

Chapter 1 *A job for Munro*

‘Read these,’ said Naylor, passing three small pieces of newspaper across the table. ‘On their own they’re not much, but together . . .’ He stopped talking and looked out of his office window for a moment, half closing his eyes in thought. ‘Together,’ he continued, ‘they could mean something strange is happening.’

Ian Munro picked up the three short newspaper stories and read them carefully. Some fish were dead and nobody knew why; two people were dead – probably because some poison gas had escaped; and, there weren’t as many birds as usual in a town. If they were three stories from three different places, probably no-one would think twice. But they were three stories about the same place, Lahti, in Finland. And they were all stories from within the last eight months. In fact, the last one was dated April 14th, only a few days ago.

Munro looked across at Naylor. Naylor was a tall man with grey hair and hard bright blue eyes. He was dressed in a dark grey suit with a white shirt and a dark blue tie. Munro thought, not for the first time, how little he knew about Naylor. But then Naylor spent his working life sending people on jobs from which they might never return. Perhaps it wasn’t surprising that he didn’t seem to have a lot of friends.

‘I see what you mean,’ said Munro, sitting back in his chair. ‘What do you think is happening?’

‘I’m not sure,’ replied Naylor, looking at Munro. ‘Poison of some sort. Poison gas, maybe. Possibly someone is making it. But we don’t know who or why. Not yet anyway.’

Naylor put the three stories back into the file on his desk. As he closed it, Munro saw the name ‘Lahti’ written on the front.

‘You lived in Finland for some years, didn’t you?’ said Naylor. ‘How’s your Finnish?’

‘It’s fine,’ replied Munro. ‘People usually think I come from Lapland, north of the Arctic Circle.’

‘Good. I want you to go over there. To Lahti.’

Twenty years ago people would have called Ian Munro a spy. Today he was called a ‘foreign executive’. It was the same business really, just a different name.

Naylor continued, ‘You’re on the 12.35 plane to Helsinki, Finland. Your tickets are ready downstairs in the travel office. You’ve got a meeting in Lahti at six o’clock this evening on the steps of the church in Kirkkokatu.’

‘Who am I meeting?’ asked Munro.

‘A man called Pentti Virolainen. He has some information for us about these stories. Find out what he knows and then wait for my orders. Any questions?’

Munro had lots of questions, but he knew that Naylor would only tell him what he needed to know.

‘Just one,’ said Munro. ‘Why us? I mean it’s a Finnish problem. Why don’t we let the Finns do something about it?’

Naylor moved forward in his chair and put his hands on the table.

‘The information I have at the moment leads me to

believe that it would not be a good idea to tell the Finns what we know. I can't tell you more than that for now. It may become clear later.'

Munro said nothing. Sometimes it made the job easier if you didn't have the complete picture.