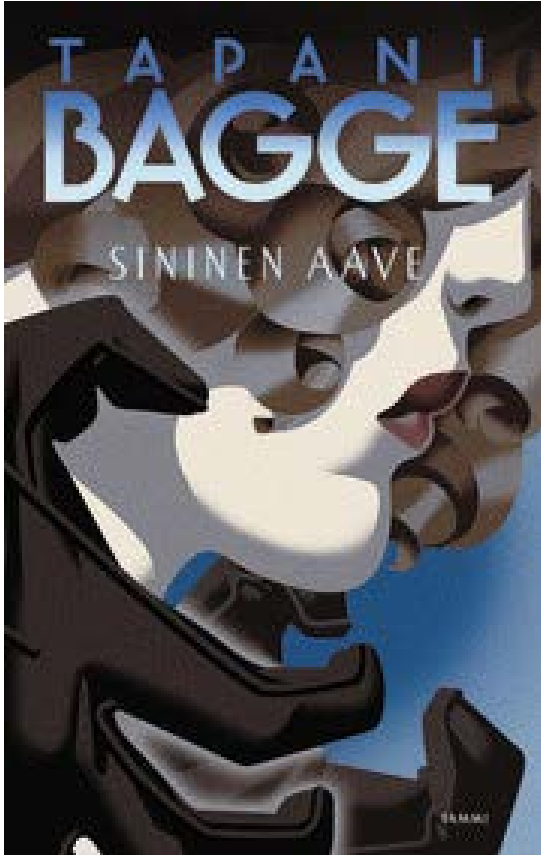


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The Blue Phantom

Written by Tapani Bagge

Publisher: Tammi, 2011

Original title: *Sininen aave*

Language: Finnish

Format: Hardcover

Length: 232 pages (40,000 Finnish words)
(~55,000 English words)

Sample translation by Owen F. Witesman

Length: 4,000 words

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FOR PUBLICATION

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Mujunen was in the center of the chaos. A chestnut horse threw its rider and began stampeding towards a little girl. Mujunen snatched the little girl up in his arms just out from under its hooves, throwing himself to the side. Panic-stricken people churned over him, the girl bit him on the finger, and the mare's hoof swept the bowler off his head. Would he be going the same way Maire had gone?¹

He had thought he had seen Anders among the protesters and tried to push his way through the crowd toward the young man. Now Anders was nowhere in sight.

Even the police horse was galloping away, hooves clattering. Mujunen tried to stand, despite the surging sea of humanity jostling him back and forth. The little girl bit him on the nose. A severe-looking working class woman kicked him in the kneecap, tore the child out of his arms, and swung a full milk can at his temple. Luckily it was only a two-liter can. Mujunen remained upright, swaying, and almost managed to dive out from under the blow of the brawny, curly blond-haired patrolman's baton. More's the pity, he ran out of space halfway. The blow thudded into his shoulder, numbing it, and was immediately followed by a second. This struck his forehead. Mujunen fell, sitting on the pavement. Behind the policemen he noticed Nikkilä from Army Intelligence, who surely recognized him, but, with a blank face, only said:

“No need to hit them quite that hard. They are Finns too after all.”

“This one certainly looks like a Russki,” the policeman with the angelic curls who was beating Mujunen said. “And sounds like one too. A hollow echo in his nut.”

“I'm a Detective Sergeant with Valpo! I'm state police!” Mujunen cried from under the protection of his bruised arm.

“I can confirm that,” Nikkilä finally said.

“But he looked so much like a Russki,” the curly-haired officer grumbled, then choosing a

¹ Translator's note: earlier in the book, the reader learns that Mujunen's wife was killed by a spooked horse.

new target for his truncheon.

Mujunen glanced around. A blond man with a Roman nose who looked like Anders was moving off through the crush of humanity towards the Lines. Mujunen plucked up his trampled bowler, reshaped it a little, and then set it on his head with both hands and took the first step after Anders. Then he received a jet of water from a fire engine in his face and against his chest and flew onto his back.

Rocks and water flew through the air; people bumped this way and that in a dense mass. And screamed. It was futile for the SPFS² shock troops to try to maintain their discipline. Mujunen scrambled upright again, his bowler lost once and for all, and found that his left knee worked, but not without agony. He could also smell smoke. The back edge of the square blazed red, but no longer from the sunset.

“Fire!”

“The wood pile is burning!”

The panic became even worse. Mujunen had to work up a sweat to make any progress towards the Lines. The others were pushing more directly away from the fire. Except for the fire brigade, whose first water jets were hissing ineffectually into the tall flames. The smoke only thickened.

When Mujunen finally reached the edge of the square and went limping up Second Line, he looked back. There weren't very many of the protesters visible anymore, but a crowd had already started to gather in the vicinity of the burning wood piles, and the patrolmen, warmed up by the riot, were driving them off with their batons. The mounted police were content to watch that the last protesters dispersed or at least didn't head off south across Longbridge. The Soviet Union's automobile delegation had also disappeared.

A shot rang out up on the rocks.

“A pistol!” a female voice cried out up ahead. “Somebody shot a pistol!”

² Translator's note: Explained in Chapter 3. The “Finland–Soviet Union Peace and Friendship Society”.

Mujunen sighed heavily. He was soaking wet, his arms and shoulders were black and blue, the marks of a little girl's teeth were imprinted on his forefinger and nose, his left knee was smashed, an old war injury was gnawing at his right ankle, and his bowler hat and Ilse's brother were missing. And then of all things he just had to run into a shooting—and Rytönen and Koho.

The duo from the newspaper were already attacking the outcropping of bedrock. Sanna Rytönen was fumbling her camera out of its bag and Ossi Koho was either digging a notepad or a flask out of his jacket pocket. He rushed after them as fast as his knee would allow.

At the point when Mujunen managed to climb high enough that he could see the scene, the incident was over. A man was lying prone on the ground, and a swarm of gawkers was standing and squatting around him.

"Mujunen, Valpo," Mujunen said, descending the gentle slope to the small flat area where the deceased lay. Or was he still alive?

"Oh, he's dead," Koho said, his index finger on the man's carotid artery and looking toward the camera. Rytönen snapped a picture.

"Who pulled the trigger?" Mujunen asked.

The people around were mostly ordinary workers who had been watching the events in the square from up here. The miscreants had already legged it.

"Lukander went after the shooter," a lady in her fifties said. "Officer Lukander that is."

"They headed off that way up Suonio Street towards the church," her husband added. Even wearing a cap the man was a full head shorter than his wife, but it didn't seem to bother them.

On Suonio Street there wasn't any sign of the pursuit. Just folks from Kallio banged up in the riot returning to their homes.

"Description?" Mujunen asked the lady, digging his notebook out of the pocket of his suit coat.

"Medium height, heavy-set, about fifty, dark hair, bug-eyed, thick mustache," the woman listed off.

“I’m sure Sergeant Mujunen didn’t mean his own description,” joked Koho, the journalist, who was standing next to the woman.

“I wasn’t describing him,” she corrected, “I was describing Lukander. The policeman.”

Mujunen felt a headache coming on. He rubbed his temples and groaned when his fingers hit the contusion left by the milk can. He opened his eyes and looked at the lady very calmly.

“And the shooter? Did you see him?”

“I didn’t see anything of him but his bald head. He was already heading up the street like a jackrabbit by the time I realized I should be looking in that direction.”

“He had on a nice, gray suit,” the husband added. “And a thick head of hair.”

“But...your wife just said the man was bald,” Mujunen huffed.

“My wife?” the man said, confused, and looked at the woman, shaking his head. “A fine lady like that!”

“Thank you,” the woman said, blushing. “I’m just Old Lady Johansson...my husband is the caretaker of the building there across the street.”

Mujunen continued his questioning. Soon more patrolmen arrived on the scene from the square, and Mujunen handed over responsibility for the questioning to them. He sent one of the men to call the switchboard from the nearest police box and request the homicide team, the police doctor, and Mononen with his hearse. Then he turned to Koho and Rytönen.

“How did you know to be here?”

“The deceased asked us to come,” the photographer, Rytönen, said.

“To witness his murder?”

“I doubt he guessed he was going to die,” Koho said. “He promised us information about Sirkka Sari’s murder.”

“Don’t forget the Kaleva,” Rytönen said.

“Or the Alamo,” Koho added.

“What the hell?” Mujunen asked. “How are those related?”

“The Alamo isn’t,” Koho confessed. “It just popped into my head.”

Mujunen waved his hand.

“You two clear off now and stop messing up the crime scene. But stay close. I’ll question you more carefully in a minute.”

A dark-haired beat cop with an imposing mustache was coming down Suonio Street to the base of the rocks. His face was as red as a fire truck, and he was almost as wet as Mujunen. Mujunen didn’t think his own eyes protruded that much, but otherwise it was hard to deny they had a lot in common.

“Got...over...the damn...wall.... He...got...away,” the police officer fumed once Mujunen had introduced himself.

“Did you recognize him?”

“I couldn’t...from behind...”

Mujunen nodded and bent down over the body. At the nape of his neck was a dark-edged hole with the hair around it singed. Mujunen turned him carefully on his side and found that the man was missing pieces of brain, his whole nose, and part of this forehead. They had undoubtedly flown some distance and already been trampled into the tall grass.

Despite these deficiencies and the spatters of blood, it was easy to identify the corpse. Mujunen had finally caught up with Ilse Anders’ little brother.

How would he tell her?

“First, the good news,” Lieutenant Henttunen said from behind his massive desk in his office on Sofia Street. He sucked flame into his pipe, waved the match, and then laid it in the ashtray. “A lot of the eyewitnesses had a sharp mental picture of the shooter. Now, the bad news: that picture was different for all of them.”

Mujunen, sitting on a worn leather sofa, didn't react one way or the other. He was looking at Henttunen but couldn't see him properly. There was too much haze in the air. Or there was something wrong with his eyes. He rubbed them, but it didn't help.

“Fortunately, you were able to identify the victim.”

“Fortunately?” Mujunen asked.

“Yes. He didn't have any kind of identification on him. Are you sure he wasn't a Jew?”

“How so?” Mujunen asked, confused.

“The nose they found in the grass was so big. Anti-Semitism could have been the motive for the murder.”

“Perhaps the killer took him for a Jew,” Mujunen admitted. “Or a friend of the Soviet Union. Or an enemy.”

“According to the eyewitnesses, they knew each other and spoke together briefly, apparently in English. Only none of the bystanders understood what they were saying.”

“Too bad.”

“Mmm,” Henttunen growled. “In any case, a dispute started, and the other one, the one who was bald or bushy-haired or had antlers, took hold of Anders' arm, twisted it behind his back, and forced him to his knees before shooting him in the neck.”

“Right there in front of people,” Mujunen observed matter-of-factly. Nothing surprised him anymore.

“If you’re brazen enough, you can do anything,” Henttunen said. “That’s plain enough from looking at Hitler. And the other dictators.”

Mujunen poured more water from the carafe and drank. There was still the taste of smoke in his throat. Smoke and ashes. After examining the deceased, the police doctor had looked him over and said that he was still alive and didn’t show any serious injuries. The bruises and scrapes and teeth marks would heal on their own, and he should take it easy on his knee for a couple of weeks. He had probably pulled a ligament.

Mujunen still hadn’t told Henttunen from where he knew Anders. He just said that Anders was indirectly connected to a Valpo case.

He would have to tell Ilse about Anders’ fate before she read about it in the paper or heard it on the radio. They still hadn’t released the victim’s nationality or name to the press, but Koho knew he was a foreigner and would undoubtedly put at least that much in the paper. There would still be room to tighten up the preliminary investigation.

“Did Anders really know something about Sirkka Sari’s death or the destruction of the Kaleva?”

The lieutenant’s question surprised Mujunen.

“What would there be to know?” Mujunen wondered aloud. At the same time, he was thinking about what Ilse might say when she heard about her brother.

Goodbye?

That night Mujunen was waiting for Ilse in her dressing room after the show. The crowd at the Grand had grown accustomed to seeing him with Ilse, and the usher let him through the locked door without a second glance. After being left alone, Mujunen sniffed the perfume and powder floating in the air. He picked up Ilse’s violet silk scarf, stroking it with his fingers and looking around as if for the last time. You never knew.

Maire had often advised him in business matters, but when he was stopping by home just now

and asked her how he should present this to Ilse, she had remained silent. Surely Maire wasn't jealous? Mujunen never would have betrayed his wife while she was alive, and hadn't for half a year after the funeral either. He had already been close with Ilse a couple of times.

The trumpet solo was picking up speed in the hall two walls away. "Mirage." Is that what this had been? He had tried to grab hold of life one more time and ended up empty handed.

Mujunen pulled the only chair in the room under himself and looked in the mirror. A beaten man. Beaten, but not broken. At least he had tried. He had something to remember during the rest of the quiet journey to his grave by Maire's side.

The touch and smell of a young woman. The softness of the lips, the warmth of the breath. The agility and power and intensity of a dancer...

The piece began to approach its conclusion. Mujunen perked up, stood, and lowered the silk scarf onto the back of the chair. At the same time his gaze fell on a book lying on the table that had been read so much its pages were like a bud bursting into bloom. *Mein Kampf*. Under it was a red, leather-bound notebook.

Mujunen was still staring at *Mein Kampf* when the door opened and Ilse rushed in. Hot, sweaty, and red-faced in her skimpy stage outfit. She was still aglow with the intoxication of the dance and immediately threw her arms around Mujunen's neck.

"How lovely! I have an admirer in my dressing room! Where are the flowers?"

"I..."

"Oh, what do I need with flowers when I have my Mujunen!"

Mujunen did not try to say anything for a moment. Ilse hugged and kissed him like he was her dearest beloved. In the end Mujunen sat down in the chair with Ilse in his lap stroking the tip of his nose with her forefinger.

"Who have you been with, with these teeth marks on your nose?"

"And my finger," Mujunen said, showing his index finger. "The thanks of a little girl for pulling her out from under the hooves of a horse."

“I thought I was your little girl,” Ilse said, looking sulky, but then she sucked on Mujunen’s finger with her lips.

Behind her the usher discreetly closed the door so the performers and stage crew walking by wouldn’t see in.

“A little girl approximately five years of age,” Mujunen clarified. “Her mother kicked me in the knee and smacked me in the head with a milk can too.”

“My hero,” Ilse breathed, smiling and kissing the contusion on his temple. Then she ran her fingers along his neck and loosened his tie. She opened his collar button, then the next. “Was it the mother who caused all of those bruises too?”

“A patrolman softened me up with his billy club. He thought I was a friend of the Soviet Union.”

“Well then I understand. You aren’t, are you?”

“No. I’m not much of a friend of Germany either.”

“Neither am I,” Ilse said and then noticed Mujunen’s eyes slide over *Mein Kampf*. “I found it in the boarding house. I haven’t even gotten through it once yet.”

“Why are you reading it at all?”

“‘Know your enemy.’ Isn’t that the saying? I’ve read Marx and Lenin too.”

Ilse shifted in Mujunen’s lap, turning towards him and sliding her left leg onto the other side of the chair. She was still smiling, and there wasn’t much of melancholy in her face anymore.

“Do you have a pistol in your pocket?”

“I’m just happy to see you.”

When Ilse went to lock the door, Mujunen quietly pleaded in his mind for Maire to forgive him. He did not even remember Ilse’s brother anymore.

Not for a little while.

8/7/1940

WEDNESDAY

12

Mujunen had seen cleaner flophouses than Hotel Pallas, but it was probably pointless expecting to see any palaces in Kallio. The old, two-story wood building with flaking, white exterior paint looked like it was perpetually wondering whether it was really worth clinging to that slope on Third Line or whether it should give up and just let itself slide down the hill.

The landlady, Salme Niemi, wasn't wondering much at all anymore. She had been going downhill for a long time already and was hastening her decline along by sustained, low-intensity tipping. She was only in her forties, but the liquor had gouged her face like water running down crumbling granite, and her voice brought to mind a poorly-greased stone crusher. However, she was a respectable citizen and a taxpayer, so she was entitled to police services and state benefits. At least so she always claimed.

Mujunen was letting her maintain this belief as long as he was able to milk her for information. He had left Karlsson to wait behind the wheel of the Citroën. On these streets it did not pay to leave such a valuable car unattended. It still had gas in its tank after all.

And the boy would only have cocked up the interrogation anyway.

“Just like I already said on the telephone, I had to go all the way to Hämeentie to call from a cafe since our line is out—surely some sort of misunderstanding—all the bills have been paid on time.... But I was just going to say that I'm sure that kike killer was living here and left his bill unpaid. He never came back last evening, even though he claimed he would be staying for several more weeks.”

“What did he look like?” Mujunen asked. There wasn't any point trying to correct her. For her, the deceased was a Jew, regardless of any evidence to the contrary. The newspaper had said

that he was a foreigner.

“Bald, but still young. Much younger than you, Mr. Detective Sergeant. Thirty and change, let’s say. I have a sharp eye. Especially with my glasses on.”

Mujunen said he believed it.

An incredibly overfed gray cat was sprawled on the counter. It had probably needed to be lifted up there. This kitty wouldn’t be much for rat hunting, even if they were pulling it by the whiskers. Judging from the condition of its nose hairs, they had actually been plucked.

“So was this Kovanen a Finn?” Mujunen asked.

“An American Finn. He spoke full Finnish, but sort of Americany. He wrote his name as William Kovanen in the register. You can look there. But he said to call him Bill. Just like some cowboy from the Wild West.”

“When did he arrive?”

“He came in the spring. In the middle of March. Supposedly he had set out to defend the land of his fathers, but had gotten stuck in Europe. At that point there wasn’t any way to get here from just about anywhere. He finally came through Petsamo on a Finnish cargo ship. And when he made it to Helsinki, the headlines about the shameful Moscow treaty were waiting for him at the newspaper stand at the station.”

Mujunen nodded.

“What did Kovanen live on here? Did he go to work?”

“Work . . .” the landlady repeated, exploding with laughter as if he had told the best joke she had ever heard. “Definitely.”

“Where?”

The woman put her thin yet wiry arms on her hips and said:

“I have one principle in the running of this hotel: I do not ask about my customers’ business, and I don’t pass that information on either.”

Unless you think it will get you something, Mujunen continued in his mind. Out loud he

asked:

“Did Kovanen have any visitors?”

“I didn’t happen to see any.”

“And what if it were to influence our compensation for your losses?”

“I still didn’t see any. I do have other things to do than keep watch on customers.”

Mujunen said he believed that too.

“Are Kovanen’s belongings still in the room?”

“I haven’t started cleaning it yet,” Niemi said and poured a little more of something clear into her glass under the counter. “I’ve been busy.”

Mujunen could see that too. She relieved her glass of some of its contents and leaned on the counter with her dirty dressing gown far too open. Dry, persistent coughing carried from somewhere in a back room. The sewage line smelled like it was backed up.

“Could I have Kovanen’s room key?”

“Are you sure the state is going to pay Kovanen’s hotel bill?”

“Just as sure as my name is Karlsson,” Mujunen declared. He was also sure there was no getting into this hotel without paying for a room in advance.

Niemi threw the key onto the counter from the wall board and raised her glass to Mujunen.

“Room 23, second floor. You may investigate it at your leisure. Just bring the key back to the counter after.”

The steep stairs creaked like an old sailing ship in a storm. Mujunen did not dare touch the railing, which was already swaying of its own accord. It also just looked that filthy.

The creaking continued in the upstairs hallway. The hall lamp failed to light no matter how he snapped the switch. Luckily it was a bright morning and some amount of light managed to get in through the window at the other end of the hallway. Mujunen had a splendid view of the old newspaper wallpapering that was tearing off in large chunks and the bulbless light socket in the ceiling.

The poison-green door of room 23 wasn't far. It was the second on the right, on the courtyard side.

The smell of sewage was noticeable all the way up here, even though the toilet was downstairs. Mujunen fitted the key in the lock and turned it. The lock clicked open. He put his hand on the sticky handle and paused for a moment to listen. Someone was snoring in the room across the hall, and one door down someone was vomiting. Farther along the hallway a loud, drunken argument was under way.

Behind door number 23 it was quiet.

With one motion Mujunen turned the handle and pulled open the door. The smell became unbearable, as if the toilet had been in that very room. Still he plunged quickly into the room because he saw the curtain swing, a dark figure disappearing behind it.

“Stop!” he cried. “Police!”

No one stopped. The window was already open, so the dark figure was trying to get out through it. Mujunen had time to grab a shoe that was just disappearing out the window. The shoe remained in his hand, but the fugitive continued on his way.

Head first.