanzines. Like Varga, the protagonist of *Sudenveri*, she even occasionally was paid for her illustrations. Besides writing and drawing, Jenny participates in role playing games, and has been active in the Oulu Student Theatre.

‘Like one of the main characters in *Sudenveri*, Marraskuu (November), I have also been interested in traditional handicrafts. I can make tablet-woven bands, rigid-heddle-woven bands and knotted lace, and I can also spin by hand. When I was developing the character of Marraskuu, I thought the story needed a person who makes things with her own hands. A person who was prepared to make decisions, like Marraskuu ends up being. Paganism is also an important element. Marraskuu is a person whose world view has room in it for a phenomenon like werewolves.’

AT THE ROOTS OF THE STORY

The novel’s protagonist, Varga, has left her wolf pack and lives among humans as an artist. One night a ‘deformed’ boy, Rasmus appears at her door. He has run off from the pack and is fleeing its leader, Martta. The novel alternates between the voices of Varga and Martta, and now and then also Marraskuu, Varga’s lover.

In her blog, Kangasvuo has written about the development of *Sudenveri*. She writes that she’d been sketching a werewolf story for almost twenty years. The first text fragment to actually remain in the final novel was created at the turn of the millennium.

Before her wolf story, Kangasvuo had written one novel-length manuscript, which was rejected by a publisher.

‘It was a realistic story, a traditional first novel about the relationship between two young women and self-destructiveness. It had a lot of autobiographical stuff in it. I think it’s totally OK to write one novel to kind of externalise things from your mind, and to find out if you are able to master the long form. Not all manuscripts need become novels. I’m not going to return to that manuscript, but I’m not going to destroy it either.’

**SUDENVERI WON THE AWARD
FOR THE BEST FINNISH FANTASY
NOVEL OF THE YEAR.**



JENNY KANGASVUO

Facts

Born:
1975

Studies:

Master's degree, University of Oulu (2001), PhL (2007), presently working on her doctoral dissertation.

Hobbies:

Live role playing, traditional handcrafts, flower finding, drawing and jogging.

Childhood classics:

Jean Auel: Clan of the cave bear; Ursula K. LeGuin: Tales of Earthsea.

Favourite fantasy:

Robin Hobb's world of The Realm of the Elderlings, and its stories

Favourite plant:

Sea aster (*Tripolium vulgare*).

Where would you rather be right now?

Chopping firewood. Or trudging through a swamp.

Short stories published in English

'Cuckoo's Egg' ('Käenmuna')

- In the fanzine *Spin* 2/2011, Turku Science Fiction Society 2011

'Riding Wolfhood' ('Sudenkulku')

- In the webzine *Usva International* 2006
(<http://www.usvazine.net/arkistousvaint06.htm>)

Translations also into other languages, e.g. French, Spanish, Estonian.

Sudenveri was born out of Jenny's dissatisfaction with werewolf stories. The main interest in werewolves, according to Kangasvuo, is how a character can be a human one moment and a wolf the next.

'In most stories a werewolf is not a wolf, but an allegory for aggressiveness, sexuality or the subconscious animal. For me, the more interesting part in the mythical werewolf is the wolf itself. How does one live with being both human and wolf?'

The werewolf pack in the novel is grounded in the smallholder and scattered settlement community life of northern Finland. Kangasvuo did a lot of research about the history of the Inari and Salla districts, particularly about what life was like in the early 1900s and before urbanisation.

'My book is located in northern Finland, so the community is based on the life of a sparsely settled little village. During the winter the men laboured at logging sites and during the summer they floated the logs downriver. The women stayed home and took care of the cattle. If anything was cultivated, it was mainly potatoes, if even that.'

THE REWARDS OF PERSISTENCE

The first version of *Sudenveri* was born as a result of National Novel Writing Month in 2003. The plot fell into place, and Martta became one of the viewpoint characters. Over the next few years, Kangasvuo worked on the text and started to keep a working diary on her blog. In 2005 and 2006 her blog collected many thoughts about the manuscript's progress.

Kangasvuo sent the novel on its first round of publishers, and painted an eye on a Japanese Daruma doll. Daruma is a round amulet doll on which you paint one eye and wish for something. If the wish comes true, you paint the other eye. Since Daruma wants to have two eyes, he will make your wish come true. But it wasn't until July 2012 that Daruma got his other eye.

After the first round of publishers and six rejection letters, Kangasvuo tried again in 2007. This time, an editor was interested in the manuscript.

'If I had had the time to work on the manuscript, it might have been published then. However, the editor wanted Marraskuu's paganism to be faded out of the manuscript to avoid having a third odd element in it, in addition to the werewolf theme and the love between two women. When I think of it now, it wouldn't have made sense to leave the paganism out. For the story's sake it's good that it got published by Teos and not in a different form by another publisher.'

The manuscript was put aside for the benefit of Kangasvuo's dissertation. A couple of years later, Kangasvuo

SUDENVERI WAS BORN OUT OF KANGASVUO'S DISSATISFACTION WITH WEREWOLF STORIES.

noticed an advertisement by Teos for a science fiction and fantasy novel writing contest.

'Four of my close friends read the manuscript at different stages. Two of them write in the same genre themselves, which is valuable. Trusted readers are important. Not because the text should in principle be read by just any outsider, but to have readers who have the courage to give hard enough comments when necessary. They say that a reader who is close to you cannot be honest, but these friends shoot straight if something is off beam. Even an editor wouldn't have said the things they did...'

A STRONG SHORT STORY WRITER

The novel's journey may have been long, but several short story writing contests have served as milestones and high points along the way. 'Vaativat arvet eli kerromus saumoistani' ['Demanding Scars or the Story of My Seams'] won first place in the Nova writing contest in 2004. 'Kaikessa lihassa on tahto' ['The Will of All Flesh']

tied for second place in the traditional Portti short story writing contest organised by the Tampere Science Fiction Society in 2004. The story also won the Atorox Award for the year's best Finnish sf/f short story in 2006.

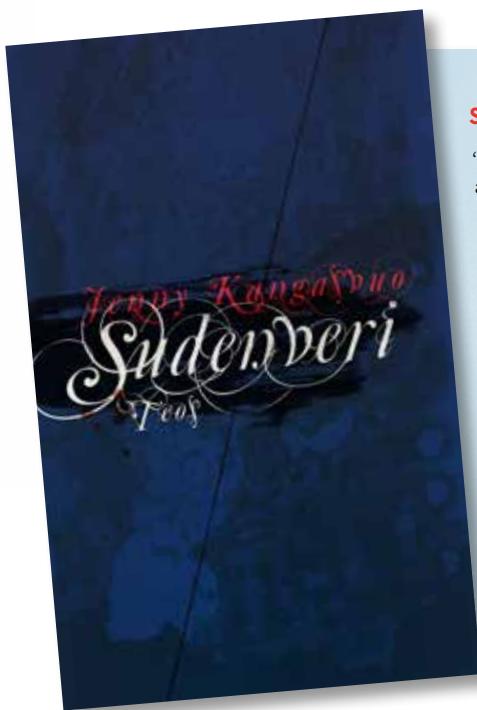
The gold medal of the Portti contest came in 2005, with the short story 'Aalto nahana alla' ['The Wave beneath the Skin']. The story is about a shape changer similar to a werewolf, a Selkie maiden, based on an old Icelandic legend.

Kangasvuo's short stories do not go through a process of trusted readers beforehand, because they usually come together right before the deadline. Sometimes she gives a short story its finishing touches on the night of the contest deadline.

'There's no time to ask anybody to read the text. Writing short stories is quite different from writing a novel, because all my short stories have been written for some contest. Participating in the Portti contest was timed to my summer vacation: starting in June and aiming at the deadline in the end of August.'

'As a form, the short story is easier to manage, since you create just one plot and environment to hold the story in a reasonable shape. A novel, on the other hand, is an impossible morass and web of relations.' Writing academic texts has also trained Kangasvuo to manage large bodies of text to form a clear beginning, middle and end.

'*Sudenveri* was quite an incredibly long trudge. Writing both a novel and short stories has been beneficial to



SUDENVERI [WOLF BLOOD]

'Hanna has left her family and changed her name, to keep her life as Varga the artist and as a wolf running with the Pack as two separate things. They start to overlap, however, when a young boy who has fled the Pack shows up on her doorstep. The boy is deformed: neither completely human nor completely a wolf. His face reveals the whole nature of the Pack.'

Martta, the Pack leader, wants the boy back. She has experienced the Winter War and the Second World War, which tore the Pack apart. She has seen each generation in its turn to waver between human and wolf. One thing she is sure about. Exposure means destruction for the Pack.

Marraskuu, Varga's lover, would like to put their relationship on a firm foundation. But how can you trust a person who refuses to talk about her past?

Jenny Kangasvuo's debut novel Sudenveri is a powerful description of double identity and the conflict between individual and family through three voices. And of the world of the wolf - based on instincts and the senses, strange but surprisingly familiar."

- From the publisher's introduction



both processes. Each chapter of a novel should form a whole, and writing short stories definitely helps in coping with smaller wholes. You understand better how to divide the text into parts.

Jenny Kangasvuo is inspired by **Octavia Butler** and **Robert Holdstock** as well as **Ursula K. LeGuin** and **Margaret Atwood**. Kangasvuo also admires **Sheri S. Tepper** for her visual imagery. She also mentions Finnish author **Maarit Verronen**, who impressed her as a representative of weird literature at the start of Jenny's own writing career.

'The novel *Pimeästä maasta* [Out of the Dark Country] by Maarit Verronen was an important book for me. I realised that it was possible to write something like that in Finland.'

FANDOM WRITER

Jenny Kangasvuo sees fandom as a significant support for a writer, as it offers both publishing channels and a motive for writing. Fandom also supplies an audience. Writing just for your own pleasure doesn't lead you anywhere in the long run.

'Fandom appreciates writing and is interested in it, especially among the Finnish

Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers. It's a pity that I usually only meet these people at Finncon. It would be nice to see them more often.'

Of writers of Finnish Weird, **Sari Peltoniemi** has long been someone Kangasvuo has admired along with **Anne Leinonen** and **Johanna Sinisalo**.

'One of my favourites is also **Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen**. I don't remember reading a single poor text from him.'

The cover of *Sudenveri* says that the novel was a runner-up in the Teos writing contest, but doesn't mention either science fiction or fantasy.

'My short stories are science fiction and fantasy, or horror. But I'm not sure about the novel – is it fantasy, real-fantasy or psychological fiction. Categorisation should be the task of the publisher, the libraries and the book sellers rather than the writer herself. But some echoes of my genre background would surely remain, even if I wrote a realistic text.'

Kangasvuo has no literary project currently on her mind or in process. She says that her dissertation is now taking up too much of her energy.

'Because of the dissertation I haven't written a single short story for a while, but now might be the time. I have lots of ideas. I dare not even think about a new idea for a novel yet.'

SAARA HENRIKSSON

Translated by **Liisa Rantalaaho**

First published in *Tähtiveltaja*-magazine 4/2012

REVIEWS

'*Sudenveri* is a stunning reading experience. From myths, womanhood and the Finnish national landscape, it creates an original literary pearl. [...] Both being a wolf and the everyday life of remote regions in bygone decades come wonderfully alive in the book. Kangasvuo captures the importance of pack culture for wolves and their wild, instinctive way of life especially well.'

– **Toni Jerrman**, *Helsingin Sanomat* 2.9.2012

'Wolves and humans in a brilliant first novel [...] *Sudenveri* has a kind of magical, inexplicable and unassuming charm. This novel is one of the absolute pearls of the literary year.'

– **Linda Olinki**, *Kaleva* 12.9.2012

'Three different women acting as storytellers each in their turn build up the story into an integrated whole with captivating language. The novel has a natural depth even as it deals with big themes – difference, change and trust.'

– **Hanna Etholén**, *Metro* 8.10.2012

'*Sudenveri* surprises the reader. It is a combination of intelligent thinking about identity, the history of Finnish wars, power struggles between relatives and modern fantasy. Above all, it is brilliant storytelling.'

– **Noora Vaarala**, *Aamulehti* 3.10.2012

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JENNY KANGASVUO

FLOW MY TEARS, FALL FROM YOUR SPRINGS!

Aino saw something was wrong as soon as Joukahainen came home from his trip. Joukahainen walked head down by the path side. He was startled by a bird taking wing from a tree, but immediately turned his gaze back down. His horse followed steadily behind him, snatching a tuft of grass here and there. Brother's hair was wet. His showy blue and red clothes were soaked and covered with brown silt marks.

The servant girls all fled out of her brother's sight, into the cowshed, the cooking hut, anywhere they could find to hide. Ordinarily, proud Little Brother would gallop straight into the middle of the farm-yard and start ordering the servants about. Now, however, he went quietly into his cabin, without a word to anybody. The groom took the horse.

It made no difference. Clearly Joukahainen had finally got his comeuppance from some warrior or wizard, and high time, too. Little Brother had been too boastful, when he actually knew but a few secrets of origins, a couple of spells and charms, some songs. A few more humiliations might make him into a man yet.

Aino put the milk bowl down by the corner of the house, for the sprite who preferred the form of a grass snake, and she whispered a few words of calling. The sprite came at once, looked at her with its small black eyes and tilted its yellow speckled head from side to side. Aino smiled and chatted with the sprite. It flicked its tongue, and Aino sensed the snake's whisper, its thanks for the milk and a promise to look after the house. She sat down on the grass to wait for the sprite to drink all the milk.

Poor Brother, Boy Brother, Little Brother. How hard it must be to become a man when you can never be a man until proving it, both to oneself and others. Aino felt sorry for her brother, though not overly much: he was still young, and he'd have to pay the songs' ransom in a different way, not by taking care of the house, not by making spells that are useful and glad, like healing charms and love raising. Aino and Mother did their magic quietly and sustained the household through their songs. To be a man,

Joukahainen had to sing and make magic all around the country.

Aino took the bowl after the sprite had emptied it and stroked the snake's head. They looked at each other with understanding, and the snake slid back underneath the house. As long as they were such friends, nothing would endanger the house, not fire nor rot. The protection did not extend to people, however: not even a house sprite could help with sickness. Luckily the house had a skilled daughter and a competent mistress who knew how to strengthen people, keep sickness at bay and drive off all hostile spells.

Aino smiled. The hot late summer day was turning to cool evening. The warm lake would still be lovely to swim in. The hay had already been harvested for winter, the grain harvest was approaching and the linen stalks were soaking. The cows were fat, one pollard had birthed twin calves, and the pigs had fattened so fast that there'd be enough meat from the autumn slaughtering for everybody to eat their fill.

The drudges were preparing fish soup for supper in the cooking hut. Talvikki was bringing a tub of viili up from the cellar and Mother was breaking bread for the table.

'Joukahainen came home', Aino told Mother, with an eloquent look.

'He didn't make a noise.'

'No. He may have had to eat some humble pie.'

'Pirsta! Go and get Joukahainen to eat', Mother ordered a servant girl. She left, dragging her feet, and Aino didn't wonder about that. Joukahainen had a habit of squeezing and groping the maids to his heart's content when nobody was looking, though Mother had forbidden it.

Pirsta looked relieved and Joukahainen looked disheartened when they both came inside, her brother first and the girl a couple of steps behind. It didn't look like Little Brother was in the mood for pinching a maid's behind. And that was as it should be, too. It's not proper for a grown man to run after every skirt, however much his loins ached. That was also

something Brother had to learn. Aino supposed that one day some servant girl would have enough and give his head a sound whack with a ladle. Getting a black eye from a maid would indeed be something to show to all those warriors and wizards Brother showed off to.

Joukahainen was in no hurry to eat either viili or soup, and he chewed his bread slowly. He did not boast of heroic deeds, of sword fights won, nor of an adversary paralyzed by singing, nor an enemy who had fled the field.

Aino and Mother were considerate and kept quiet, but smiled furtively at each other. Joukahainen had won too many fights and contests lately – the disappointment must have felt bitter after so many victories. He hadn't looked as gloomy as this for a long time. But one loss would mature him more than ten victories, and as a man he would yet be thankful to whoever had vanquished him.

'I lost to Väinämöinen', Joukahainen said, after chewing the last bit of bread.

Aino could not help a little laugh. Only foolish Little Brother would go and defy so powerful a wizard! Served him right to get clobbered. Joukahainen, however, did not snap at her laugh as he used to. He just looked at her, endlessly sad, and Aino felt a coldness inside. Brother was so young, even his beard was just a thin down – what kind of a price had Väinämöinen made him pay for his defiance? Aino felt intensely protective, and angry towards the powerful wizard. Had he not seen what a whelp Joukahainen still was? Had it been necessary to humiliate her brother so badly he wouldn't even defend himself against his sister's mocking laughter?

'Väinämöinen sang me into the bog', Joukahainen said, miserably.

'What did I tell you', Mother started scolding immediately. 'One should never challenge such wizards as Väinämöinen! Be thankful you got home alive. Väinämöinen must have been sated and satisfied to let you go!'

Joukahainen kept looking at the table, doodling with his finger along the grain. 'He didn't let me off scot-free.'

'Well that's for sure!' Mother snapped.

'I tried offering him my horses and arms, and silver and gold', Joukahainen said quietly.

Aino stood up and started ordering the maids about. Brother would need a long bout in the sauna.

'I hope Väinämöinen took those, since you couldn't offer him any land.'

'I offered him land, too.'

Aino turned back to the table. 'You didn't! It's not yours to offer, its family land!'

'Väinämöinen didn't want it', Joukahainen defended himself.

'And a good thing he didn't. The land inheritance belongs to us both.'

'And I'd have nothing against my daughter's husband living in the house', Mother threatened.

Joukahainen kept sighing and puffing. Aino felt apprehensive. Could Brother have pledged himself as a slave to Väinämöinen to save his life? On the other hand, that might actually bring about something good. Brother might learn from the wizard.

'I promised him Aino, to be his wife.'

For a moment the hall was totally quiet.

'You did what?' asked both Aino and Mother.

'I'd have died! I offered him everything I could, but Väinämöinen just let me go on sinking! I was up to my neck in the bog. When I offered him Aino as a wife, he let me go.'

'That's not yours to promise!' Aino was angry. 'You cheated Väinämöinen! You can't offer something you don't have!'

'I'd be on death's door now if I hadn't promised that you would be his wife and child bearer!'

'And what do you think Väinämöinen will do when he hears he's not getting the ransom? The bog awaits you, Brother.'

'I know', Joukahainen said woefully.

Mother had been quiet for a long while. Now she spoke up. 'Aino. Do not hasten to reject this proposal.'

'You call this a proposal? That my brother has promised me as ransom like a horse?'

'No no no,' Mother shook her head. 'But it can be turned into a proposal. Väinämöinen is a mighty man. Just think if we could get him to live here in our house!' Mother's eyes shone, and Aino knew what she was thinking: fame and glory.

'Väinämöinen will never consent to live here as a son-in-law', Joukahainen said. 'He's not going to move here, to Pohjola. He's got his own manor in Kalevala.'

That did not quench Mother's eagerness. 'Aino, you couldn't get a mightier husband anywhere! We've heard the stories about Väinämöinen for the longest time. I myself have sung his songs of power to you when you were little! This is a brilliant marriage deal!'

'You sang me the songs of Väinämöinen when I was little', Aino said.

'Yes! You ought to be proud that such a man wants to make you his wife!'

'Väinämöinen is an old man!' Aino shouted with a force that drove the servant girls into the corners of the hall. 'All his might is in words only. Why do you think he's gone unmarried for so long?'

Mother put on a deprecating expression. 'That's a small matter. If the songs of Väinämöinen are not powerful enough to get his cock up, my songs

will take care of that. Don't worry about that, Daughter.'

'Then marry him yourself!'

Suddenly, the disagreement was between Mother and Aino, not between Aino and Little Brother. Joukahainen just sat there, silent, and Aino felt like hitting her brother, who caused so much trouble.

Mother and Aino kept the quarrel going for several days. It affected the whole household. The maids tiptoed quietly in the corners, the grooms hardly stepped into the farmyard, the shepherds took the cattle to pasture as early as possible and returned as late as they dared. Still, Aino and Mother were of the same flesh and blood. They used nothing against each other but anger and words.

Joukahainen, however, was cheerful. Though all the trouble was his fault, neither his sister nor his mother was angry at him. Without a care in the world, he went hunting, and in the evenings brought with him a rabbit or a fat grouse for the drudges to skin or pluck. He left his sword in its scabbard in the arms chest and sang only harmless songs.

One evening, perhaps five days after Joukahainen had returned, Aino and Mother were at loggerheads again.

'Now don't be so childish. As if a man's age affected what kind of a husband he's going to be. I've lived so much longer than you that I know the young handsome braves are nothing but a nuisance.'

'But you've already had your share of those braves! Should I be content with a feeble ancient? Would you have accepted Väinämöinen when you were young?'

'Yes, I would have', Mother said, firmly.

'Would you have taken Väinämöinen as he is now?' Aino insisted.

Mother hesitated. When she'd declared that she'd have taken him when she'd been young, Mother had not been thinking of the bald and greying old man Väinämöinen was today, but of the wiry strong warrior he had been in the days of her own youth.

'You wouldn't have', Aino affirmed, turned on her heels and marched across the yard, into the woods.

Outside the farmyard, her stiff march changed to a run, and soon Aino was running without direction, furious and out of breath. After she'd run her anger dry, she threw herself down on the greensward among the birch trees.

'Damn you, Mother!' The words slipped out of her mouth, but immediately she repented and uttered a few words to cancel the curse. One should not play with the Powers. She didn't really wish to curse her mother.

If she'd have had on reserve any candidate for a son-in-law, Mother would have given up more easily.

If only Aino could have said, 'Look here, Mother, here's the merchant Kaukamieli, who's willing to live in our house as your son-in-law. Let's forget this Väinämöinen'. But she had no one to offer. She was content with her life at home, where she kept the house together with Mother. What was Mother's hurry to marry her off? Didn't Mother understand that as an only daughter Aino was the one to protect both her mother and the house, that she should grow up to be the new mistress of the house? Especially since Brother was so foolhardy and adventurous that he well might go abroad for years - get killed, even.

Sure, Aino had admirers, as any daughter of a big house would have had even if she had not been the only daughter of the house. None of them had been interesting enough. She wasn't going to marry for a long time yet.

Since the anger had evaporated, Aino decided to return home. She started making a sauna whisk, just for herself - she intended to enjoy a long sauna bath, to sweat the anger out of her pores and take a long swim afterwards. Mother would give in at the end. They were both made of stern stuff, but Aino had more to lose than Mother had to gain.

When the whisk was done, Aino started tidying herself up. Her braid was loose, her skirt hem was muddy and her bronze-tasselled belt hung slack. Luckily neither the belt nor her silken hair-ribbon had fallen off. She started walking back home, erect and dignified, as if she'd never bolted off in a temper like a brat.

She took the ribbon off and started braiding her hair, the red ribbon between her teeth.

'Braid thou thy hair for none but me, my lassie', a voice said from the birch grove.

Aino dropped the ribbon and turned around, startled. The voice had sounded disembodied. Then, she saw the speaker: a grey-bearded, thickset old man walking towards her with determined steps. There were bushes and high tussocks in the birch grove. The speaker must have been watching her for some time. At first Aino blushed and looked down - she had run into the birch wood like a spoiled brat, puffing and kicking at the tussocks. Then she lifted up her chin. She had nothing to be ashamed of, she was on her own ground, among birches growing on land her own forefathers had cleared. It was the stranger who'd been spying on her and crept up on her like a villain.

'And a fine belt thou also wearest just for me', the stranger smiled and touched the shining bronze tassel of her belt.

And Aino realised who the stranger must be.

She snatched the belt end from Väinämöinen's hand. 'Neither for you nor for anyone else!' The

slack belt slipped of her waist and fell to the ground. 'I'll go in a tow shirt rather than wear red for a decrepit old man!' Aino tread the belt underfoot and kicked at the red hair-ribbon. Then she turned away and walked home with a straight back, never looking behind her, though Väinämöinen's gaze raised the hairs on her neck.

On the walk home, she began to feel afraid. Väinämöinen was mighty, he had sung Joukahainen into the bog. Aino was mightier than her brother, but she had more sense, too. It wasn't worth getting ill-tempered with Väinämöinen. She'd have liked to steal a look back and check whether the wizard was following her, perhaps to change her into a bird or a birch tree, but her pride wouldn't let her. If she was to be turned into a bird, she'd change into a hawk, not a tit-mouse. And she would not beg for mercy and promise a sister for a slave like her brother had done.

When she reached the farmyard, Aino sought out Mother to ask for advice. Perhaps she had not angered Väinämöinen – she'd gotten home safely, after all – but a few suitable protective spells or amulets would not be amiss.

Mother, however, smiled affectionately when Aino told her about the meeting in the birch grove. 'Don't you worry about Väinämöinen's wrath. On the contrary, your temper will just egg him on. Had you been a young man, you might not even be alive any more. The best protection for you is a pretty dress. When I was young, I wove a blue dress, set the charms of the Lady Moon and the Lady Sun on it, and dressed in it I cast a love spell on your father. If you put that dress on, Väinämöinen will completely lose his head for

you. Go fetch it from the chest in the clothes store – my golden jewellery is in the same chest. You will inherit them. They are yours.'

Aino was flabbergasted.

'There now, my girl, get going and make yourself pretty! I shall tell Pirsta to prepare some camomile water for you to wash your hair. Väinämöinen might arrive today already! And when he comes, you will not say no to him, you will smile.'

Aino went into the storehouse and sat down on the clothes chest. What should she do? Indeed, you did not say no to Väinämöinen – if he got angry, he might turn the fields into a swamp and the cattle into ants. Aino opened the clothes chest and admired the dress and the jewellery. The dress was skilfully made. Aino could see that Mother had filled it with the might of the Sun and the Moon, had done so already when spinning the thread. As she had woven the cloth, the might had grown stronger still. The cloth shimmered in the shadowy storehouse, and suddenly Aino felt a deep respect for her mother. What was the skill of singing somebody into a bog compared with the skill of weaving cloth like this? There was more sparkle of might in a mere dress Mother had woven than in Väinämöinen himself. And Mother had been young when she made this, younger than Aino was now! Maybe Väinämöinen was famous for his might, but Mother's might was different, it was of a secretive and everyday stuff.

Aino laughed aloud. After all, how did Väinämöinen differ from Joukahainen, that swaggering boy, if you didn't count the colour of the beard and the grace of the body? Väinämöinen proclaimed his

deeds high and low so that youngsters competed in challenging him. He knew how to turn people into birds, he made rocks tremble and humbled the Spirits. But was he able to fatten the cows, make the servants plump and healthy and the grain grow? Could he protect his house from fire? Was he able to weave a dress like this? Surely he didn't have time for anything other than sword fights and singing contests with young – and some older – madcaps. And all the while, the mothers, sisters and wives of all those madcaps kept their houses standing with their own deep-rooted powers.

Aino felt calm and fearless. Väinämöinen was a nobody. An old man. If Mother would have



wanted, she could have sung him into a bog. Perhaps Aino could do that herself? But she was not a stupid young madcap, she had no intention of pushing her luck.

But she did intend to save her brother from the wizard's anger. She would flee and lure Väinämöinen after her, away from her poor Brother.

Aino waited for the night. She put on the dress and the golden jewellery and walked to the nearby cove. The lake was calm, warm and inviting. Aino wasn't going swimming, not yet. She sat on a stone on the beach. It still radiated the sun's heat and joined with the power of the Lady Sun in the cloth. The power was threaded into the cloth and was shining around her. Mother had used the dress to enchant father. Aino would use it to quite another purpose.

Aino started to sing. She sang the Origins of the Water and the Fish, she soothed the Water Spirits and she called the maidens of Vellamo, the Mother of Waters. She sang her throat hoarse, but the might woven by her mother was flowing in her. At the end, Aino did not know whether the power came from the cloth or from herself - she was her mother's flesh and blood, after all. Aino threw her heirloom jewellery into the water as an offering, one piece after another, and never stopped singing. No one came to get the gold, but Aino knew she had listeners. The light summer night was full of eyes in the mist.

Finally, when dawn approached and the night's mist slowly evaporated from the lake's surface, Aino saw them. Three maidens of Vellamo sat on a rock in the lake, looking calmly at her. Their skin was white like the underside of a fish and their hair was algae green. Aino had accomplished her purpose.

One of the water maidens lifted her arm and Aino answered the greeting. Then she had to hurry. Quickly she took off all her clothes, down to the last pendant and ribbon. The blue dress Mother had woven was just a dress - the power hummed in it, but it hummed more strongly in Aino herself. Awkwardly, quickly she waded into the water and started swimming towards the rock with strong strokes, all the time afraid that the water maidens would not wait for her.

The water was warm. It caressed her and held her up, prepared to serve after the night's singing. Aino reached the rock of Vellamo's maidens and climbed on it, laboriously, for it was slippery with algae.

The maidens looked vacant but they radiated sympathy and curioseness. Each had a small face, nose hardly more than a bulge over nostrils, and neither ears nor eyelids. Their gaze was openly curious, staring because of their lack of eyelids. Next to them, Aino felt stiff and coarse-faced.

'Hail to you, maidens of Vellamo. I thank you humbly.'

The maidens gave no answer, but one of them touched her shoulder. The touch was cold and damp, and pouring with amusement. The maidens did not speak, but Aino felt they thanked her for the gold and the song.

Abruptly, the rock vanished. Where there had just been hard stone and four maidens was now nothing but a widening circle of waves.

The water no longer caressed Aino, it was crushing her all over, pressing her into a new form. She felt as if a stone was weighing on her chest, compressing her lungs. She held her breath, though the water maidens whispered in her mind, urging her to give up and let go. Panic fluttered in her like a willow grouse caught in a snare. She controlled it, let the air go and breathed in her first breath of water. The water was a fistful of pain everywhere in her body, in her mouth, throat, in the tiny corners of her lungs. Panic tried to make her believe that the spells and songs had gone wrong, that she was just as stupid and arrogant as her brother, that she would drown.

But the water maidens held fast to her, took her deeper and deeper, until she neither saw nor heard anything, until nothing was left but water, darkness and pain.

Then, slowly, slowly, and yet in an instant, the pain was gone. Aino was breathing water like the water maidens, and she could see in the murk. She heard and understood the whisper of the maidens, the grumbling of the flounders on the lake bottom, the patient waiting of the pike, the quick movements of a school of minnows. She stretched out her arm, pale as the underside of a fish, and saw her own slender fingers and the transparent membrane between them.

She was still Aino, but she was also one of Vellamo's maidens. The three others were no longer just 'three water maidens', they were each an individual, close and well-known to her like sisters. They hummed and cuddled close to Aino and she hummed with them. In her thoughts she was able to follow their humming, how it spread from the lake bottom to the surface and into the coves. It drove off a young girl who was going to drown herself from a brook, consoled a seal who had lost her pup, caressed a school of herrings.

In the evening, Aino climbed the rock by the cape - it was in its old place again, as if it had never drawn her into the deep and turned a lively woman into a fish with shining flanks. Aino didn't have to sing, she just sent her mind searching for a herald, found a furry hare and told it to bring a message to Mother. Mother would understand what Aino had become and would send Väinämöinen after her, and she would lead him far away. Then she could return.

As she dived into the water, Aino wondered what returning would mean. She was now something other than Aino, she was thinking the thoughts of the water maidens more than her own. She knew the hardly noticeable ebb and tide, the laughter and hum of her sisters, she tasted the changes of salt on her skin. She didn't think, she was part of the waters. Would she soon even recognise her own self, Aino, any more? Would she miss the smell of a honey-flower, the first blueberries, the whimper of a new-born puppy?

The other maidens called her and she joined them as an equal. It was impossible to tell which of them had once been something other than a water maiden. They were water on each other's skin, a whisper under a quay, the first gasp of a perch caught by an angler. The waters flowed slowly on the lake bottom, swiftly in the falls, and the water maidens were present in all the movement of the waters.

Aino lost her sense of time. She did not know how long she'd been a water maiden, one of the gentle sisters, when she heard a song of enchantment. At first, she did not recognise it. She just inclined her earless head in bewilderment. After listening for a while, she was no longer just a water maiden, but also Aino again. Slowly she swam towards the sound, which was coming from a wooden rowboat.

Aino dived under the boat, saw the joined, waterlogged boards and a hook and bait hanging on the end of a line. The song reverberated differently under water than in the air, but it was still recognisable: it told of the deeds of Väinämöinen, and the singer himself was the song's hero.

Aino jerked at the hook and told all the fishes to stay away. The song stopped. It was very quiet. The angler just moved the line to and fro, as if trying to catch a perch.

Abruptly, Aino tugged at the line, rushed to the surface and caught the boat's side. The boat tilted and water flowed in. The wizard fell on all fours on the bottom, his eyes wide with fear.

Fluidly Aino climbed into the boat and looked at Väinämöinen. The rod and line had fallen into the water and were floating away with the waves. If the oars hadn't been fastened they'd have been travelling in the same direction.

Väinämöinen stumbled backwards to the bow and took out his knife, that's all he was able to do. 'Thou art neither fish nor human!'

Aino said nothing. If the wizard had himself been calling the maidens of Vellamo, he would have recognised the visitor, but he wasn't accustomed to the Powers of nature coming uninvited. For a while they just glared at each other. Väinämöinen blinked nervously, Aino stared without eyelids.

Väinämöinen made a sudden movement towards Aino with the knife. She felt sorry for the aged man. She dived sinuously back into the water, far from the knife's edge.

'Put your knife back into its sheath! I am no fish for you to fry!' The man peeked cautiously over the boat's side.

'Don't you know who I am?'

He didn't answer, was too scared of this catch talking like a human.

'I am Aino, the sister of Joukahainen, the one you tried to oblige to become your wife. Don't you recognise me?'

Without waiting for an answer, Aino dived into the depths.

On the surface, Väinämöinen rowed back and forth around the bay, placed all kinds of traps in the water: lures, hooks and nets. Now and then he called to Aino. She goaded him by filling his traps with fish: pike perch, a bony bullhead, three-spined sticklebacks to snatch the baits off the hooks. Teasing her grey-bearded suitor, she was Aino more than a water maiden. Now and then the boat glided quite close to her, so close she drew a line with her wet finger on the boat's dry side above her. But she didn't show herself to the wizard again.

Väinämöinen was persistent. He tried to enchant her with a song, made a new song up, just for the maidens of Vellamo. Aino held all her sisters below the surface, though the song tempted them. By the time night fell, the wizard was tired. His singing voice was hoarse, but still he kept trying. Only just before the dawn did the water on her skin tell Aino that the boat was being rowed ashore. Väinämöinen had given up.

Aino wanted to return to her sisterly existence as a water maiden, to forget Väinämöinen, her fame-hungry Mother, her impetuous Little Brother. She could not. She had been a maiden of Vellamo – now, in spite of her shape, she was Aino more than a water maiden.

She swam to her home shore. She listened to the familiar sounds, saw a glimpse of her mother on the path to the sauna. Mother looked old and tired. Brother went around glum and hands clasped in tight fists. Aino felt home-sick, and the tender caresses of the water maidens did not relieve her.

The wind told her the news that Väinämöinen was looking for a wife again. This time, however, he had sense enough to go courting instead of blackmailing a stupid youngster to give his sister as ransom. If she wished, Aino could soon return home. Each evening she glided to her home shore, listening to the familiar sounds with longing, and each morning the water maidens made her feel happy again. She was half Aino, half a water maiden, and neither part was complete.



One evening Aino heard Mother and Brother talking, even through water a hundred fathoms deep.

Joukahainen was swearing revenge.

'Don't be stupid, Joukahainen! Last time you barely escaped. That ought to be enough to teach you.'

'Väinämöinen is to blame for Aino being gone! We've heard nothing of her since the hare ran into the hall and brought the dress-cloth. She might even be dead!'

'I don't want to lose you, too, my son. Let it be. Let the old man go. It's not his fault.'

'Whose fault is it, then? I shall kill the old man! I'll kill him!'

'It is your own fault! Do not make others bear your guilt. You'll rue the day yet!'

'So be it, then! But Väinämöinen shall be dead and gone!'

Joukahainen snatched his bow from the wall, stashed a handful of arrows in his quiver and girded his loins with his sword-belt.

Joukahainen traced the route of Väinämöinen on his courting journey and tailed him. Aino swam as

a fish nearby whenever her brother travelled close to the waterways. She touched his lips every time he drank water and sent birds to follow him in the forest. A sickly-sweet odour of revenge and sorrow hung around him. Aino wanted to rise from the water to be a sister at his side, but she'd been a water maiden too long. She would need strong spells and enchantments to take a human form. Brother's revenge was too close, Aino had no time.

After trailing the wizard for several days, Joukahainen reached him by a river and stopped there, to lie in ambush. While Väinämöinen was crossing the river, Joukahainen shot his arrow. Aino made a whirl in the water that made the wizard's pale horse stumble, and the first arrow whistled into the bushes on the opposite shore. The second arrow hit the horse. It bolted, threw the old man into the river and ran off.

Within the river's current, Aino drew Väinämöinen under the surface, to be safe from her brother, but she didn't show herself to the old man. She remained the water around him, a strong current to tow the old man towards the sea. Väinämöinen was just as scared as when he'd seen Aino as a water maiden sit on the seat of his boat.

On her brother's face Aino saw a most repulsive expression: pure joy in the suffering of another being, the thrill of a torturer. All real power would always flee the touch of Joukahainen. Violence was its own intractable force that does not accept silver offerings, nor yield to songs. Brother would never make a mighty wizard or warlock, however many origins, spells and songs he learned.

Aino let Väinämöinen up to breathe only after her brother was out of sight behind a bend of the river. The old man coughed and spluttered, he threw up river water, but he was alive. Aino took him gently downriver, circled him round the rocks and held his face above the surface. He held himself stiff, quite scared. Aino wanted to get him far away by sea, far from her brother's reach, so far away that Väinämöinen would never think of checking whether the sister, that maiden of Vellamo, had returned to human form.

The days went by while Aino hurried Väinämöinen northwards. The old man was sturdy. She didn't trouble feeding him. She only wished urgently to be rid of him and to return to her home bay and back to being a human.

At last, the coolness and colour of the water told Aino that they had come far from familiar waters. She left the wizard to float and watched for a while to see what he would do. He was scratched and bruised, his beard and hair were full of seaweed and thrash like a drowned body. No swimmer, he. Aino thought of taking him closer to the beach, but then Väinämöinen

started to sing. It was but a small, croaky song, but he had enough might to make it work.

An eagle flew down from the horizon, flapped over the water until Väinämöinen caught its legs. The old man was too heavy for the eagle to carry. It could not get properly up into the air. With heavy wing-beats it drew the wizard closer to a beach, wingtips sometimes touching the water. The old man was mostly in the water, only his head and hands above the surface, beneath the eagle's wings.

As Väinämöinen drew farther away, Aino felt more and more relieved. The old man would not be seen on her home ground again. As a water maiden she swam back to her home bay. The other maidens of Vellamo swam by her side and murmured in sorrow, for they sensed Aino would soon be leaving them. An ache was pressing at her mind, like water pressing a fish in the deeps.

Back in her home cove, Aino climbed the rock and knew she could still choose between the water maiden and the girl. Her water sisters sat by her side and caressed her, pleading with her to stay. She answered their caresses, and each touch was a good-bye.

For she was more Aino than a water maiden.

In the evening, Aino started to sing. Her songs were not the same ones she had sung as she had called the maidens of Vellamo to accept her among them. Her songs now were new and powerful, her

very own. They told of tanned skin, of frost-bite on the cheeks, of the roughness of stubble fields under the feet. Aino also sang of the taste of water, of the flounder's sand-coloured skin, of the pondweed's veined leaves.

The water maidens grieved, but were not able to weep with their lidless eyes.

In the morning, Aino stood up on the rock, human. She jumped into the water, but it felt heavy and strange, her body clumsy and disobedient. Somehow, hating her own movements, she splashed to the shore. The water maidens had disappeared, but Aino felt them close, curious and terrified, filled with longing.

Slowly, Aino walked home with the morning wind. She slipped into her cabin, dressed herself in a linen shirt and walked to the sauna shore. The water rippled and its moving face was familiar, like a sister's face.

Aino bowed her head and wept. Every tear was a message.

JENNY KANGASVUO

Translated by Liisa Rantalaaho

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POST SCRIPT: THE KALEVALA AND AINO

The Kalevala, the national epic of Finland, is not a collection of success stories. It tells of failures and setbacks, misadventures and self-pity. Even the mightiest of wizards, Väinämöinen, who in some oral versions of Kalevala poetry is the first human being and who helped to create the world, is a fool, easily infatuated by pretty young maidens. Some maidens trick and mislead him, some just want to escape his old hands – like Aino.

Aino is the victim of the story, a pawn of men and her mother. My story follows the original plot-line: an arrogant young man challenges a wizard and survives his wrath only by offering up his sister. Their mother is thrilled by the thought of having a powerful son-in-law, but the desperate sister drowns herself. Then she reincarnates as a fish that returns to mock the wizard. The brother tries to avenge his sister's death and kill the wizard at a river bank, but the wizard is saved by the wind and the currents that take him to sea, where he weeps and pities himself, until he is picked up by an eagle

and helped by a powerful witch. Onwards to the next story and the next maiden.

The Kalevala has its share of cunning maidens, powerful witches and mighty mothers – it is not an epic of oppressed women. But the story of Aino has always bothered me: why did she kill herself? In two other suicides that occur in the Kalevala, the motive is incest: a brother and sister who have grown up separately have a relationship, and when they find out they are close kin, decide to kill themselves. But Aino did not have any reason to punish herself. Did she not have any other choice?

I did not need to change much in the original story of Aino, it was enough to give her the chance to make her own choices. To make her a shapeshifter instead of someone desperate enough to end her own life. To have her, instead of the wind and the currents, save Väinämöinen. To let her think about her actions and recognise her own power.

JENNY KANGASVUO

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