



BY THE AUTHOR OF *THE HEALER*

DARK AS MY HEART

ANTTI
TUOMAINEN

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About the Book

Aleksi lost his mother on a rainy October day when he was thirteen years old. 20 years later, he is certain that he knows who's responsible. Everything points to millionaire Henrik Saarinen. The police don't agree. Aleksi has only one option: to get close to Henrik Saarinen and find out the truth about his mother's fate on his own. But as Aleksi soon discovers, delving into Saarinen and his beautiful daughter's family secrets is a confusing and dangerous enterprise.

Dark As My Heart tells the story of a mother and son and the search for justice. It's a story about the cost of obsessions, the price of vengeance and the power of love. Set against a vividly conjured bleak and beautiful Finnish landscape, *Dark As My Heart* is both a Hitchcockian mystery tale and a modern Greek tragedy.

About the Author

Antti Tuomainen was born in Finland in 1971 and lives in Helsinki. His novel *The Healer* was awarded the Clue Award for Best Finnish Crime Novel. Bestselling author Sofi Oksanen has said of Tuomainen's writing: 'The ability to use all the tricks of crime fiction and all the tools of poetry makes Tuomainen's work unique.'

Lola Rogers is a Finnish to English literary translator living in Seattle. Her translations of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry including works by Riikka Pulkkinen, Sofi Oksanen, Rosa Liksom and Pasi Jääskeläinen, as well as Antti Tuomainen's prize-winning debut, *The Healer*.

Also by Antti Tuomainen

The Healer

For my mother

Dark as My Heart

Antti Tuomainen



Harvill Secker
LONDON

I sang to my dear dead mother
and she instantly understood me,
and pressing a kiss to my forehead said
as into her arms she pulled me:
'Believe then in truth, or in fantasy, -
if you'll only believe in it utterly!
For truth is what you believe it to be.
My son, believe in your dreams!'

EINO LEINO, 'Smiling Apollo'

THE BEGINNING

SHE'D MET A man and now her mouth was filling with blood. These things were connected, and yet not connected.

What had she done wrong?

Nothing she could think of.

And yet ...

Her chin stung on one side, the crushed outer fingers of her left hand cried out in pain, and it seemed there was worse to come.

It was incredible how quickly her mind was flying, the things it found, the things it saw and remembered.

A year earlier her life had changed completely. No, not completely. It changed completely thirteen years ago, when her son was born. But over the past year her life had opened up, as if a piece of paper wadded in her fist had been smoothed flat, as if a storm had moved on and the sun had risen after years below the horizon.

She'd heard that in moments of great distress you don't really feel distressed, that at the moment of death or intense panic or shock, you don't realise you're going to die. It wasn't true, of course. She was thinking with a level of clarity she'd seldom experienced before.

She even saw how beautiful everything was, everything on either side of the long, gleaming knife. Her son. Her life. In that order.

The brilliance of that thought lit up the inside of the car, its cramped and airless space tinted a feverish artificial green by the dashboard lights, as if they were in a submarine sinking for miles into deep water. But the

thought didn't remain submerged in the car. It lit up the creeping October evening outside, the thick grey veil of rain like a mist, but wetter, and freezing cold. She saw all of her thirty-two years, and she knew what was important and what wasn't.

If there had been time, she might have laughed. If there had been time, she might have thought – practical and optimistic as she was – that things could be worse. That she could have raced through her life without understanding its beauty, without seeing the wonders before her, all around her. She could have been, even now, absorbed in some inessential thing.

Instead she was fending off a knife with her hand.

The long, steel blade pierced her skin again. Her hand, narrow and delicate. The knife broad and cold. It went through her palm and into her wrist.

She said to herself again that this was happening because she'd met a man, befriended him.

She said this to herself many times. The truth of it was shocking. She'd met a man, she was fending off a knife. There could hardly have been a greater incongruity between the two, and yet the first thing led to the second. To this. She remembered an American movie where a tired policeman was trying to sum up the nature of life to his younger colleague. Anything can happen to anyone at any time, he said.

I guess so.

But still.

She thought about her son again. There were suddenly so many things she ought to talk to him about. They started to trample over each other, crowd each other out, tumbling and clashing and tripping in their rush.

Her son. He should at least know ...

How much she loved him ...

That required sacrifice.

She had to reach her hand further. That made her chest and stomach vulnerable to the swiftly swinging knife.

She lunged forward as far as the safety belt would let her. How ironic that they called it a safety belt.

Her hand got hold of something, her fingernails scratched. She scratched the side of a neck, dug her nails as deep as she could with the strength she had left. She was sure that her nails were piercing flesh, sure that she felt blood and muscle under her fingers.

This had a price. She had opened her arms. The knife struck her chest.

Her strength was running out. She couldn't feel her hands any more. A moment later she realised that they were in her lap, saw that under her fingernails – the nails that weren't broken, the fingers that weren't broken – there was skin and blood that was a different colour to her own.

That was something.

The knife stopped swinging.

The car moved.

She realised that she wasn't holding her breath. She just couldn't breathe.

She wanted to get out of the car. She thought – clearly, lucidly – that she had to get away, had to make herself get away.

And at that moment she felt as if she was flying, rushing towards the warmest, friendliest of suns.

It seemed her wish was coming true.

She was flying to her son.

TWENTY YEARS LATER

SEPTEMBER 2013

IN OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, at some other time, I would already have made my move.

I knew myself.

She was slim, her hair black and shining, thickly draped over her shoulders and down her back, her fringe short enough to show her sharply drawn brows. Against her pale, almost white skin, her hair was like raven's feathers scattered over pure drifts of snow. The same impenetrable black continued in her long, languid lashes, and in the centre of it all her blue-grey eyes gazed at me unrelentingly.

Her expression was a mixture of calm, secure superiority, and something else that I couldn't quite put my finger on at this first meeting. To do that would have required that I get up from the dark brown leather armchair, walk around the oval table of antique walnut, and sit down next to her on the overstuffed, pale gold sofa. That was something I didn't intend to do, for lots of reasons.

The first reason had to do with who she was. Her name was Amanda Saarinen and she was just setting a glass of wine down on the table. On the rim of the glass was a smudge of dark red lipstick the length and width of a little finger.

'You're the new caretaker.'

The top three buttons of her black, wide-collared blouse were undone. I had already noticed that she was a devotee of plastic surgery. There was something in the result that matched the faux antique sofa she was sitting on. The flower arrangement on the table repeated the pale yellow

and orange of the flowers and coats of arms in the wallpaper that spread behind her in both directions. She looked as if she was posed in a painting.

'You don't look like a caretaker,' she said, reaching a hand over the table. 'I forgot to introduce myself. Amanda Saarinen.'

'That's all right. Aleksi Kivi,' I said, squeezing her hand and sitting down again. 'I guessed you were Amanda. I've only been here for a week. Maybe I'll eventually start to look like a caretaker.'

She almost smiled. She was thirty-one, two years younger than me. She picked up her glass of wine again. It was eleven-thirty in the morning.

'Maintenance men are short, stocky, overgrown boys in their fifties. They wear cargo pants and belts with a hundred and fifty different keys and a Leatherman and one of those mobile phones you can use underwater. They don't listen when you talk to them. You seem to be listening to what I'm saying. How can that be?'

'I *am* listening.'

'And your fingernails are clean. Very un-caretaker-like.'

She took a sip of wine.

'And you really want to work here?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'For a change.'

Amanda looked at me.

'Sure, but a change to what?'

'Well, the renovation, for one thing. I'm a carpenter by trade and I've worked as one for almost ten years. Mostly renovations. I wanted a change to just one project. To be able to take my time and focus, do things the way they should be done.'

That last part was true. Not the whole truth, but true all the same.

'I'd like to find something I want to do, too.'

'I think that time comes when it comes.'

'I think that time's already past.'

I didn't say anything.

'What else?' she asked. 'You've been a carpenter. Anything else?'

'Not much else. I ran a second-hand bookshop for a little over a year in Kallio, near the park. It didn't work at all. I sold the books too cheap because I wanted people to read them.'

'Interesting,' Amanda said, not sounding terribly sincere.

She took another sip of wine. There was just a drop left at the bottom.

'What did they tell you about this place?' she asked.

'That it's important to the family, more of a refuge than a residence.'

'I guess you could say that. Did they tell you anything about a woman in her thirties practically living here who no longer has a single friend?'

I looked at her.

'I find that hard to believe.'

'Hard to believe that somebody is hiding herself away here, or hard to believe she has no friends?'

'Both. But then, it's none of my business.'

'I guess not,' she said quietly.

We were sitting in front of glass-paned double doors. The white of the door and window frames was fresh, just painted. Outside the windows a bright and cloudless, windy early September day made the oak and maple leaves jangle yellow, gold and rich red. Beyond the trees the sparkling sea spread to the horizon. Over it all lay a cobalt blue sky. It was nearly impossible to imagine the dark coldness of space beyond it, but it was there. Of course it was.

Amanda seemed to have forgotten that I existed. She stared out at the garden, or the sea, her expression fixed. I remembered Miia again, which made me think of what I'd

once had, and what I'd left behind to come here and do what I had to do.

I looked around. They called this the hall. A good name for seventy square metres of space, the largest room in the manor. The understated wallpaper was bordered by waist-high grey wainscoting. From the ceiling hung two identical crystal chandeliers that hadn't been lit once in the week I'd been at the house.

Although I hadn't actually been in the house. I had my own small room and kitchen at one end of an outbuilding.

'Have you met him?' Amanda asked.

'Who?'

'My father, of course.'

Of course.

'No.'

Something flashed in her eyes.

'What about Markus?'

'Markus ...'

'Yes, Markus Harmala, my father's chauffeur.'

'No. Why would he be here when Henrik isn't?'

She didn't bother to answer that question. She stared me straight in the eye.

'How many times did they interview you?' she asked.

'Three times.'

'Does that include those silly psychological tests?'

'They weren't silly. But it's four, if you count the tests.'

'My father just wants to be sure, I guess,' she said, not sounding particularly convinced. She picked up her empty glass, looked at it for a moment, then raised her eyes again.

'What were you doing when I sent for you?'

'I was on my way downstairs to check how much water is being used, since they installed the new ...'

'Right. You've got to get back to work. Naturally. I was just leaving anyway. Did I leave my car outside?'

'Yes, you did,' I said. 'If that black Range Rover is yours. It's right in front of the door.'

Amanda read my thoughts.

‘One glass of wine,’ she said with a smile. ‘I’m all right to drive.’

I saw no reason to argue with her. She got up from the sofa and pulled on her coat, and I did the same. I followed her out. The wind took hold of my hair and chilled my skin, which had grown warm, almost feverish, while I was indoors. Amanda walked with purposeful steps. Somewhere nearby the last blackbird of autumn sang. We went to her car.

‘I wanted to meet you,’ Amanda said. ‘It’s no trivial matter to me who is here taking care of the place. For many reasons.’

‘I understand,’ I said.

We stood less than a metre apart. Up close, Amanda’s eyes were hard and shiny. The wind fluttered her black hair over her face. When it blew the right way I caught a whiff of alcohol in the air.

‘See you later,’ she said, and in one smooth movement was in her car.

The Range Rover skidded over the deep brown ruts in the gravel. It disappeared into the birch woods and I took a deep breath of cleansing air, literally breathing a sigh of relief.

In other circumstances, at some other time.

Maybe.

But not now.

—

The police had rung the doorbell as I was standing in front of the television eating Weetabix. The television was on, but I wasn’t watching it.

They’d said their names, said they were from the criminal division, and asked if they could come in. I didn’t say anything. I was thirteen years old and my mouth was full of cold skimmed milk and mushy cereal.

They didn't wait for me to swallow. They stepped inside and walked to the living room. They asked me to sit down.

They were wearing suits and skinny ties with loosened knots. They looked at me with sad faces. They had blue and purple bags under their eyes, swollen and heavy. When we'd sat for a moment in silence they asked whether I had any close relatives they could call.

My mother, I said.

Anyone else, one of them asked. He had yellow teeth.

I shook my head.

Your father, the other one asked. He had the longest, shiniest forehead I'd ever seen.

I shook my head.

An aunt? Uncle? Grandma? Grandpa?

No. It was just my mother and me. We didn't need anything else.

I'll call social services, the yellow teeth said to the shiny forehead, and got up and went into the kitchen to use the phone.

I sat silently with the shiny forehead. The yellow teeth murmured on the other side of the wall. He came back and nodded to his companion. The one with the shiny forehead cleared his throat, although there was nothing in it to clear.

Your mother is missing, he said.

No, she's not, I said.

There was a sharp taste of acid and warm milk in my mouth.

We're going to take you with us. We need to talk.

At the police station a woman wearing a blue scarf around her neck sat beside me. Other than the scarf she was completely white. Her face, hair, and clothes were various shades of white. Now and then she put her hand on my shoulder. It felt strange. It wasn't my mother's hand.

The police asked her if they could continue asking me questions. The woman asked me if I was getting tired.

I said I wasn't. I wanted my mother back.

All of the questions were about her.
What had our life been like recently?
Had she met anyone?
Did she have a boyfriend?
She hadn't been threatened by anyone?
Had I seen any men around her?
Did I know anything about the men?
Had my mother been happy? Normal? Cheerful? Sad?
What had she been wearing that morning? What did she say before she left for work? How did she say what she said? Did she ever talk about people she was going to see? If so, did I remember anyone in particular?
And so on.
Weeks went by. The policemen changed but the questions were the same.
Months went by, and although the questions were the same, they came less frequently. Then they stopped altogether.
I was thirteen years old.
I knew that the police would never figure out where my mother had gone.
I still knew it.

Kalmela Manor stood on the seashore ninety-four kilometres west of Helsinki, in a spot that had been thought desirable in 1850. The estate covered a hundred and sixteen hectares, less than half of it farmland. The rest was forest, both wild and cultivated. The shoreline was a kilometre long, with a little more than a tenth of it, about a hundred and twenty metres of the eastern half, clear cut. From the long dock to the west you could see hundreds of metres of rocks and thickets broken up by at least two steep, red-grey stone cliffs.

The manor was built on a spot where the ground rose above the surrounding landscape. The house at the top of the hill dominated its surroundings and looked as large and yellow as the sun on a cloudless day. The other buildings included the outbuilding with its garage, the guest house, a boat shed, and a seaside sauna.

The farm fields were rented to locals. In September they lay bare and stubbled and, depending on the clearness of the day and the position of the sun, could appear golden-yellow, tired brown, or grey as wool felt. In the spring they would again sprout rye, oats, sugar beets, and potatoes.

There was plentiful forest in every direction, surprisingly dark and dense even in autumn.

The main building had been renovated at the turn of the millennium. It was an assortment of pale yellows beautifully complemented by the white of window frames and pillars as thick as punchbags flanking the entrance. There were two floors, eight rooms, and a professional kitchen. Downstairs was the common space. It was dominated by the large, bright hall where visitors, such as myself, were directed upon arrival. Behind the hall was a dining room and behind that, hidden from sight, was the kitchen. The kitchen pantry took up a significant amount of the ground floor.

There was also a library furnished with imposing English leather armchairs, a bar, and dark, glass-doored bookshelves on both of the long facing walls. There were a lot of books, most of them old.

All of the bedrooms were upstairs. The largest of these was made up of three of the previous bedrooms combined. It had a bathroom designed to the same scale. In the middle of the upper storey was a common room similar to the downstairs hall, though smaller, with double doors leading to a balcony.

The balcony looked out on a view of the sea. From there you could see the entire level, well-tended lawn with its standing rows of junipers, old red and gold maples, on the

right the boat shed and dock, where a white, fifteen-metre yacht was moored, and on the left the brown-planked sauna with its terrace and next to it a narrow swimming dock designed for quick dashes into the water.

Standing on the balcony you might make other observations. There were no neighbours. The wind was a constant presence. It whirled over the estate, blowing my hair around, making the woods sigh, and carrying the salty, inviting smell of the sea wherever it went, including indoors. When now and then the wind calmed a little or quieted completely, an extraordinary silence fell, broken only by human sounds.

There were two permanent residents: the cook Enni Salkola, and me. There reigned between us a sort of understanding, a camaraderie. Maybe it was something instinctive, the unspoken thought that we were there to work, unlike those who lived or visited there. There was an *us* and *them*, and that difference placed Enni and me on the same side.

On my second evening there, after spending the whole day working outside in the cool wind, as I was making my way across the dark yard to my apartment, Enni had called after me and invited me into the kitchen for an evening snack. Long, thin slices of fresh rye bread with butter and pickled whitefish, black-label Emmental cheese, and tart apples from the orchard. I was hungry. We talked a bit about our work and nearly as much about the weather, but mostly we ate. And the silence didn't feel bad. When I glanced at Enni while I was eating, she just smiled and asked if I wanted some more. I did.

Standing on the balcony I looked out at the sea. It spread blue and flat before me, as if you could walk on it. I felt the autumn wind on my arms. I checked the floorboards I'd been working on again to make sure they didn't wobble or squeak when you stepped on them. I'd wedged the loose places with small shims and sanded the floor to make

everything level. It felt good. I didn't expect anyone to be spending time outside on an autumn weekend, but this small success nevertheless pleased me.

I closed the balcony doors as I went in, swung my toolbag into my right hand, and went downstairs. I walked across the yard to the toolshed first, left my bag there, and then went to the other end of the building, where I was living.

I had my own stairs to the first-floor apartment. I didn't keep the door locked. I didn't see any reason to. I had very few possessions, and the only valuables were valuable only to me. I left my heavy work boots in the doorway, brewed some dark-roasted coffee, and made two sandwiches - Enni's rabbit pâté spread on crusty rye.

I sat by the window and looked at the weak, grey light of the afternoon multiplied in the simple lines and rough, irregular surface of the thick vase I'd placed on the windowsill.

DECEMBER 1993 – JULY 2003

I HADN'T NOTICED it before.

I could feel the social worker's gaze on my back as I walked across the small, quiet apartment to the living-room window.

The home my mother and I shared was going to be sold. I'd been told at various times and in various ways that I couldn't live there alone. I was told that I was only thirteen, that I needed adults around me, to intermediate for me. I didn't argue. I had a different opinion, but I understood that it was useless to resist. After my mother's disappearance it was all inevitable, inexorable, as if a strong, heavy hand had drawn a line between the past and the present, and there was nothing one boy could do about it.

The social worker went into the kitchen. I picked up the vase and I could feel that my mother had once held it in her hand. Maybe she got it from her own mother, a person I knew no more about than I did about anything else. Or maybe she'd found it somewhere and brought it home. In any case, her hands had held it. I went to get a T-shirt from my room to wrap the vase in.

I asked the social worker if I could stay in the apartment one night.

No, that wasn't possible.

I looked the social worker in the eye for a moment. I could tell she felt sorry for me. Everybody did. It didn't bring my mother back or explain what had happened to her.

I went into my room. It was the smallest room in the small apartment, a room of my own. I remembered how my