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# The Girl Who Played with Fire

## Stieg Larsson

Translated from the Swedish by Reg Keeland

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Extract

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# PROLOGUE

She lay on her back fastened by leather straps to a narrow bed with a steel frame. The harness was tight across her rib cage. Her hands were manacled to the sides of the bed.

She had long since given up trying to free herself. She was awake, but her eyes were closed. If she opened her eyes she would find herself in darkness; the only light was a faint strip that seeped in above the door. She had a bad taste in her mouth and longed to be able to brush her teeth.

She was listening for the sound of footsteps, which would mean he was coming. She had no idea how late at night it was, but she sensed that it was getting too late for him to visit her. A sudden vibration in the bed made her open her eyes. It was as if a machine of some sort had started up somewhere in the building. After a few seconds she was no longer sure whether she was imagining it.

She marked off another day in her head.

It was the forty-third day of her imprisonment.

Her nose itched and she turned her head so that she could rub it against the pillow. She was sweating. It was airless and hot in the room. She had on a simple nightdress that was bunching up beneath her. If she moved her hips she could just hold the cloth with her first two fingers and pull the nightdress down on one side, a couple of centimetres at a time. She did the same on the other side. But there was still a fold under the small of her back. The mattress was lumpy. Her isolation sharply amplified all the tiny sensations that she would not otherwise have noticed. The harness was loose enough that she could change position and lie on her side, but that was uncomfortable because then she had to keep one hand behind her, which made her arm keep going to sleep.

She was not afraid. But she did feel a great, pent-up rage.

At the same time she was troubled by unpleasant fantasies about what was going to happen to her. She detested this helplessness. No matter how hard she tried to concentrate on something else –

to pass the time and to distract her from the situation she was in – the fear came trickling out. It hovered like a cloud of gas around her, threatening to penetrate her pores and poison her. She had discovered that the most effective method of keeping the fear at bay was to fantasize about something that gave her a feeling of strength. She closed her eyes and conjured up the smell of petrol.

*He was sitting in a car with the window rolled down. She ran to the car, poured the petrol through the window, and lit a match. It took only a moment. The flames blazed up. He writhed in agony and she heard his screams of terror and pain. She could smell burnt flesh and a more acrid stench of plastic and upholstery turning to carbon in the seats.*

She must have dozed off, because she did not hear the footsteps, but she was wide awake when the door opened. The light from the doorway blinded her.

*He* had come, at any rate.

He was tall. She did not know how old he was, but he had reddish-brown, tangled hair and a sparse goatee, and he wore glasses with black frames. He smelled of aftershave.

*She hated the smell of him.*

He stood at the foot of the bed and observed her for a long time.

*She hated his silence.*

She could see him only in silhouette from the light in the doorway. Then he spoke to her. He had a dark, clear voice that stressed, pedantically, each word.

*She hated his voice.*

He told her that it was her birthday and he wanted to wish her Happy Birthday. His tone was not unfriendly or ironical. It was neutral. She thought that he was smiling.

*She hated him.*

He came closer and went around to the head of the bed. He laid the back of a moist hand on her forehead and ran his fingers along her hairline in a gesture that was probably intended to be friendly. It was his birthday present to her.

*She hated his touch.*

*

She saw his mouth move, but she shut out the sound of his voice. She did not want to listen. She did not want to answer. She heard him raise his voice. A hint of irritation at her failure to respond. He talked about mutual trust. After a few minutes he stopped. She ignored his gaze. Then he shrugged and began adjusting her leather straps. He tightened the harness across her chest a bit and leaned over her.

She twisted suddenly to the left, away from him, as abruptly as she could and as far as the straps would allow. She pulled up her knees to her chin and kicked hard at his head. She aimed at his Adam's apple and the tip of her toe hit him somewhere below his jaw, but he was ready for that and turned away so it was only a light blow. She tried to kick again, but he was out of reach.

She let her legs sink back down on to the bed.

The sheet hung down on to the floor. Her nightdress had slid up above her hips.

He stood still for a long time without saying a word. Then he walked around the bed and tightened the foot restraint. She tried to pull her legs up, but he grabbed hold of one ankle, forced her knee down with his other hand and fastened her foot with a leather strap. He went around the bed and tied down her other foot.

Now she was utterly helpless.

He picked up the sheet from the floor and covered her. He watched her in silence for two minutes. She could sense his excitement in the dark, even though he did not show it. He undoubtedly had an erection. She knew that he would reach out and touch her.

Then he turned and left, closing the door behind him. She heard him bolt it, which was totally unnecessary because she had no way of getting free from the bed.

She lay for several minutes looking at the narrow strip of light over the door. Then she moved and tried to feel how tight the straps were. She could pull her knees up a bit, but the harness and the foot restraints grew taut immediately. She relaxed. She lay still, staring at nothing.

She waited. She thought about a petrol can and a match.

*She saw him drenched with petrol. She could actually feel the box of matches in her hand. She shook it. It rattled. She opened the box and selected a match. She heard him say something, but she shut her ears, did not listen to the words. She saw the expression on his face as she moved the match towards the striking surface. She heard the scraping sound of sulphur. It sounded like a drawn-out thunderclap. She saw the match burst into flame.*

She smiled a hard smile and steeled herself.

It was her thirteenth birthday.

# PART I

# IRREGULAR EQUATIONS

## 16 – 20.xii

Equations are classified by the highest power (value of the exponent) of its unknowns. If this is one, the equation is of first degree. If this is two, the equation is of second degree, and so on. Equations of higher degree than one yield multiple possible values for their unknown quantities. These values are known as roots.

The first-degree equation (the linear equation):
$3x - 9 = 0$ (root: $x = 3$)

# CHAPTER 1

## Thursday, 16.xii – Friday, 17.xii

Lisbeth Salander pulled her sunglasses down to the tip of her nose and squinted from beneath the brim of her sun hat. She saw the woman from room 32 come out of the hotel side entrance and walk to one of the green-and-white-striped *chaises-longues* beside the pool. Her gaze was fixed on the ground and her progress seemed unsteady.

Salander had only seen her at a distance. She reckoned the woman was around thirty-five, but she looked as though she could be anything from twenty-five to fifty. She had shoulder-length brown hair, an oval face, and a body that was straight out of a mail-order catalogue for lingerie. She had a black bikini, sandals, and purple-tinted sunglasses. She spoke with a southern American accent. She dropped a yellow sun hat next to the *chaise-longue* and signalled to the bartender at Ella Carmichael's bar.

Salander put her book down on her lap and sipped her iced coffee before reaching for a pack of cigarettes. Without turning her head she shifted her gaze to the horizon. She could just see the Caribbean through a group of palm trees and the rhododendrons in front of the hotel. A yacht was on its way north towards St Lucia or Dominica. Further out, she could see the outline of a grey freighter heading south in the direction of Guyana. A breeze made the morning heat bearable, but she felt a drop of sweat trickling into her eyebrow. Salander did not care for sunbathing. She had spent her days as far as possible in shade, and even now was under the awning on the terrace. And yet she was as brown as a nut. She had on khaki shorts and a black top.

She listened to the strange music from steel drums flowing out of the speakers at the bar. She could not tell the difference between Sven-Ingvars and Nick Cave, but steel drums fascinated her. It seemed hardly feasible that anyone could tune an oil barrel, and

even less credible that the barrel could make music like nothing else in the world. She thought those sounds were like magic.

She suddenly felt irritated and looked again at the woman, who had just been handed a glass of some orange-coloured drink.

It was not Lisbeth Salander's problem, but she could not comprehend why the woman stayed. For four nights, ever since the couple had arrived, Salander had listened to the muted terror being played out in the room next door to hers. She had heard crying and low, excitable voices, and sometimes the unmistakable sound of slaps. The man responsible for the blows – Salander assumed he was her husband – had straight dark hair parted down the middle in an old-fashioned style, and he seemed to be in Grenada on business. What kind of business, Salander had no idea, but every morning the man had appeared with his briefcase, in a jacket and tie, and had coffee in the hotel bar before he went outside to look for a taxi.

He would come back to the hotel in the late afternoon, when he took a swim and sat with his wife by the pool. They had dinner together in what on the surface seemed to be a quiet and loving way. The woman may have had a few too many drinks, but her intoxication was not noisome.

Each night the commotion in the next-door room had started just as Salander was going to bed with a book about the mysteries of mathematics. It did not sound like a full-on assault. As far as Salander could tell through the wall, it was one repetitive, tedious argument. The night before, Salander had not been able to contain her curiosity. She had gone on to the balcony to listen through the couple's open balcony door. For more than an hour the man had paced back and forth in the room, going on about what a shit he was, that he did not deserve her. Again and again he said that she must think him a fraud. No, she would answer, she did not, and tried to calm him. He became more intense, and seemed to give her a shake. So at last she gave him the answer he wanted . . . *You're right, you are a fraud*. And this he at once took as a pretext to berate her. He called her a whore, which was an accusation that Salander would have taken measures to combat if it had been directed at her. It had not been, but nevertheless she

thought for a long time about whether she ought to take some sort of action.

Salander had listened in astonishment to this rancorous bickering, which all of a sudden ended with something that sounded like a slap in the face. She had been on the point of going into the hotel corridor to kick in her neighbours' door when silence descended over the room.

Now, as she scrutinized the woman by the pool, she could see a faint bruise on her shoulder and a scrape on her hip, but no other injury.

Some months earlier Salander had read an article in a *Popular Science* that someone had left behind at Leonardo da Vinci Airport in Rome, and she developed a vague fascination with the obscure topic of spherical astronomy. On impulse she had made her way to the university bookshop in Rome to buy some of the key works on the subject. To be able to get a grasp of spherical astronomy, however, she had had to immerse herself in the deeper mysteries of mathematics. In the course of her travels in recent months she had been to other university bookshops to seek out more books.

Her studies had been unsystematic and without any real objective, at least until she wandered into the university bookshop in Miami and came out with *Dimensions in Mathematics*, by Dr L. C. Parnault (Harvard University Press, 1999). That was just before she went down to the Florida Keys and began island-hopping through the Caribbean.

She had been to Guadeloupe (two nights in a hideous dump), Dominica (fun and relaxed, five nights), Barbados (one night at an American hotel where she felt terribly unwelcome), and St Lucia (nine nights). She would have considered staying longer had she not made an enemy of a slow-witted young hoodlum who haunted the bar of her backstreet hotel. Finally she lost patience and whacked him on the head with a brick, checked out of the hotel, and took a ferry to St George's, the capital of Grenada. This was a country she had never heard of before she bought her ticket for the boat.

She had come ashore on Grenada in a tropical rainstorm at

10.00 one November morning. From *The Caribbean Traveller* she learned that Grenada was known as Spice Island and was one of the world's leading producers of nutmeg. The island had a population of 120,000, but another 200,000 Grenadians lived in the United States, Canada, or Britain, which gave some indication of the employment market in their homeland. The terrain was mountainous around a dormant volcano, Grand Etang.

Grenada was one of many small, former-British colonies. In 1795, Julian Fedon, a black planter of mixed French ancestry, led an uprising inspired by the French Revolution. Troops were sent to shoot, hang or maim a considerable number of the rebels. What had shaken the colonial regime was that even poor whites, so-called *petits blancs*, had joined Fedon's rebellion without the least regard for racial boundaries. The uprising was crushed, but Fedon was never captured; he vanished into the mountainous Grand Etang and became a Robin Hood-like legend.

Some two hundred years later, in 1979, a lawyer called Maurice Bishop started a new revolution which the guidebook said was inspired by the Communist dictatorships in Cuba and Nicaragua. But Salander was given a different picture of things when she met Philip Campbell – teacher, librarian, and Baptist preacher. She had taken a room in his guesthouse for the first few days. The gist of it was that Bishop was a popular folk leader who had deposed an insane dictator, a U.F.O. nutcase who had devoted part of the meagre national budget to chasing flying saucers. Bishop had lobbied for economic democracy and introduced the country's first legislation for sexual equality. And then in 1983 he was assassinated.

There followed a massacre of more than a hundred people, including the Foreign Minister, the Minister for Women's Affairs, and some senior trade union leaders. Then the United States invaded the country and set up a democracy. As far as Grenada was concerned, this meant that unemployment rose from around 6 per cent to almost 50 per cent, and that the cocaine trade once more became the largest single source of income. Campbell shook his head in dismay at the description in Salander's guidebook and gave her some tips on the kinds of people and the neighbourhoods she should avoid after dark.

In Salander's case, such advice normally fell on deaf ears. However, she had avoided making the acquaintance of the criminal element on Grenada by falling in love with Grand Anse Beach, just south of St George's, a sparsely populated beach that went on for miles. There she could walk for hours without having to talk to or even encounter another living soul. She moved to the Keys, one of the few American hotels on Grand Anse, and stayed for seven weeks, doing little more than walking on the beach and eating the local fruit, called chin-ups, which reminded her of sour Swedish gooseberries – she found them delightful.

It was the off season, and barely a third of the rooms at the Keys Hotel were occupied. The only problem was that both her peace and quiet and her preoccupation with mathematical studies had been disturbed by the subdued terror in the room next door.

Mikael Blomkvist rang the doorbell of Salander's apartment on Lundagatan. He did not expect her to open the door, but he had fallen into the habit of calling at her apartment every week or so to see whether anything had changed. He lifted the flap on the letterbox and could see the same heap of junk mail. It was late, and too dark to make out how much the pile might have grown since his last visit.

He stood on the landing for a moment before turning on his heel in frustration. He returned unhurriedly to his own apartment on Bellmansgatan, put on some coffee and looked through the evening papers before the late T.V. news *Rapport* came on. He was irritated and depressed not to know where Salander was. He felt stirrings of unease and wondered for the thousandth time what had happened.

He had invited Salander to his cabin in Sandhamn for the Christmas holidays. They had gone for long walks and calmly discussed the repercussions of the dramatic events in which they had both been involved over the past year, when Blomkvist went through what he came to think of as an early mid-life crisis. He had been convicted of libel and spent two months in prison, his professional career as a journalist had been in the gutter, and he

had resigned from his position as publisher of the magazine *Millennium* more or less in disgrace. But at that point everything had turned around. A commission to write a biography of the industrialist Henrik Vanger – which he had regarded as an absurdly well-paid form of therapy – had turned into a terrifying hunt for a serial killer.

During this manhunt he had met Salander. Blomkvist unconsciously stroked the faint scar that the noose had left beneath his left ear. Salander had not only helped him to track down the killer – she had saved his life.

Time and again she had amazed him with her odd talents – she had a photographic memory and phenomenal computer skills. Blomkvist considered himself virtually computer illiterate, but Salander handled computers as if she had made a pact with the Devil. He had come to realize that she was a world-class hacker, and within an exclusive international community devoted to computer crime at the highest level – and not only to combating it – she was a legend. She was known online only as Wasp.

It was her ability to pass freely into other people's computers that had given him the material which transformed his professional humiliation into what was to be "the Wennerström affair" – a scoop that a year later was still the subject of international police investigations into unsolved financial crimes. And Blomkvist was still being invited to appear on T.V. talk shows.

At the time, a year ago, he had thought of the scoop with colossal satisfaction – as vengeance and as rehabilitation. But the satisfaction had soon ebbed. Within a few weeks he was sick and tired of answering the same questions from journalists and the financial police. *I am sorry, but I am not able to reveal my sources.* When a reporter from the English-language *Azerbaijan Times* had come all the way to Stockholm to ask him the same questions, it was the last straw. Blomkvist cut the interviews to a minimum, and in recent months he relented only when the woman from *She* on T.V.4 talked him into it, and that had happened only because the investigation had apparently moved into a new phase.

Blomkvist's cooperation with the woman from T.V.4 had another dimension. She had been the first journalist to pounce on the story,

and without her programme on the evening that *Millennium* released the scoop, it might not have made the impact it did. Only later did Blomkvist find out that she had had to fight tooth and nail to convince her editor to run it. There had been massive resistance to giving any prominence to "that clown" at *Millennium*, and right up to the moment she went on air, it was far from certain that the battery of company lawyers would give the story the all-clear. Several of her more senior colleagues had given it the thumbs down and told her that if she was wrong, her career was over. She stood her ground, and it became the story of the year.

She had covered the story herself that first week – after all, she was the only reporter who had thoroughly researched the subject – but some time before Christmas Blomkvist noticed that all the new angles in the story had been handed over to male colleagues. Around New Year Blomkvist heard through the grapevine that she had been elbowed out, with the excuse that such an important story should be handled by experienced financial reporters, and not some little girl from Gotland or Bergslagen or wherever the hell she was from. The next time T.V.4 called, Blomkvist explained frankly that he would talk to them only if "she" asked the questions. Days of sullen silence went by before the boys at T.V.4 capitulated.

Blomkvist's waning interest in the Wennerström affair coincided with Salander's disappearance from his life. He still could not understand what had happened.

They had parted two days after Christmas and he had not seen her for the rest of the week. On the day before New Year's Eve he telephoned her, but there was no answer.

On New Year's Eve he went twice to her apartment and rang the bell. The first time there had been lights on, but she had not answered the door. The second time there were no lights. On New Year's Day he called her again, and still there was no answer, but he did get a message from the telephone company saying that the subscriber could not be reached.

He had seen her twice in the next few days. When he could not get hold of her on the telephone, he went to her apartment in early January and sat down to wait on the steps beside her front door. He had brought a book with him, and he waited stubbornly for

four hours before she appeared through the main entrance, just before 11.00 at night. She was carrying a brown box and stopped short when she saw him.

"Hello, Lisbeth," he said, closing his book.

She looked at him without expression, no sign of warmth or even friendship in her gaze. Then she walked past him and stuck her key in the door.

"Aren't you going to offer me a cup of coffee?" he said.

She turned and said in a low voice: "Get out of here. I don't want to see you ever again."

Then she shut the door in his face, and he heard her lock it from the inside. He was bewildered.

Three days later, he had taken the tunnelbana from Slussen to T-Centralen, and when the train stopped in Gamla Stan he looked out of the window and she was standing on the platform not two metres away. He caught sight of her at the exact moment the doors closed. For five seconds she stared right through him, as though he were nothing but air, before she turned and walked out of his field of vision as the train began to move.

The implication was unmistakable. She wanted nothing to do with him. She had cut him out of her life as surgically and decisively as she deleted files from her computer, and without explanation. She had changed her mobile phone number and did not answer her email.

Blomkvist sighed, switched off the T.V., and went to the window to gaze out at City Hall.

Perhaps he was making a mistake in going to her apartment from time to time. Blomkvist's attitude had always been that if a woman clearly indicated that she did not want anything more to do with him, then he would go on his way. Not respecting such a message would, in his eyes, show a lack of respect for her.

Blomkvist and Salander had slept together. It had been at her initiative, and it had gone on for half a year. If it were her decision to end the affair – as surprisingly as she had started it – then that was O.K. with Blomkvist. It was her decision to make. He had no difficulty with the role of *ex*-boyfriend – if that is what he was – but Salander's total repudiation of him was astonishing.

He was not in love with her – they were about as unlike as two people could possibly be – but he was very fond of her and really missed her, as exasperating as she sometimes was. He had thought their liking was mutual. In short, he felt like an idiot.

He stood at the window a long time.

Finally he decided. If Salander thought so little of him that she could not even bring herself to greet him when they saw each other in the tunnelbana, then their friendship was apparently over and the damage irreparable. He would make no attempt to contact her again.

Salander looked at her watch and realized that although she was sitting, perfectly still, in the shade, she was drenched with sweat. It was 10.30. She memorized a mathematical formula three lines long and closed her book, *Dimensions in Mathematics*. Then she picked up her key and the pack of cigarettes on the table.

Her room was on the third floor, which was also the top floor of the hotel. She stripped off her clothes and got into the shower.

A green lizard twenty centimetres long was staring at her from the wall just below the ceiling. Salander stared back but made no move to shoo it away. There were lizards everywhere on the island. They came through the blinds at the open window, under the door, or through the vent in the bathroom. She liked having company that left her alone. The water was almost ice-cold, and she stayed under the shower for five minutes to cool off.

When she came back into the room she stood naked in front of the mirror on the wardrobe door and examined her body with amazement. She still weighed only forty kilos and stood one metre twenty-four centimetres tall. Well, there was not much she could do about that. She had doll-like, almost delicate limbs, small hands, and hardly any hips.

But now she had breasts.

All her life she had been flat-chested, as if she had never reached puberty. She thought it had looked ridiculous, and she was always uncomfortable showing herself naked.

Now, all of a sudden, she had breasts. They were by no means

gigantic – that was not what she had wanted, and they would have looked ridiculous on her otherwise skinny body – but they were two solid, round breasts of medium size. The enlargement had been well done, and the proportions were reasonable. But the difference was dramatic, both for her looks and for her self-confidence.

She had spent five weeks in a clinic outside Genoa getting the implants that formed the structure of her new breasts. The clinic and the doctors there had absolutely the best reputation in all of Europe. Her own doctor, a charmingly hard-boiled woman named Alessandra Perrini, had told her that her breasts were abnormally underdeveloped, and that the enlargement could therefore be performed for medical reasons.

Recovery from the operation had not been painless, but her breasts looked and felt completely natural, and by now the scars were almost invisible. She had not regretted her decision for a second. She was pleased. Even six months later she could not walk past a mirror with her top off without stopping and feeling glad that she had improved her quality of life.

During her time at the clinic in Genoa she had also had one of her nine tattoos removed – a 25-centimetre-long wasp – from the right side of her neck. She liked her tattoos, especially the dragon on her left shoulder blade. But the wasp was too conspicuous and it made her too easy to remember and identify. Salander did not want to be remembered or identified. The tattoo had been removed by laser treatment, and when she ran her index finger over her neck she could feel the slight scarring. Closer inspection would reveal that her suntanned skin was a shade lighter where the tattoo had been, but at a glance nothing was noticeable. Her stay in Genoa had cost her 190,000 kronor.[1]

Which she could afford.

She stopped dreaming in front of the mirror and put on her knickers and bra. Two days after she had left the clinic in Genoa

1 In December 2004, 10 Swedish krona was the equivalent of €1.10, £0.80 and $1.60.

she had for the first time in her twenty-five years gone to a lingerie boutique and bought the garments she had never needed before. Since then she had turned twenty-six, and now she wore a bra with a certain amount of satisfaction.

She put on jeans and a black T-shirt with the slogan: "Consider this a fair warning." She found her sandals and sun hat and slung a black bag over her shoulder.

Crossing the lobby, she heard a murmur from a small group of hotel guests at the front desk. She slowed down and pricked up her ears.

"Just how dangerous is she?" said a black woman with a loud voice and a European accent. Salander recognized her as one of a charter group from London who had been there for ten days.

Freddy McBain, the greying reception manager who always greeted Salander with a friendly smile, looked worried. He was telling them that instructions would be issued to all guests and that there was no reason to worry as long as they followed all the instructions to the letter. He was met by a hail of questions.

Salander frowned and went out to the bar, where she found Ella Carmichael behind the counter.

"What's all that about?" she said, motioning with her thumb towards the front desk.

"Matilda is threatening to visit us."

"Matilda?"

"Matilda is a hurricane that formed off Brazil a few weeks ago and tore straight through Paramaribo yesterday, that's the capital of Surinam. No-one's quite sure what direction it's going to take – probably further north towards the States. But if it goes on following the coast to the west, then Trinidad and Grenada will be smack in its path. So it might get a bit windy."

"I thought the hurricane season was over."

"It is. It's usually September and October. But these days you never can tell, because there's so much trouble with the climate and the greenhouse effect and all that."

"O.K. But when's Matilda supposed to arrive?"

"Soon."

"Is there something I should do?"

"Lisbeth, hurricanes are not for playing around with. We had one in the seventies that caused a lot of destruction here on Grenada. I was eleven years old and lived in a town up in the Grand Etang on the way to Grenville, and I will never forget that night."

"Hmm."

"But you don't need to worry. Stay close to the hotel on Saturday. Pack a bag with things you wouldn't want to lose – like that computer you're always playing with – and be prepared to take it along if we get instructions to go down to the storm cellar. That's all."

"Right."

"Would you like something to drink?"

"No thanks."

Salander left without saying goodbye. Ella Carmichael smiled, resigned. It had taken her a couple of weeks to get used to this odd girl's peculiar ways and to realize that she was not being snooty – she was just very different. But she paid for her drinks without any fuss, stayed relatively sober, kept to herself, and never caused any trouble.

The traffic on Grenada consisted mainly of imaginatively decorated minibuses that operated with no particular timetable or other formalities. The shuttle ran during the daylight hours. After dark it was pretty much impossible to get around without your own car.

Salander had to wait only a few minutes on the road to St George's before one of the buses pulled up. The driver was a Rasta, and the bus's sound system was playing "No Woman, No Cry" full blast. She closed her ears, paid her dollar, and squeezed in next to a substantial woman with grey hair and two boys in school uniform.

St George's was located on a U-shaped bay that formed the Carenage, the inner harbour. Around the harbour rose steep hills dotted with houses and old colonial buildings, with Fort Rupert perched all the way out on the tip of a precipitous cliff.

St George's was a compact and tight-knit town with narrow streets and many alleyways. The houses climbed up every hillside, and there was hardly a flat surface larger than the combined cricket field and racetrack on the northern edge of the town.

She got off at the harbour and walked to MacIntyre's Electronics at the top of a short, steep slope. Almost all the products sold on Grenada were imported from the United States or Britain, so they cost twice as much as they did elsewhere, but at least the shop had air conditioning.

The extra batteries she had ordered for her Apple PowerBook (G4 titanium with a 43 cm screen) had finally arrived. In Miami she had bought a Palm PDA with a folding keyboard that she could use for email and easily take with her in her shoulder bag instead of dragging around her PowerBook, but it was a miserable substitute for the 43 cm screen. The original batteries had deteriorated and would run for only half an hour before they had to be recharged, which was a curse when she wanted to sit out on the terrace by the pool, and the electrical supply on Grenada left a lot to be desired. During the weeks she had been there, she had experienced two long black-outs. She paid with a credit card in the name of Wasp Enterprises, stuffed the batteries in her shoulder bag and headed back out into the midday heat.

She paid a visit to Barclays Bank and withdrew $300, then went down to the market and bought a bunch of carrots, half a dozen mangos, and a 1.5-litre bottle of mineral water. Her bag was much heavier now, and by the time she got back to the harbour she was hungry and thirsty. She considered the Nutmeg first, but the entrance to the restaurant was jammed with people already waiting. She went on to the quieter Turtleback at the other end of the harbour. There she sat on the veranda and ordered a plate of calamari and chips with a bottle of Carib, the local beer. She picked up a discarded copy of the *Grenadian Voice* and looked through it for two minutes. The only thing of interest was a dramatic article warning about the possible arrival of Matilda. The text was illustrated with a photograph showing a demolished house, a reminder of the devastation wrought by the last big hurricane to hit the island.

She folded the paper, took a swig from the bottle of Carib, and then she saw the man from room 32 come out on to the veranda from the bar. He had his brown briefcase in one hand and a big glass of Coca-Cola in the other. His eyes swept over her without

recognition before he sat on a bench at the other end of the veranda and fixed his gaze on the water beyond.

He seemed utterly preoccupied and sat there motionless for seven minutes, Salander observed, before he raised his glass and took three deep swallows. Then he put down the glass and resumed his staring out to sea. After a while she opened her bag and took out *Dimensions in Mathematics*.

All her life Salander had loved puzzles and riddles. When she was nine her mother gave her a Rubik's cube. It had put her abilities to the test for barely forty frustrating minutes before she understood how it worked. After that she never had any difficulty solving the puzzle. She had never missed the daily newspapers' intelligence tests; five strangely shaped figures and the puzzle was how the sixth one should look. To her, the answer was always obvious.

In primary school she had learned to add and subtract. Multiplication, division and geometry were a natural extension. She could add up the bill in a restaurant, create an invoice, and calculate the path of an artillery shell fired at a certain speed and angle. That was easy. But before she read the article in *Popular Science* she had never been intrigued by mathematics or even thought about the fact that the multiplication table was maths. It was something she memorized one afternoon at school, and she never understood why the teacher kept banging on about it for the whole year.

Then, quite suddenly, she sensed the inexorable logic that must reside behind the reasoning and formulae, and that led her to the mathematics section of the university bookshop. But it was not until she started on *Dimensions in Mathematics* that a whole new world opened to her. Mathematics was actually a logical puzzle with endless variations – riddles that could be solved. The trick was not in solving arithmetical problems. Five times five would always be twenty-five. The trick was to understand combinations of the various rules that made it possible to solve any mathematical problem whatsoever.

*Dimensions in Mathematics* was not strictly a textbook, rather it was a 1200-page brick about the history of mathematics from

the ancient Greeks to modern-day attempts to understand spherical astronomy. It was considered the Bible, in a class with what the *Arithmetica* of Diophantus had meant (and still did mean) to serious mathematicians. When she opened *Dimensions in Mathematics* for the first time on the terrace of the hotel on Grand Anse Beach, she was enticed into an enchanted world of figures. This was a book written by an author who was both pedagogical and able to entertain the reader with anecdotes and astonishing problems. She could follow mathematics from Archimedes to today's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California. She had taken in the methods they used to solve problems.

Pythagoras' equation ($x^2 + y^2 = z^2$), formulated five centuries before Christ, was an epiphany. At that moment Salander understood the significance of what she had memorized in secondary school from some of the rather few classes she had attended. *In a right-angled triangle, the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.* She was fascinated by Euclid's discovery in about 300 B.C. that a perfect number is always *a multiple of two numbers, in which one number is a power of 2 and the second consists of the difference between the next power of 2 and 1.* This was a refinement of Pythagoras' equation, and she could see the endless combinations.

$$6 = 2^1 x\ (2^2 - 1)$$
$$28 = 2^2 x\ (2^3 - 1)$$
$$496 = 2^4 x\ (2^5 - 1)$$
$$8128 = 2^6 x\ (2^7 - 1)$$

She could go on indefinitely without finding any number that would break the rule. This was a logic that appealed to Salander's sense of the absolute. She advanced through Archimedes, Newton, Martin Gardner, and a dozen other classical mathematicians with unmixed pleasure.

Then she came to the chapter on Pierre de Fermat, whose mathematical enigma, "Fermat's Last Theorem", had dumbfounded her for seven weeks. And that was a trifling length of time, considering that Fermat had driven mathematicians crazy for almost four

hundred years before an Englishman named Andrew Wiles succeeded in unravelling the puzzle, as recently as 1993.

Fermat's theorem was a beguiling, simple task.

Pierre de Fermat was born in 1601 in Beaumont-de-Lomagne in southwestern France. He was not even a mathematician; he was a civil servant who devoted himself to mathematics as a hobby. He was regarded as one of the most gifted self-taught mathematicians who ever lived. Like Salander, he enjoyed solving puzzles and riddles. He found it particularly amusing to tease other mathematicians by devising problems without supplying the solutions. The philosopher Descartes referred to Fermat by many derogatory epithets, and his English colleague John Wallis called him "that damned Frenchman".

In 1621 a Latin translation was published of Diophantus' *Arithmetica* which contained a complete compilation of the number theories that Pythagoras, Euclid, and other ancient mathematicians had formulated. It was when Fermat was studying Pythagoras' equation that in a burst of pure genius he created his immortal problem. He formulated a variant of Pythagoras' equation. Instead of $(x^2 + y^2 = z^2)$, Fermat converted the square to a cube, $(x^3 + y^3 = z^3)$.

The problem was that the new equation did not seem to have any solution with whole numbers. What Fermat had thus done, by an academic tweak, was to transform a formula which had an infinite number of perfect solutions into a blind alley that had no solution at all. His theorem was just that – Fermat claimed that nowhere in the infinite universe of numbers was there any whole number in which a cube could be expressed as the sum of two cubes, and that this was general for all numbers having a power of more than 2, that is, precisely Pythagoras' equation.

Other mathematicians swiftly agreed that this was correct. Through trial and error they were able to confirm that they could not find a number that disproved Fermat's theorem. The problem was simply that even if they counted until the end of time, they would never be able to test all existing numbers – they are infinite, after all – and consequently the mathematicians could not be 100 per cent certain that the next number would not disprove Fermat's theorem. Within mathematics, assertions must always be

proven mathematically and expressed in a valid and scientifically correct formula. The mathematician must be able to stand on a podium and say the words, "This is so *because* . . ."

Fermat, as was his wont, sorely tested his colleagues. In the margin of his copy of *Arithmetica* the genius penned the problem and concluded with the lines: *Cuius rei demonstrationem mirabilem sane detexi hanc marginis exiguitas non caperet*. These lines became immortalized in the history of mathematics: *I have a truly marvellous demonstration of this proposition which this margin is too narrow to contain.*

If his intention had been to madden his peers, then he succeeded. Since 1637 almost every self-respecting mathematician has spent time, sometimes a great deal of time, trying to find Fermat's proof. Generations of thinkers had failed until finally Andrew Wiles came up with the proof everyone had been waiting for. By then he had pondered the riddle for twenty-five years, the last ten of which he worked almost full-time on the problem.

Salander was at a loss.

She was actually not interested in the answer. It was the process of solution that was the point. When someone put a riddle in front of her, she solved it. Before she understood the principles of reasoning, the number mysteries took a long time to solve, but she always arrived at the correct answer before she looked it up.

So she took out a piece of paper and began scribbling figures when she read Fermat's theorem. But she failed to find a proof for it.

She disdained to look at the answer key, so she bypassed the section that gave Wiles' solution. Instead she finished her reading of *Dimensions* and confirmed that none of the other problems formulated in the book presented any overwhelming difficulties for her. Then she returned to Fermat's riddle day after day with gathering irritation, wondering what was Fermat's "marvellous proof". She went from one dead end to another.

She looked up when the man from room 32 stood and walked towards the exit. He had been sitting there for two hours and ten minutes.

*

Ella Carmichael set down the glass on the bar. She had long since realized that crappy pink drinks with stupid umbrellas were not Salander's style. She ordered always the same drink, rum and Coke. Except for one evening when she had been in an odd mood and got so drunk that Ella had to call the porter to carry her to her room, her normal consumption consisted of *caffè latte* and a few drinks. Or Carib beer. As always, she sat at the far right end of the bar and opened a book which looked to have complicated lines of numbers in it, which in Ella's eyes was a funny choice of reading for a girl of her age.

She also noticed that Salander did not appear to have the least interest in being picked up. The few lonely men who had made advances had been rebuffed kindly but firmly, and in one case not very kindly. Chris MacAllen, the man dispatched so brusquely, was a local wastrel who could have used a good thrashing. So Ella was not too bothered when he somehow stumbled and fell into the pool after bothering Miss Salander for an entire evening. To MacAllen's credit, he did not hold a grudge. He came back the following night, all sobered up, and offered to buy Salander a beer, which, after a brief hesitation, she accepted. From then on they greeted each other politely when they saw each other in the bar.

"Everything O.K.?"

Salander nodded and took the glass. "Any news about Matilda?"

"Still headed our way. It could be a real bad weekend."

"When will we know?"

"Actually not before she's passed by. She could head straight for Grenada and then decide to swing north at the last moment."

Then they heard a laugh that was a little too loud and turned to see the lady from room 32, apparently amused by something her husband had said.

"Who are they?"

"Dr Forbes? They're Americans from Austin, Texas." Ella Carmichael said the word "Americans" with a certain distaste.

"I could tell they're Americans, but what are they doing here? Is he a G.P.?"

"No, not that kind of doctor. He's here for the Santa Maria Foundation."

"What's that?"

"They support education for talented children. He's a fine man. He's discussing a proposal for a new high school in St George's with the Ministry of Education."

"He's a fine man who beats his wife," Salander said.

Ella gave Salander a sharp look and went to the other end of the bar to serve some local customers.

Salander stayed for ten minutes with her nose in *Dimensions*. She had known that she had a photographic memory since before she reached puberty, and because of it she was very different from her classmates. She had never revealed this to anyone – except to Blomkvist in a moment of weakness. She already knew the text of *Dimensions in Mathematics* by heart and was dragging the book around mainly because it represented a physical link to Fermat, as if the book had become some kind of talisman.

But this evening she could not concentrate on Fermat or his theorem. Instead she saw in her mind Dr Forbes sitting motionless, gazing at the same distant point in the sea at the Carenage.

She could not have explained why she knew that something was not right.

Finally she closed the book, went back to her room and booted up her PowerBook. Surfing the Internet did not call for any thinking. The hotel did not have broadband, but she had a built-in modem that she could hook up to her Panasonic mobile phone and with that set-up she could send and receive email. She typed a message to <plague_xyz_666@hotmail.com>:

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No broadband here. Need info on a Dr Forbes
with the Santa Maria Foundation, and his wife,
living in Austin, Texas. $500 to whoever does
the research. Wasp.
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She attached her public P.G.P. key, encrypted the message with Plague's P.G.P. key, and sent it. Then she looked at the clock and saw that it was just past 7.30 p.m.

She turned off her computer, locked her door, and walked four hundred metres along the beach, past the road to St George's, and knocked on the door of a shack behind the Coconut. George Bland was sixteen and a student. He intended to become a lawyer or a doctor or possibly an astronaut, and he was just as skinny as Salander and only a little taller.

Salander had met him on the beach the day after she moved to Grand Anse. She had sat down in the shade under some palms to watch the children playing football by the water. She was engrossed in *Dimensions* when the boy came and sat in the sand a few metres away from her, apparently without noticing she was there. She observed him in silence. A thin black boy in sandals, black jeans, and a white shirt.

He too had opened a book and immersed himself in it. Like her, he was reading a mathematics book – *Basics 4*. He began to scribble in an exercise book. Five minutes later, when Salander cleared her throat, he jumped up with a start. He apologized for bothering her and was on the brink of being gone when she asked him if what he was working on were complicated formulae.

Algebra. After a minute she had shown him an error in his calculation. After half an hour they had finished his homework. After an hour they had gone through the whole of the next chapter in his textbook and she had explained the trick behind the arithmetical operations as though she were his tutor. He had looked at her awestruck. After two hours he told her that his mother lived in Toronto, that his father lived in Grenville on the other side of the island, and that he himself lived in a shack a little way along the beach. He was the youngest in the family, with three older sisters.

Salander found his company surprisingly relaxing. The situation was unusual. She hardly ever began conversations with strangers just to talk. It was not a matter of shyness. For her, a conversation had a straightforward function. *How do I get to the pharmacy?*, or *How much does the hotel room cost?* Conversation also had a professional function. When she worked as a researcher for Dragan Armansky at Milton Security she had never minded having a long conversation if it was to ferret out facts.

On the other hand, she disliked personal discussions, which

always led to snooping around in areas she considered private. *How old are you? Guess. Do you like Britney Spears? Who? What do you think of Carl Larsson's paintings? I've never given them a thought. Are you a lesbian? Piss off.*

This boy was gawky and self-conscious, but he was polite and tried to have an intelligent conversation without competing with her or poking his nose into her life. Like her, he seemed lonely. He appeared to accept without puzzlement that a goddess of mathematics had descended on to Grand Anse Beach, and with pleasure that she would keep him company. They got up as the sun sank to the horizon. They walked together towards her hotel, and he pointed out the shack that was his student quarters. Shyly he asked if he might invite her to tea.

The shack contained a table that was cobbled together, two chairs, a bed, and a wooden cabinet for clothes. The only lighting was a desk lamp with a cable that ran to the Coconut. He had a camp stove. He offered her a meal of rice and vegetables, which he served on plastic plates. Boldly he even offered her a smoke of the local forbidden substance, which she also accepted.

Salander could not help noticing that he was affected by her presence and did not know how he should treat her. She, on a whim, decided to let him seduce her. It had developed into a painfully roundabout procedure in which he certainly understood her signals but had no idea how to react to them. Finally she lost patience and pushed him roughly on to the bed and took off her shirt and jeans.

It was the first time she had shown herself naked to anyone since the operation in Italy. She had left the clinic with a feeling of panic. It took her a long while to realize that no-one was staring at her. Normally she did not give a damn what other people thought of her, and she did not worry about why she felt nervous now.

Young Bland had been a perfect initiation for her new self. When at last (after some encouragement) he managed to unfasten her bra, he immediately switched off the lamp before undressing himself. Salander could tell that he was shy and turned the lamp back on. She watched his reactions closely as clumsily he began to touch her. Only much later did she relax, certain that he thought her

breasts were natural. On the other hand, it was unlikely he had much to compare them to.

She had not planned to get herself a teenage lover on Grenada. It had been an impulse, and when she left him late that night she had not thought of ever going back. But the next day she ran into him on the beach and realized that the clumsy boy was pleasant company. For the seven weeks she lived on Grenada, George Bland became a regular part of her life. They did not spend time together during the day, but they spent the hours before sundown on the beach and the evenings alone in his shack.

She was aware that when they walked together they looked like two teenagers. Sweet sixteen.

He evidently thought that life had become much more interesting. He had met a woman who was teaching him about mathematics and eroticism.

He opened the door and smiled delightedly at her.

"Would you like company?" she said.

Salander left the shack just after two in the morning. She had a warm feeling in her body and strolled along the beach instead of taking the road to the Keys Hotel. She walked alone in the dark, knowing that Bland would be a hundred metres behind.

He always did that. She had never slept all night at his place, and he often protested that she, a woman all alone, should not be walking back to her hotel at night. He insisted it was his duty to accompany her back to the hotel. Especially when it was very late, as it often was. Salander would listen to his objections and then cut the discussion off with a firm no. *I'll walk where I want, when I want. And no, I don't want an escort*. The first time she caught him following her she was really annoyed. But now she thought his wanting to protect her was rather sweet, so she pretended that she did not know he was there behind her or that he would turn back when he saw her go in the door of the hotel.

She wondered what he would do if she were attacked.

She would make use of the hammer she had bought at MacIntyre's hardware store and kept in the outside pocket of her shoulder bag.

There were not so many physical threats that could not be countered with a decent hammer, Salander thought.

There was a full moon and the stars were sparkling. Salander looked up and identified Regulus in Leo near the horizon. She was almost at the hotel terrace when she stopped short. She had caught sight of someone near the waterline below the hotel. It was the first time she had seen a living soul on the beach after dark. He was almost a hundred metres off, but Salander knew at once who it was there in the moonlight.

It was the fine Dr Forbes from room 32.

She took three quick steps into the shadow of a tree. When she turned her head, Bland was invisible too. The figure at the water's edge was walking slowly back and forth. He was smoking a cigarette. Every so often he would stop and bend down as if to examine the sand. This pantomime continued for twenty minutes before he turned and with rapid steps walked to the hotel's beach entrance and vanished.

Salander waited for a few minutes before she went down to where Dr Forbes had been. She made a slow semicircle, inspecting the sand. All she could make out were pebbles and some shells. After a few minutes she broke off her search and went back to the hotel.

On her balcony, she leaned over the railing, and peered in her neighbours' door. All was quiet. The evening's argument was obviously over. After a while she took from her shoulder bag some papers to roll a joint from the supply that Bland had given her. She sat down on a balcony chair and gazed out at the dark water of the Caribbean as she smoked and thought.

She felt like a radar installation on high alert.

## CHAPTER 2

### Friday, 17.xii

Advokat Nils Erik Bjurman set down his coffee cup and watched the flow of people outside the window of Café Hedon on Stureplan. He saw everyone passing in an unbroken stream, but observed none of them.

He was thinking of Lisbeth Salander. He thought often about Salander.

What he was thinking made him boil with rage.

Salander had crushed him. He was never going to forget it. She had taken command and humiliated him. She had abused him in a way that had left indelible marks on his body. On an area the size of a book below his navel. She had handcuffed him to his bed, abused him, and tattooed him with I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST.

Stockholm's district court had declared Salander legally incompetent. He had been assigned to be her guardian, which made her inescapably dependent on him. From the first time he met her he had fantasized about her. He could not explain it, but she seemed to invite that response.

What he had done – he, a 55-year-old lawyer – was reprehensible, indefensible by any standard. He knew that, of course. But from the moment he laid eyes on Salander in December two years earlier, he had not been able to resist her. The laws, the most basic moral code, and his responsibility as her guardian – none of it mattered at all.

She was a strange girl – fully grown, but with an appearance that made her easily mistaken for an child. He had control over her life; she was his to command.

She had a record that robbed her of credibility if she ever had

a mind to protest. Nor was it a rape of some innocent – her file confirmed that she had had many sexual encounters, could even be regarded as promiscuous. One social worker's report had raised the possibility that Salander had solicited sexual services for payment when she was seventeen. A police patrol had observed a drunken older man sitting with a young girl on a park bench in Tantolunden. The police had confronted the pair; the girl had refused to answer their questions, and the man was too intoxicated to give them any sensible information.

In Bjurman's eyes the conclusion was straightforward: Salander was a whore at the bottom of the social scale. It was risk-free. If she dared to protest to the guardianship agency, no-one was going to believe her word against his.

She was the ideal plaything – grown up, promiscuous, socially incompetent, and at his mercy.

It was the first time he had exploited one of his clients. Hitherto it had never occurred to him to make advances to anyone with whom he had a professional relationship. To satisfy his sexual needs, he had always turned to prostitutes. He had been discreet and he paid well; the problem was that prostitutes were not serious, they were only pretending. It was a service he bought from a woman who moaned and rolled her eyes: she played her part, but it was as phoney as street theatre.

He had tried to dominate his wife in the years that he was married, but she had merely gone along with it, and that too was a game.

Salander had been the perfect solution. She was defenceless. She had no family, no friends: a true victim, ripe for plundering. The opportunity makes the thief.

And then out of the blue she had destroyed him. She had struck back with a power and determination that he had not dreamed she possessed. She had humiliated him. She had tortured him. She had all but demolished him.

During the almost two years since then, Bjurman's life had changed dramatically. After Salander's night-time visit to his apartment he had felt paralysed – virtually incapable of clear thought or decisive action. He had locked himself in, did not answer the

telephone, and was unable even to keep up contact with his regular clients. After two weeks he went on sick leave. His secretary was deputed to deal with his correspondence at the office, cancelling all his meetings, and trying to keep irritated clients at bay.

Every day he was confronted by the tattoo on his body. Finally he took down the mirror from the bathroom door.

He returned to his office at the beginning of summer. He had handed over most of his clients to his colleagues. The only ones he kept for himself were companies for whom he dealt with legal business correspondence without being involved in meetings. His only active client now was Salander – each month he wrote up a balance sheet and a report for the guardianship agency. He did very precisely what she had demanded: the reports had not a grain of truth in them and made plain that she no longer needed a guardian. Each report was an excruciating reminder of her existence, but he had no choice.

Bjurman had spent the summer and the autumn in helpless, furious brooding. And then, in December he pulled himself together and went on holiday to France. While there, he had consulted a specialist at a clinic for cosmetic surgery outside Marseille about how best to remove the tattoo.

The specialist had examined his abdomen with ill-concealed astonishment. At last he recommended a course of action. One way would be laser treatment, he said, but the tattoo was so extensive and the needle had penetrated so deeply that he was afraid that the only realistic solution was a series of skin grafts. It would be expensive and would take time.

In the past two years Bjurman had seen Salander on only one occasion.

On the night she attacked him and established control over his life, she had taken the spare set of keys to his office and apartment. She would be watching him, she had told him, and when he least expected it she would drop in. He had almost begun to believe it was an empty threat, but he had not dared to change the locks. Her warning had been unmistakable – if she ever found him in

bed with a woman, Salander would make public the ninety-minute video that documented how he had raped her.

In January a year ago he had woken at 3.00 a.m., not sure why. He turned on his bedside light and almost howled in fright when he saw her standing at the foot of his bed. She was like a ghost suddenly there, not two metres from him. Her face was pale and expressionless. In her hand she held her taser.

"Good morning, Mr Advokat Bjurman," she said. "So sorry for waking you this time."

*Good God, has she been here before? While I slept?*

He could not tell whether she was bluffing. Bjurman cleared his throat and was about to speak. She cut him off with a gesture.

"I woke you for one reason only. I'm going to be away for a long time quite soon. Keep writing your reports every month, but don't post copies to me, send them to this hotmail address."

She took a folded paper from her jacket pocket and dropped it on the bed.

"If the guardianship agency wants to get in touch with me, or anything else comes up that might require my being here, write me an email at this address. Is that understood?"

He nodded. "I understand . . ."

"Don't speak. I don't want to hear your voice."

He clenched his teeth. He had not dared to try to reach her, since she had threatened to send the video to the authorities if he did. Instead he had thought for months what he would say to her when eventually she contacted him. He really had nothing he could say in his defence. All he could do was appeal to her humanity. He would try to convince her – if she would only give him a chance to speak – that he had done it in a fit of insanity, that he was utterly sorry for it and wanted to make amends. He would grovel if that would convince her, if he could only somehow defuse the threat that she posed.

"I have something to say," he said in a pitiful voice. "I want to ask your forgiveness . . ."

She listened in silence to his plea. Then she put one foot on the bottom of the bed and stared at him in disgust.

"Now you listen, Bjurman: you're a pervert. I have no reason

to forgive you. But if you keep yourself clean, I'll let you off the hook the day my declaration of incompetence is rescinded."

She waited until he lowered his gaze. *She's going to make me crawl.*

"There's no change to what I said a year ago. You fail, and the video goes to the agency. You contact me in any way other than I tell you to, then I make the video public. I die in an accident, the video will be made public. You ever touch me again, I will kill you."

He believed her.

"One more thing. The day I set you free, you can do as you like. But until that day you will not set foot in that clinic in Marseille. You begin treatment, I will tattoo you again, and this time I'll do it on your forehead."

*How the fucking hell did she know out about the clinic?*

The next moment she was gone. He heard a faint click as she turned the front-door key. It was as if a ghost had paid him a visit.

At that instant he began to loathe Lisbeth Salander with an intensity that blazed like red-hot steel in his brain and transformed his life into an obsession to crush her. He fantasized about killing her. He toyed with fantasies of having her crawl at his feet and beg him for mercy. But he would be merciless. He would put his hands round her throat and strangle her until she gasped for air. He wanted to tear her eyes from their sockets and her heart from her chest. He wanted to erase her from the earth.

Paradoxically, it was at this same moment that he felt as though he had begun to function again, and he discovered in himself a surprising emotional balance. He was obsessed with the woman and she was on his mind every waking minute. But he had begun to think rationally again. If he was going to find a way of destroying her, he was going to have to get his head in order. His life settled on a new objective.

He stopped fantasizing about her death and began planning for it.

Blomkvist passed less than six feet behind Advokat Bjurman's back as he navigated with two scalding glasses of *caffè latte* to editor-

in-chief Erika Berger's table at Café Hedon. Neither he nor Berger had ever heard of Nils Bjurman, so neither of them were aware of his being there.

Berger frowned and moved an ashtray aside to make room for her glass. Blomkvist hung his jacket over the back of his chair, slid the ashtray over to his side of the table, and lit a cigarette. Berger detested cigarette smoke and gave him a furious look. He turned his head to blow the smoke away from her.

"I thought you gave up."

"Temporary backsliding."

"I'm going to stop having sex with guys who smell of smoke," she said, smiling sweetly.

"No problem. There are plenty of girls who aren't so particular," Blomkvist said, smiling back.

Berger rolled her eyes. "So what's the problem? I'm meeting Charlie at the theatre in twenty minutes." Charlie was Charlotta Rosenberg, a childhood friend.

"The work experience girl bothers me," Blomkvist said. "I don't mind her being the daughter of one of your girlfriends, but she's supposed to be in editorial for another eight weeks and I don't think I can put up with her that long."

"I've noticed the hungry glances she's been casting your way. Naturally I expect you to behave like a gentleman."

"Erika, the girl's seventeen and has a mental age of ten, and I may be erring on the generous side."

"She's just impressed. Probably a little hero worship."

"At 10.30 last night she rang the entry phone on my building and wanted to come up with a bottle of wine."

"Oops," Berger said.

"Oops is right. If I were twenty years younger I might not have even hesitated. I'm going to be forty-five any day now."

"Don't remind me. We're the same age."

The Wennerström affair had given Blomkvist a certain celebrity. Over the past year he had received invitations to the most improbable places, parties and events. He was greeted with air kisses from

all sorts of people he had hardly shaken hands with before. They were not primarily media people – he knew all of them already and was either on good or bad terms with them – but so-called cultural figures, and B-list celebrities now wanted to appear as though they were his close friends. Now it was the thing to have Mikael Blomkvist as your guest at a launch party or a private dinner. "Sounds lovely, but unfortunately I'm already booked up," was becoming a routine response.

One downside of his star status was an increasing rash of rumours. An acquaintance had mentioned with concern that he heard a rumour claiming that Blomkvist had been seen at a rehab clinic. In fact Blomkvist's total drug intake since his teens consisted of half a dozen joints, and one experiment with cocaine fifteen years earlier with a female singer in a Dutch rock band. As to alcohol, he was only ever seriously intoxicated at private dinners or parties. In a bar he would seldom have more than one large, strong beer. He also liked to drink medium-strong beer. His drinks cabinet at home had vodka and a few bottles of single malt Scotch, all presents. It was absurd how rarely he indulged in them.

Blomkvist was single. The fact that he had occasional affairs was known both inside and outside his circle of friends, and that had led to further rumours. His long-lasting affair with Erika Berger was frequently the subject of speculation. Lately it had been bandied about that he picked up any number of women, and was exploiting his new celebrity status to screw his way through the clientèle of Stockholm's night spots. An obscure journalist had once even urged him to seek help for his sex addiction.

Blomkvist had indeed had many brief relationships. He knew he was reasonably good-looking, but he had never supposed himself exceptionally attractive. But he had often been told that he had something that made women interested in him. Berger had told him that he radiated self-confidence and security at the same time, that he had an ability to make women feel at ease. Going to bed with him was not threatening or complicated, but it might be erotically enjoyable. And that, according to Blomkvist, was as it should be.

Blomkvist's best relationships had been with women he knew well and whom he liked a lot, so it was no accident that he had begun an affair with Berger twenty years earlier, when she was a young journalist.

His present renown, however, had increased women's interest in him to a point that he found pretty bizarre. Most astonishing were the young women who made impulsive advances in unexpected circumstances.

But Blomkvist was not turned on by teenagers with short miniskirts and perfect bodies. When he was younger his women friends had often been older than him – in some cases considerably older – and more experienced. Over time the age difference had evened out. Salander had definitely been a step in the other direction.

And this was the reason for his hastily called meeting with Berger.

*Millennium* had taken on a media school graduate for work experience, as a favour to one of Berger's friends. This was nothing unusual; they had several interns each year. Blomkvist had said a polite hello to the girl and rapidly discovered that she had only the vaguest interest in journalism beyond that she "wanted to be seen on T.V." and that – Blomkvist suspected – at present it was quite a coup to work at *Millennium*.

She did not miss an opportunity to be in close contact with him. He pretended not to notice her blatant advances, but that only induced her to redouble her efforts. Quite simply, it was becoming tiresome.

Berger burst out laughing. "Good Lord, imagine, you being sexually harassed at work."

"Ricky, this is a drag. There's no way I want to hurt or embarrass her. But she's no more subtle than a mare in heat. I'm worried what she might come up with next."

"She's got a crush on you and she's too young to know how to express herself."

"You're wrong. She knows damned well how to express herself. There's something warped about how far she goes, and she's getting annoyed that I'm not taking the bait. I don't need a new wave of rumours making me out to be some lecherous rock-star type on the hunt for a nice lay."

"O.K., but let me get to the nub of the problem. She rang your doorbell last night, is that the extent of it?"

"With a bottle of wine. She said she'd been to a party at a friend's house close by and tried to make it look like pure chance that she found herself in my building."

"What did you tell her?"

"I didn't let her in, obviously. I said that she'd come at an awkward time, that I had a friend there."

"How did she take that?"

"She was really upset, but she did leave."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Get her off my back. I'm thinking of having a serious talk with her on Monday. Either she lays off or I'll kick her out of the office."

Berger thought for a moment. "Let me have a talk with her. She's looking for a friend, not a lover."

"I don't know what she's looking for, but . . ."

"Mikael. I've been through what she's going through. I'll talk to her."

Like everyone else who had watched T.V. or read an evening paper in the past year, Bjurman had heard of Mikael Blomkvist. But he did not recognize him in Café Hedon, and in any case he had no idea that there was a connection between Salander and *Millennium*.

Besides, he was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to pay attention to his surroundings.

Ever since the lifting of his mental paralysis, he had been continuously circling round and round the same conundrum.

Salander had in her possession a video of his assault on her which she had recorded with a hidden camera. She had made him watch the video. There was no room for favourable interpretations. If it ever got to the guardianship agency, or, God forbid, if it ended up in the hands of the media, his career, his freedom and his life would be over. He knew the penalties for aggravated rape, exploitation of a person in a subordinate position, abuse and aggravated abuse; he reckoned he would get at least six years in prison. A

zealous prosecutor might use one section of the video as the basis for a charge of attempted murder.

He had all but asphyxiated her during the rape when he had excitedly pressed a pillow over her face. He devoutly wished he had finished the job.

*They would not accept that she was the whole time playing a game. She had enticed him with her cute little-girl eyes, had seduced him with a body that looked like a twelve-year-old's. She had provoked him to rape her. They would never see that she had in fact put on a performance. She had planned . . .*

The first thing he would have to do was to gain possession of the video and make sure somehow that there were no copies. That was the crux of the problem.

There was no doubt in his mind that a witch like Salander would have made enemies over the years. Here Bjurman had an advantage. Unlike anyone else who might have tried or might try to get at her, he had access to all her medical records, welfare reports and psychiatric assessments. He was one of the very few people in Sweden who knew her secrets.

The personal file that the agency had copied to him when he agreed to serve as her guardian had been a mere fifteen pages that mainly presented a picture of her adult life, a summary of the assessment made by the court-appointed psychiatrists, the district court's ruling to place her under guardianship, and her bank statements for the preceding year.

He had read the file over and over. Then he had begun systematically to gather information on Salander's life.

As a lawyer he was well practised in extracting information from the records of public authorities. As her guardian he was able to penetrate the layers of confidentiality surrounding her medical records. He could get hold of every document he wanted that dealt with Salander.

It had nevertheless taken months to put together her life, detail by detail, from her first primary school reports to social workers' reports to police reports and transcripts from the district court. He had discussed her condition with Dr Jesper H. Löderman, the psychiatrist who on her eighteenth birthday had recommended that

she be institutionalized. Löderman gave him a rundown of the case. Everyone was helpful. A woman at the welfare agency had even praised him for showing such determination to understand every aspect of Salander's life.

He found a real gold mine of information in the form of two notebooks in a box gathering dust in the archive of the guardianship agency. The notebooks had been compiled by Bjurman's predecessor, the lawyer Holger Palmgren, who had apparently come to know Salander as well as or better than anyone. Palmgren had conscientiously submitted a report each year to the agency, and Bjurman supposed Salander had probably not known that Palmgren also made meticulous notes for himself. Palmgren's notebooks had ended up with the guardianship agency, where it seemed no-one had read their contents since he had suffered a stroke two years earlier.

It was the original. There was no indication that a copy had ever been taken. Perfect.

Palmgren's picture of Salander was completely different from what could be deduced from the welfare agency's report. He had been able to follow her laborious progress from unruly teenager to young woman to employee at Milton Security – a job she had obtained through Palmgren's own contacts. Bjurman learned from these notes that Salander was by no means a slow-witted office junior who did the photocopying and made coffee – on the contrary, she had a real job, carrying out real investigations for Dragan Armansky, Milton's C.E.O. Palmgren and Armansky obviously knew each other well and exchanged information about their protégée from time to time.

Salander seemed to have only two friends in her life, and both of them regarded her as their protégée. Palmgren was out of the picture now. Armansky remained, and could possibly be a threat. Bjurman decided to steer clear of Armansky.

The notebooks had explained a lot. Bjurman understood how Salander had discovered so much about him. He could not for the life of him see how she had found out about his visit to the plastic

surgery clinic in France, but much of the mystery surrounding her had vanished. She made her living burrowing into other people's lives. He at once took fresh precautions with his own investigations and decided that, since Salander had access to his apartment, it was not a good idea to keep any papers there that dealt with her case. He gathered all the documentation and filled a cardboard box to take to his summer cabin near Stallarholmen, where he was spending more and more of his time in solitary brooding.

The more he read about Salander, the more persuaded he became that she was pathologically unwell. He shuddered to remember how she had handcuffed him to his bed. He had been totally under her control then, and Bjurman did not doubt that she would make good her threat to kill him if he gave her cause.

She lacked social inhibitions, one of her reports concluded. Well, he could conclude a stage or two further: *she was a sick, murderous, insane fucking person. A loose hand-grenade. A whore.*

Palmgren's notebooks had provided him with the final key. On several occasions he had recorded very personal diary-type accounts of conversations that he had had with Salander. *A crazy old man.* In two of these conversations he had used the expression "when 'All The Evil' happened". Presumably Palmgren had borrowed the expression directly from Salander, but it was not clear what event it referred to.

Bjurman wrote down the words "All The Evil". The years in foster homes? Some particular attack? The explanation ought to be there in the documentation to which he already had access.

He opened the psychiatric assessment of Salander as an eighteen-year-old and read it through for the fifth or sixth time. There had to be a gap in his knowledge.

He had excerpts from journal entries from elementary school, an affidavit to the effect that Salander's mother was incapable of taking care of her, and reports from various foster homes during her teens.

Something had set off the madness when she was twelve.

There were other gaps in her biography.

He discovered to his great surprise that Salander had a twin sister who had not been referred to in any of the material to which he had previously had access. *My God, there are two of them*. But he could not find any reference to what had happened to the sister.

The father was unknown, and there was no explanation as to why her mother could not take care of her. Bjurman had supposed that she had become ill and that as a result the whole process had begun, including the spells in the children's psychiatric unit. But now he was sure that something had happened to Salander when she was twelve or thirteen. *All The Evil*. A trauma of some kind. But there was no indication in Palmgren's notes as to what "All The Evil" could have been.

In the psychiatric assessment he finally found a reference to an attachment that was missing – the number of a police report dated 12/MAR/1991. It was handwritten in the margin of the copy he had indented for from the social welfare agency archive. When he put in a request for the report he was told that it was stamped "TOP SECRET by Order of His Royal Highness", but that he could file an appeal with the relevant government department.

Bjurman was stymied. The fact that a police report dealing with a twelve-year-old girl was classified was not in itself surprising – there could be all manner of reasons for the protection of privacy. But he was Salander's guardian and had the right to study any document at all which concerned her. He could not understand why gaining access to such a report should require an appeal to a government department.

He submitted his application. Two months passed before he was informed that his request had been denied. What could there be in a police report almost fourteen years old about so young a girl to classify it as Top Secret? What possible threat could it contain to Sweden's government?

He returned to Palmgren's diary, trying to tease out what might be meant by "All The Evil". But he found no clue. It had to have been discussed between Palmgren and his ward but never written down. The references to "All The Evil" came at the end of the second notebook. Perhaps Palmgren had never had time to write

up his own conclusions about this apparently crucial series of events before he had his stroke.

Palmgren had been Salander's trustee from her thirteenth birthday and her guardian from the day she turned eighteen. So he had been involved shortly after "All The Evil" had taken place and Salander was put away in the children's psychiatric unit. The chances were that he had known about whatever it was that had happened.

Bjurman went back to the archive of the guardianship agency, this time to find the detailed brief of Palmgren's assignment, drawn up by the social welfare agency. At first glance the description was disappointing: two pages of background information. Salander's mother was now incapable of bringing up her daughter; the two children had to be separated; Camilla Salander was placed through the social welfare agency in a foster family; Lisbeth Salander was confined at St Stefan's children's psychiatric clinic. No alternative was discussed.

Why? Only a cryptic formulation: "In view of the events of 12/3/91 the social welfare agency has determined that . . ." Then again a reference to the classified police report. But here there was the name of the policeman who wrote the report.

Bjurman registered the name with shock. He knew it well. Indeed he knew it very well, and this discovery put matters in a wholly new light. It still took him two more months to get the report, this time employing quite different methods. The police report consisted of forty-seven pages of A4, with a dozen or so pages of notes that were added over a six-year period. And finally the photographs. And the name.

*My God . . . it can't be possible.*

There was one other person who had reason to hate Salander with the same passion as he did.

He had an ally, the most improbable ally he could have imagined.

Bjurman was roused from his reverie by a shadow falling across the table at Café Hedon. He looked up and saw a blond . . . *giant* was the only word for him. For a few seconds he recoiled before he regained his composure.

The man looking down at him stood more than two metres high and had an exceptionally powerful build. A bodybuilder without a doubt. Bjurman could not see a hint of fat. The man made a most alarming impression. His blond hair was cropped close at the sides with a short shock of hair on top. He had an oval, oddly soft, almost childlike face. His ice-blue eyes, however, were not remotely gentle. He was dressed in a mid-length black leather jacket, blue shirt, black tie, and black trousers. The last thing Bjurman noticed was his hands. If all of the rest of him was extra large, his hands were enormous.

"Advokat Bjurman?"

He spoke with some European accent but his voice was so peculiarly high-pitched that Bjurman was tempted to smile. With difficulty he kept his expression neutral and nodded.

"We got your letter."

"Who are you? I wanted to meet . . ."

The man with the enormous hands was already sitting opposite Bjurman and cut him off.

"You'll have to meet me instead. Tell me what you want."

Bjurman hesitated. He disliked intensely the idea of having to be at the mercy of a stranger. But it was a necessity. He reminded himself that he was not alone in having a grudge against Salander. It was a question of recruiting allies. In a low voice he explained his business.