

Oulunsalo fiction, Pt. 1

ICE ROAD



Jani Ojala



The ferry doesn't run at night-time Ice road is in use

Acknowledgments

Van Morrison

Never before have I been able to credit something I've done to one single song. Your song "Astral Weeks", however, was the first spark of Ice Road. Other things would pile on top and ignite, hence this book.

Thank you, for waking up a dreamer in me.

Richard O'Connor

For your book *Undoing Depression*. Real insightful, helpful, and one of the major inspirations of this book.

Family - my mother, my father, my two brothers, my sister-in-law, my two nephews Mikael and Samuli

For listening, being there, and being the proper surrounding. This book would not be possible without you.

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THE LONELINESS

Chapter 1

The Cabinet Door, Pt. 1

The slightly hairy, tanned palm of a middle aged man ever-so-slightly missed its target and landed on a nightstand on the bedside. The resting man lifted his fist from the surface of the table, and got the job done with the next smack. Moments of a slow summer's morning rolled on by. He was sleepy, with clouded instincts, staring at the brown, as-normal-as-can-be wall of his bedroom. Time dragged along and a tired hand fell down to the side of the bed, searched for a sec and picked up a pair of jeans.

After dressing up while half-conscious, the man started - fully dressed - to drag himself out. As he opened the door of his bedroom, there was the view of the living room, which he scrolled past, to get to the kitchen. His unsure, tired eyes struggled to stay on track. *The coffee. Gotta get the coffee.*

His old ways, rehearsed in all the routine-*dulled* mornings of the past, guided him to take the coffee bag from the cabinet. He barely even noticed himself digging up a spoon and drowning it in coffee grounds. He laid his eyes on the cabinet door while executing the morning routine. It was white and figure-less, stripped of the beauty it *must'a possessed when it was just a tree somewhere. What do I give a fuck.*

He got lost in thought again, this time more aggressive ones. For a stretched second he stared at that cabinet door because it was just, a comfortable layout. *Am I gonna wake up this morning at all?*

Something snapped and he tried to remember what was in his hands. In a hurry to make up time *for some reason*, he started pouring the grounds into the coffee maker. He was so familiar with that coffee maker that *I could make coffee all day long without looking at it, even*. The eyes still hadn't left their sight from that cabinet door. *This aint funny anymore*. He looked at that coffee maker again, and there was a pile of coffee grounds that laid on top of the unopened cap. *This morning's too **long**...*

Approximately ten minutes later it was all done, he had *finally* got the *goddamn* coffee to boil. He stepped outside to greet the morning with a forced smile to the sky, *which never responds anyway...* Something reminded him to get back to his morning hurries.

As he got to the mailbox, he opened it up and saw the corner of the morning paper peaking out. He shoved his hand in the box, got the paper and started walking back. On his way he felt a small, quiet *but unpleasant* vibration next to his thigh and got the phone out of the pocket, answering:

— **Tapani Kumavaara.**

Tapani listened to restless complaint from the phone and tried to sneak a word in:

— Miska, hey... Miska! If you could... I can't help you right now, I'm in the middle of some shit.

— *This is real this time, asshole! I need your help ASAP.*

Tapani stopped walking at his front door.

— Sorry, I gotta go now, the guy just arrived.

— *What guy?*

— I'm driving this guy to the city. Listen, I gotta go now. I'll call you later.

Frustrated, he shoved the phone back in his pocket, opened the door and stepped in, made his way back to the kitchen and threw the morning paper to the table. The upper left corner of the paper met the surface of the table first, and Tapani watched the paper landing on its back.

- *--I wonder if everyone leaves their paper on the table like this? What's the traditional way people have of protecting their papers as they put them away for a little while to get a cup of coffee after a struggle like mine?*
- *What danger does this little reflex-initi--*
- *What am I doing?*

In a daze, Tapani picked up the phone again and made a call... The phone tooted. Soon, the voice bothering him outside just a minute ago, responded:

— *Hello?*

— You mean you need help right now?

— *Yeah, you wouldn't even know how... Man, I'm not sure, but I think I just heard this guy breathing, and--*

— Not on the phone. I'll meet you there in a half an hour.

— *Okay, sounds cool, but what if it--*

— You already know.

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Business as us'

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He looked at the front page of the newspaper, which read something about some Soisalo-family and their "life as a family — a renewed one."

— "I figured I could drive by your place after I drop the guy off", Tapani squeezed some final words to the phone call still going on.

There was an answer on the phone he couldn't make out, because he was so concentrated on the paper - interested in the main story. "OK", he quickly said to the phone and hung up. There was a new fascination in his eyes as he scrolled the pages of the newspaper, turning to page [18](#) for some more information.

Chapter 2

The Head

A black sedan parked in the driveway of a house with red, wooden walls – Miska's. Out of the car, came Tapani, unobtrusively wiping sweat off his forehead and proceeding to the backyard, in a hurry. The backdoor of the carage was open. *That's where he'd be.* Tapani rushed into the carage and saw Miska rolling the decapitated head of *some asshole* on the floor. Miska looked up, startled, and then recognized his friend. They both fell tacit. *This even real?*

Tapani looked at the head and felt something with no explanatory words for it. He looked his friend in the eye. A new level to the depth in the look on Miskas eyes emerged; like they were asking for help.

— "I am rather speechless." Tapani informed his buddy.

Miska continued rolling the dead head to the grass of the backyard.

— Don't fucking take it out! Where do you think it's going? Under your backyard?

— "Are there any other ideas!?" Miska shouted.

Tapani just gazed. He didn't even want to think about what he was witnessing. Miska was morose still, and he expressed that by glares at his buddy, who could care less – he was still in a mixture of amazement and fright about that human head on the floor.

— "... You got a smoke, by the way?" he asked, turning to look at his friend.

— I think I do, not sure. My mind's been racing the whole morning and I've been chain-smoking like a motherfucker.

Miska slipped his right palm into a jacket-pocket and flapped the hem of his open jacket around in search of floaters. He ripped the pack out and offered it. Tapani got it. A cigarette slid out to his palm and he placed it in between his lips, then looking inside the open pack.

— "There's three left." He stated.

— Oh, yeah, coo'.

— Here, you take one too.

— No. I'm feeling weak.

— Doesn't matter, take it now.

Miska silently consented. He put a cigarette in his mouth, and as he was toking on it, the blowin' wind made him turn his eyes, and they'd meet the sight of that human head again. He took the next small hit, blew it out against the wind.

The head fell down on its ear, and caught Tapani's attention as well.

— "Alright this has taken enough", Miska said, frustrated. "Do you have any idea what to do with this? I trust that you can say at least something... Maybe offer a more objective view, shit, I don't know what I want, but this much I do know: I *don't* wanna get--"

— "--How'd he die?" Tapani *shamelessly* interrupted.

Miska turned a tired and nervous look to his buddy, starting to explain:

— I killed him. We was having an argument about something very very... close to heart... He wasn't--

— --Yeah I don't care about your fight. You know what? I might have an idea.

— Oh *please*, do tell. Your thoughts are specifically what I've been waiting to hear the whole night and the rainy morning. And God only knows, you got those; enough to fill a book.

— "Thanks, I suppose... Well, my thoughts are: the decapitation you've already done, was the right start..." Tapani explained his side, while watching Miska put the

head back up, standing on its neck. "...A step in the right direction. But don't roll it out to the backyard! You don't even have a hole and those neighbors are bound to see you mysteriously digging a mysterious hole - which you won't be finishing in hours, *not with that back* - and you'll have to stay up the whole night doing it. Miska, these things are *doable* and all, you can do it on the low and get away with it, but please... Use your head."

— I didn't ask you here to make stupid fucking jokes.

— *Ask?*

— Oh my God...

— The first thing that you do is *stay calm*. Take in some air once in a while, focus on the slow and glorious burn of that cigarette, or whatever you're doing *at the moment*. It's all about the moment. Think about those repetitive, yet inviting, routine-esque shapes in that cloud of smoke you breathe out. Everybody has a reason for picking up this dangerous habit. Be it the guilty pleasure, temporarily clearing your throat, looking more busy or businesslike than you are, or just relaxing. Whatever the reason is, *own it*, be one with it and let it... be. Don't focus on the severed human head which you mercilessly cut off from the live human being, who probably has a family and a--

— "Stop *fucking* fucking around, you're *not funny!*" Miska yelled.

— "Alright, let's just get in now and cut it up inside", spoke Tapani, fully focused, not a sign of fatigue in his posture anymore. *Funny how that happened*.

He picked up the head and walked in the house through the garage-door, holding it. Miska was still sitting around at the exit-door. Alluva sudden, Tapani yelled at him:

— Why do you have so many rolls of garbage-bags, though? Don't bullshit me, Miska; you were planning on this. There's three of these.

— There are? Well I must'a overbought them. I can't recall. I'm stressed.

— I still don't buy it for shit that you're stressed over *taking a life*. You've done that before.

— "Will you *fucking shut the fuck up* and get in?!" Miska clapped back.

HALF AN HOUR LATER:

Tapani was standing in front of a window, at the end of the upstairs-hallway of Miska's house, smoking a cigarette. He quit oggling at the cigarette and positioned it in between his lips, took a couple of quick revitalizing tokes while simultaneously blowing out the nose, blinked and zoomed his sight into the stone courtyard. A little mumble was heard from the left. Oddly reluctant, he turned to look.

— "Holy fuck I can't do this I can't do this." He heard Miska repeat.

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There's a feeling I get

When I look to the west

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Miska walked alarmingly fast - he *rarely ran for/from anything, and was close to that now* - to the open window Tapani was having a smoke-break at. Tapani saw it, ducked out the way, but was pushed before he could.

The cigarette dropped in the midst of the long hairs of the carpet, diagonally. Neither one noticed; Tapani was checking on his buddy, who was leaning on the window, heavily and *indecisively* taking hurried breaths. With time, he started sounding like himself again, and Tapani took this chance to quickly get a word in:

But he couldn't.

— "Well?" Miska asked a rhetorical question.

— What?

— Well, be a smartass again. *Ha ha, Miska gets fits from disposing a body, ha ha ha, Miska wasn't such an old school guy after all, Miska's scared of washing dirty laundry.*

— You really should stop with that self-blaming and those suppositions. They're probably what got you carried away this time, too.

— Whatever.

— Well what do you think it comes from? Do you think it's the changing weathers, circumstances or what? Anxiety's very common, but all the more mysterious.

— You wanna know something? Huh, you smart-mouth fuck?

— "Well..." Tapani said, trying hard to do a delicate job in choosing the next word to come out of his mouth. "Shoot?"

— I've been having this for over a year. It's taken over me every time I do *this...* At one point last winter I couldn't get sleep for the death of me because of *these*. That's right, I've been a mental case for over a year! There's something for you and Samuli to gossip and laugh about to your fucking out-of-town friends.

—... What do you honestly expect me to say to that? You're blaming *me* now?

— You'll figure out something smart soon, pull in all you big fancy words and philosophies. *No one* is *totally* bored of listening to you already.

— Wasn't my input exactly what you invited me here for?

— Fuck you.

Miska stood up and looked at his friend dead in the eyes.

There was a silence before the two guys, as they stood there, facing each other, *getting nowhere*.

— "You're not even trying to listen." Tapani said, as he turned away, and started walking down the hallway.

As he was walking, he heard Miska yell out:

— You're such a fucking hypocrite!

— I hope you fucking choke next time.

Tapani left, and the house was consumed by silence, only broken by the Van Morrison record - *Astral Weeks* - playing in the background.

*"To be born again...
...To be born again...
...In another world...
...In another world...
...In another time."*

Suddenly, Miska spit a mouthful in the air, letting it land wherever it may. He caught onto his breath again, and started walking back to the room he just came out of - getting back to work.

ELSEWHERE:

Samuli Leinonen, a 26 year-old normal-height, normal-looking young gent, opened his eyes, stared at the roof of his room for a minute, closed his eyes, opened them again and kept on blinking until his throat would clear up and he was able to call out:

— Veera! You up?

— "Hold up!" Yelled a quiet, *cute* female voice from a few rooms away.

Following the instructions of the voice, Samuli got up, slow, steady. He sat on the edge of the bed, and saw Veera coming.

— "Good morning." Said she.

— "Mooorning..." Samuli muttered back at her. "My stuff, is it ready?"

— "Yeah. It is", Veera replied.

By half-an-accident, Samuli laid his eyes on a snake-tattoo that was covering his girlfriend's arm, as she asked him:

— Listen... I know it won't help your stress out, that I'm asking about work, but... Why were you so tense yesterday? Where did you--

Samuli looked at Veera *with a sense of warning in the eyes*. Silence followed.

— "No, go ahead", said Samuli *with awfully mixed signals*, while simultaneously making quick work of putting on his shirt and jumping in his pants.

— But what you need the hammer for? Samuli, really. You gotta tell me right away if the Gym's in trouble.

— It's not. Just a precaution. You know how long it's been since there was even conflict. The guys just keep on talking about how they feel pressure brewing. I know it's nothing serious; I carry it with me mostly to satisfy them.

— Alright. Well, *remember*, you call my brother right away if you need help... of any kind. I'm serious.

— "I'll keep you up to date." Samuli assured. "You're worrying over nothing."

Side by side was the way they walked themselves to the kitchen. Samuli reached to the table, took a brown paper-bag as Veera looked at him with concern. She was quiet. He reached closer to her, landed a quick *routine*-kiss on her forehead and told her:

— I'll be back pretty early. Maybe by four, if I'm lucky.

He took a gun, laying on the table next to the bag, in his right palm. Holding the bag with the other hand, the gun with the other, he walked out the front door.

ELSEWHERE:

Tapani scrolled along Miska's stone courtyard, back in the daze. **The daze.** *That's what it's referred to, now.* Miska rushed to him from the backyard, looking at him with *rehearsed bullshit* remorse.

— "Don't go anywhere now! I mean it." Miska yelled out.

Tapani stopped and turned to look. He faced those remorseful eyes and felt a sense of guilty pride.

— "Sorry..." Miska *clumsily pronounced*. "You realize I was upset, right? I don't do this everyday, and the smell... Come

on, help me, please?"

Tapani looked at the trees next to him, which were just passing by him slowly, just a minute ago... He couldn't let his eyes, or that thought, go.

Why. Why the FUCK am I paying attention to those now? Why not, say, the situation instead? Tapani! Wake Up! For real. The phone.

Tapani's phone vibrated in the front-left pocket. He reached to get it, and stopped to watch the rocks, completely forgetting Miska, who was looking at him. The colors on those stones turned... *more vivid*, as he kept looking. The sun had been coming up fast enough for the eye to notice the small differences.

— "I'm coming to Miska's. Did it happen?" Samuli's voice spoke to him from the phone.

— Huh? What you mean?

— *Miska. He told me yesterday that he might need some help early in the morning, just in case he can't keep himself under control.*

There was a silence. Tapani laid a knowing, blaming look on Miska, who was still staring.

— "Anxiety, my dick..." Tapani mumbled out to himself, too quietly for either Miska or Samuli to hear.

— *Huh?*

— "Are you coming?" Miska finally spoke up.

— "*Tapani? What's going on in there?*" Samuli's voice asked through the phone.

Tapani looked at Miska *in the eyes*, silently, leaving both his friends without an answer. It lasted a while. Miska took a cautionary step back.

— "Yeah", Tapani said to the phone in the middle of it. "He couldn't keep himself under control. Just like he told you yesterday, but neglected to tell me, even when I was cleaning up his mess. Definitely stop by."

Tapani walked past Miska, heading to the garage. Miska was quiet and awkward. Tapani stopped at the door of the

garage, turned to look at Miska with disappointment, with blame.

— You're such a fucking hypocrite.

Chapter 3

The Island of Hailuoto

— "Explain to me, Samuli - and please, spare me no boring detail - what was that episode with Miska about?"

Samuli was laying down on the bench at the gym, doing his reps. The bar came back up, with green discs on each end, and landed on its holder, above his head.

— What *episode*?

— OK, let's go ahead and pretend there isn't a two-ton elephant hanging on four wires from the roof.

— Huh?

— "*Tell me*", Tapani said, raising his voice, "who the fuck was the guy that's now laying sliced in Miska's house?"

— "Would you *fucking* relax with the voice?" Samuli got alarmed. "There could be--"

— *No*, there aren't any bugs. I scanned through the place precisely this morning. How stupid does *everybody* suddenly think I am?

— "It's not like that", Samuli said as he sat up. "I just--"

— It was a rhetoric question. Answer the fucking question.

— "Some guy he knew through his fiancée..." Said Samuli as he laid back down. "Ask him. He'll surely know."

He grabbed hold of the iron again. Tapani stood there for a couple of seconds, looking at Samuli as he put on his gloves. They slipped into his hands and Tapani was still looking. Samuli laid this grumpy look upon his friend; one that was enough of a... *enough to let me know*. Tapani walked out the door, leaving Samuli's controlled groans of hard work to echo in the room alone.

Tapani stood in the hallway, next to a set of stairs and this elevator right next to them. Lost in thought, he had stopped walking at some point. He went back to his distorted and guilty thoughts, only to have the focus broken by the door behind him. It shut. Where he was standing was a sort of a vestibule in between three hallways that went in different directions. He headed to the left, to the lounge, the center of the sports-center.

"Alright hol' up!" — he heard Samuli yell out behind him, before he could move. He stopped, turned to look, *wary of all the possible dangers of the situ-- what?*. Samuli was standing at the gym-door, a bit sweaty.

— "I didn't mean-- Just, please tell me what's it about, alright?" Tapani proposed. "Let's not start fighting now."

— "I agree totally", Samuli replied. "Okay, well... come inside first."

They walked in the gym, while Samuli was explaining:

— Miska killed some acquaintance of his fiancée's. Petra had told him she'd been raped or harassed - or some shit like that - by the guy. Some sad shit, yeah, I agree.

— "If it's true, serves the cocksucker right" Tapani said. "All rapists *should* be killed in the meanest way imaginable."

— What do you mean *if it's true*? Of course it's true, no? Miska doesn't really get riled up over... well okay, yes he does, But come on, it's not like him to *do any extras* if there isn't a solidified reason?

— Well, Miska's a known dipshit. From what I've gathered about his woman, she seems like this innocent little lady that *keeps her extra thoughts to herself* and *never has a bad thing to say at all*, but she's just the type of person that, behind the scenes, will do absolutely anything for attention. For drama to surround her. From what Miska's told me, and what I had the time to witness, she'll apply the anxiety-card, paranoia-card, fuck it, *the whole deck*, to duck anything