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The Mine

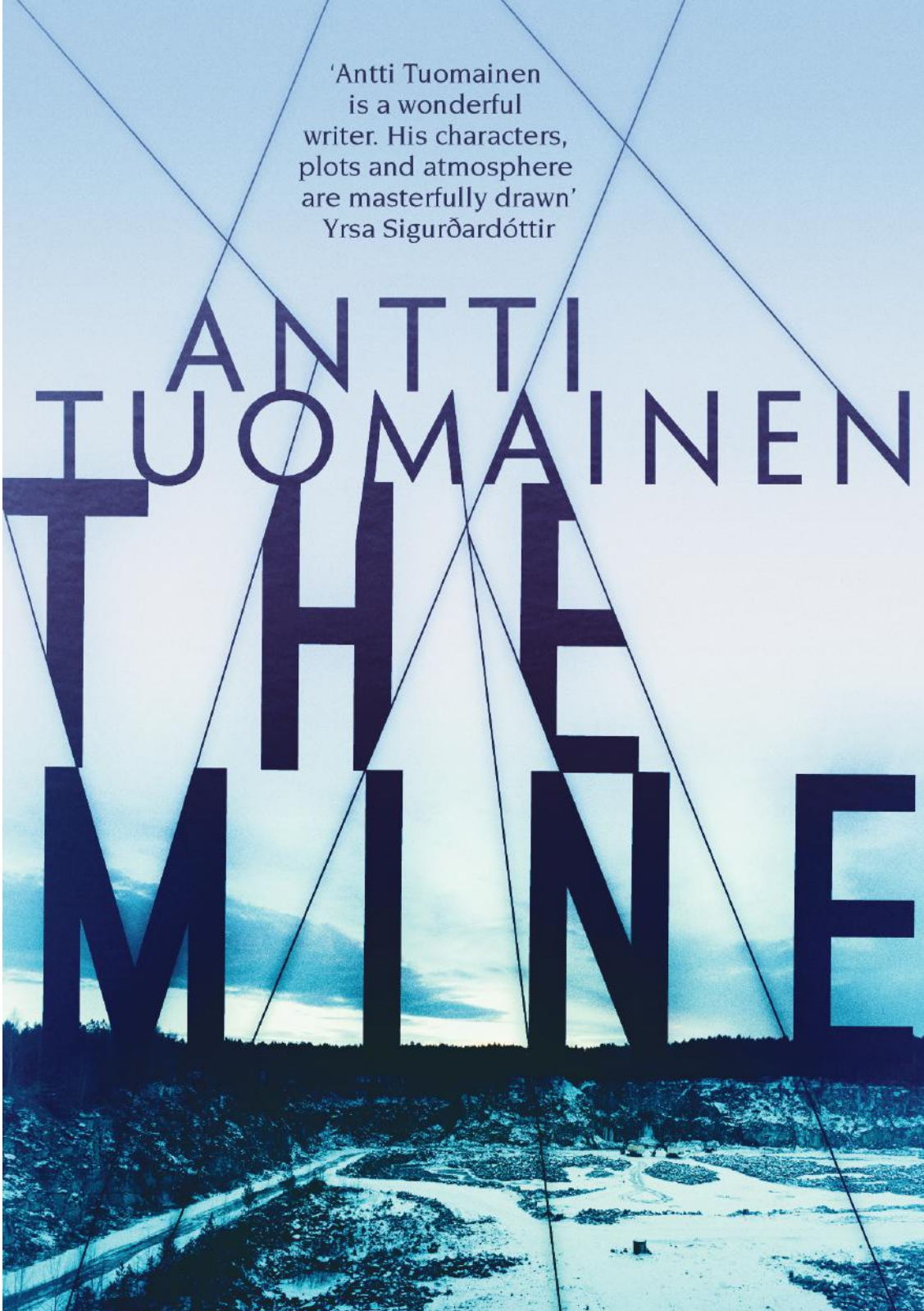
Written by Antti Tuomainen

Published by Orenda Books

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'Antti Tuomainen is a wonderful writer. His characters, plots and atmosphere are masterfully drawn'
Yrsa Sigurðardóttir
ANTTI TUOMAINEN
THE MINE

The Mine

Antti Tuomainen

Finnish Antti Tuomainen (b. 1971) was an award-winning copywriter when he made his literary debut in 2007 as a suspense author. The critically acclaimed *My Brother's Keeper* was published two years later. In 2011, Tuomainen's third novel, *The Healer*, won 'Best Finnish Crime Novel of 2011' and was shortlisted for the Glass Key Award. The Finnish press labelled *The Healer* – the story of a writer desperately searching for his missing wife in a post-apocalyptic Helsinki – 'unputdownable'. Two years later in 2013 they crowned Tuomainen 'The King of Helsinki Noir' when *Dark as My Heart* was published. *Dark as My Heart* has been shortlisted for the Petrona Award, 2016. With a piercing and evocative style, Tuomainen is one of the first to challenge the Scandinavian crime genre formula.

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'Dark, captivating and troubling' **Crime Fiction Lover**

'*Dark As My Heart* contains passages of lyrical intensity, along with bloody scenes that would not be out of place in a Jacobean revenge drama' ***Sunday Times***

'This chilling novel compels … Clever, atmospheric and wonderfully imaginative' ***Sunday Mirror***

'Tuomainen writes beautifully…' ***Publishers Weekly***

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Review copies will be available in August 2016

B-format paperback original
ISBN: 978-1-910633-53-3
EPUB: 978-1-910633-54-0
15 August 2016 EBOOK – 10 October 2016 PRINT
£8.99

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UNEDITED SAMPLER

Antti Tuomainen

The Mine

Translated from the Finnish by David Hackston



ORENDA
BOOKS

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www.orendabooks.co.uk

First published in the United Kingdom by Orenda Books 2016
Originally published by Like Kustannus, Finland, as *Kaivos* 2015
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ISBN 978-1-910633-53-3

Typeset in Minion by MacGuru Ltd

Orenda Books is grateful for the financial support of FILI, who provided a translation grant for this project.

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Half an hour of dark road, the glare growing stronger by the minute, until finally, as the thick forest receded in front of me, the mining complex opened up like a moon landscape. I turned on to the road leading towards the complex. The car park was full. I drove along a line of cars and parked at one end. If I turned off the motor the cold would work its way inside in minutes. If I kept the motor running someone was bound to notice. Getting a permit at the control tower wouldn't be any easier than it had been earlier that day, I imagined. If anything, it would only be more difficult. I was in the wrong place.

I returned to the road leading to the mine. Just before the intersection with the highway there was a crossroads with narrow lanes covered in fresh snow leading in both directions. The lane to the right appeared to follow the outer limits of the mine. I turned down it. The snow felt soft beneath my tyres. I drove slowly. The lane curved gently to the right. Trees, snow-covered verges. Eventually I came to a clearing. I turned off the car lights.

The clearing grew wider until I found myself staring at an endless open expanse divided into square sections. There was movement in a section at one end of the clearing, near the forest edge. It was so far away that the two enormous diggers, illuminated by searchlights, and the men working around them – around eight in total – looked like ants busying themselves. A moment later I realised that the sheer, square sections in front of me were in fact tanks full of sewage. Their surfaces had frozen and the snow hid them from view, camouflaging them in the landscape.

What were these men doing? What kind of work had to be undertaken at night and in this specific place? Tanks of raw sewage were no place to dig for iron ore.

This shit won't disappear by itself.

The diggers were rumbling around, mulching the ground. The searchlights pointed towards the woods. The men bustled around the machinery.

I only had my telephone, but it had a camera. I switched off the motor and stepped out of the car. The wind almost ripped the clothes off me. There was a few hundred metres between me, the men and the diggers. The wire fence round the mine's premises was tall and ran in both directions. To the left it ran through a stretch of forest.

The snow was deep, and walking through it was hard work. By the time I reached the cover of the trees, the snow had pushed its way inside my shoes, trousers and jacket. I was shivering with cold. When I finally arrived at the fence my feet were numb and so were my fingers. I found a spot where the fence ran alongside a large boulder. I climbed on top of the boulder and jumped. It was only then that it occurred to me that the fence might be electrified. If it had been switched on, I would now be lying unconscious in snow a metre deep. I trudged forward through the snow towards the searchlights and the diggers. The frozen wind numbed my face. I made sure not to wander off across the tanks but stuck to the strips of land separating them from one another. I would be hidden in darkness for a while yet, I knew that much. My legs ached with cold and adrenalin; the frigid air clutched at my throat and lungs. I was sweating yet at the same time worried I would freeze.

Over the boom of the diggers I eventually heard the sound of the men's voices. Behind the digging site, at the forest edge, the ground began to slope downwards. The men were digging some form of canal, a wide ditch leading towards the woods. I took a few steps closer and came to a halt. I pulled off my gloves and dug my phone from my jacket pocket. It wouldn't switch on. I tried blowing to warm it up. I knelt down in the snow, held the phone between my hands and puffed. It remained black and silent. After a few minutes of watching the men at work and listening as the diggers scraped against the frozen earth, I decided to go back to the car.

The trek was long and cold. I could hear Pauliina's voice, the way she'd described me to her friends after a drunken night out: *Janne would sell his left testicle for a good story and the right one to have his photo published alongside it. After all, what else does he need them for? He's never at home.*

Even the fence seemed taller now than when I'd come the other way. Using a thick spruce tree for support, I climbed to the top of the fence, rolled over the top and landed in the snow with a thump. Again I was lucky. There were no stones or protruding branches hidden beneath the snow. I couldn't feel my feet, and it took all the will power I could muster to get the car started and on the move again.

The motel owner's wife watched me as I limped through the foyer. I made it to my room, stripped off my clothes and left them on the bathroom floor, gulped down a few glasses of water and stood under the hot shower. Gradually the shivers and trembling subsided. When I returned to the bedroom, I tried the phone again. It felt cold in my hands and still wouldn't switch on. No goodnight text message for Ella this evening.

I stepped up to the window to close the curtains and looked out on to the car park.

Snow.

A long shadow.

A man.

Everything about him was stocky. A man whose strength you could sense, whose outstretched hand was like the fork of a pick-up truck.

There, standing in the car park, looking right through my window. A moment later he was gone, vanished into the darkness.

I looked from one side of the car park to the other, from the dark edge of the woods to where the road led off into the world outside, from the spaces between the cars to their windows. I could see nothing, nobody. The gently fluttering snowflakes heightened the sense of static, of frozen motionlessness. I was certain I'd just seen Kosola, the security officer. He had been standing only about twenty metres away and had looked me right in the eyes.

✶✶

Fourteen hours later I left the car at the rental place next to Helsinki railway station and headed for the tram stop. Wind whipped across the square, making people lean forwards and walk as if they were begging. It

pressed snow into their eyes and mouths. I sent Pauliina a text message, told her I'd be home by eight at the latest. I didn't expect a reply.

A drunk was asleep at the tram stop, his lower back bare, defying the elements. Either he would wake up tougher than before or with the mother of all sciatic nerve pains. The tram didn't disturb his sleep as it rattled up to the stop. Neither did he react when someone kicked his empty vodka bottle, sending it clinking and spinning on the asphalt. Russian roulette for the poor.

The tram crossed Long Bridge and glided towards Hakaniemi. I got off, skipped across the pedestrian crossing, its white stripes slippery beneath my shoes. The editorial office of *Helsinki Today* was situated on Paasivuorenkatu. We constantly had to defend the decision to locate our newspaper's editorial department in a building that also housed a number of trade unions and the offices of the once great Finnish labour movement. No, we weren't waving the red flag. No, this wasn't a statement – the fact that we'd had to move from the hip design district around Eerikinkatu to a place where we could look out at the World Peace statue gifted us by the Soviet Union. No, we didn't yearn for the ideology of a bygone age. We were a thriving, independent newspaper.

I ran up the stairs to the third floor. Editor-in-chief Hutrila was in his office. It wasn't yet five o'clock, so he was still in his chair. After five, and well before six, he generally moved slightly and leant across the edge of his desk so that nobody coming into the room could sit down. Discussions were kept short because reporters had to present ideas to him on their feet.

'Close the door,' said Hutrila, beckoning me in.

The room was so quiet that I could hear the hum of his computer. Hutrila wasn't a fan of open-plan offices. What sensible person was? Open-plan offices only produced open-plan thoughts: messy, noisy and second hand. I sat down opposite Hutrila. He was a short, blond man who constantly looked like he was about to launch a missile.

'I thought you were doing a story about the Suomalahti mine,' he said. 'Then I read what you sent me. This is nothing.'

'That's what I've come to talk about,' I said.

'You want to focus on this story; you want to neglect everything else; you want me to give you free rein: on what grounds?'

I looked at Hutrila, stared into his grey eyes.

'This could be a big story, if I can just work out what's going on…'

'Sure. Alongside your other work. I've read the text. Tell me what you think is so special about it.'

'Nothing yet.'

'Quite.'

'I need time.'

'Then make time. That's what everybody else in this team does. We have an editorial meeting tomorrow at twelve sharp. I'll see you there.'