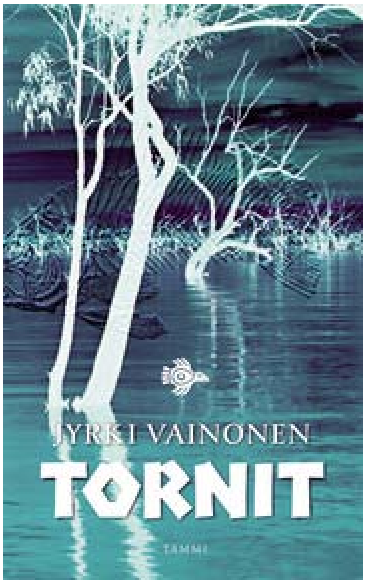

Towers

By Jyrki Vainonen

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JYRKI VAINONEN

TOWERS

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I’m learning to see.
I don’t know why;
everything just goes deeper into me,
not stopping where it used to.
There is something innermost within me,
something I was not aware of.
Now everything goes there.
I don’t know what happens there.

Rainer Maria Rilke, Malte Laurids Brigge’s memoirs
Translated into Finnish by Sinikka Kallio

PART ONE

I

The instructions are incredibly detailed. I found the paper where I guessed it would be: inside Mother's amulet. Mother had wanted to wear the pendant to the very end; probably to make sure I didn't sneak a peek at the message too soon. It felt like she was being overly defensive, considering that Mother hadn't gotten up from her wheelchair for ages. For the last six months she had only been able to move her left hand properly. She had used it to communicate various things to me, mainly her pain, hunger, and thirst. Now that hand would never move again.

I stand next to my mother, holding her final message in my hand. She must have written it a long time ago, back when she still had control of her hand. I have already read the message. I know what it says, but something inside me refuses to understand and accept.

The message was addressed to me. Her handwriting had still been clear and strong when she wrote it.

I look at my mother. She is sitting in her chair with her eyes open. Her head has slumped to the left; her chin is resting on her shoulder. Her face is limp and droopy, and her thin, almost transparent skin has a yellowish tint to it.

It is as if a light were radiating through the skin.

There sits a wise woman, a prophetess, a clairvoyant. "Do you want to know your future? To hear your fate? Madame H will tell you."

When Mother was still in good health and living a so-called normal life, people traveled vast distances to see her. So many people over the years that they could not all have been superstitious daydreamers or poor, desperate souls who were just happy that someone would give them a little bit of her time, no matter what claims that someone made about their futures. Maybe it was just coincidence that many of her predictions came true. Either way, Mother's reputation had spread far and wide. But there were still many who said, "Superstition, fraud, nonsense! Scam!"

There were always people like that, unbelievers.

I bow over to close my mother's eyes. The wrinkles around her eyes are still visible on her skin. Life has ceased coursing through the veins on the back of her hand, veins that have become like the tunnels of a subcutaneous maggot.

I look at the letter again. I hear my mother's voice; she speaks to me as if she were still alive, dictating the instructions, but all color has disappeared from her voice. "Chop me into pieces and bury me in the garden around the house. Cut me from the groin. The left leg behind the house on the east side, the right leg in front of the house on the west side. The soles of the feet toward the house."

My hand is shaking a little.

The head is supposed to be buried five feet deep, facing east, under the largest lilac bush in the garden.

Before that I am supposed to ensure that Mother's eyes are closed, if they happened to stay open when she died, and cover the top of her head with *"that* white linen cloth". The cloth was separately packed amongst Mother's things in a flat box, clean and carefully looked after. Any other cover "must *absolutely"* not be used.

"The pelvis under the elderberry bush, the pubic mound toward the sky. Pile on three feet of soil."

Then, the second-to-last piece. "When you have buried me according to these instructions, go stand in front of the steps in front of the house and three paces from the lowest step. Stand there and look away from the house, down to the river. Wait a moment. It is important that you have the patience to wait long enough. Henrik, this is a matter of life and death."

I'll say it is.

I let go of the paper. I try to forget what happened between Mother and me.

I tell myself out loud, "Henrik, you are free now.

It feels good.

I forgive you, Mother."

It feels strange to say it out loud.

I forgive you. I forgive you, because you promised that after your death I would inherit your gift of sight, as long as I follow your instructions.

That moment is now.

As I return the ax to the woodshed after doing it all, the weakness and vertigo set in. My head sways and my stomach churns. I get the shivers. I have to sit down on the stairs for quite a while before I can bring myself to wash the ax. I scour it with a rough brush. I manage to get the blade clean, but the blood has managed to soak into the wooden handle, forming dark patches that won't come off.

The dirt had been cold, moist as always in autumn, and it had a strong, earthy smell. It was loamy, fertile garden soil with the remnants of dead plants and thin yellowish roots. Some of them were tangled into thick bunches. I was forced to hack the thickest, dark-skinned roots with the blade of the shovel. I hope the lilacs don't die because of it, I remember thinking. The metal handle of the shovel felt smooth and cold; the wooden grip of the handle was warm. Every sound rang clearly in my ears as I dug, every scrape of the blade digging into the ground. A couple of times, the shovel hit a rock. I rolled the biggest rocks out of the holes. The largest of them were the size of a human head.

Mother's skin had glowed white at the bottom of the holes.

I make my way to the front of the house and come to a stop at the base of the steps. I make sure I'm three paces away from the bottom step and turn around. The river flows by down below within its banks. At the house it narrows to about 10 feet or so, but further downstream the water glided along as a steel-gray blanket, perhaps 100 feet wide. Thickets mostly grow along the edge of the river, but at our yard there are just a couple of old silver willows along the embankment.

I stand motionless, breathing deeply.

Nothing happens. I close my eyes. Nothing happens.

I wait. A minute, two, three. I open my eyes.

The leaves in the bushes and trees start to move. A drop falls on my nose. At first it is just a slow drizzle, then the first real drops start falling, and then it begins to pour. A gray veil falls over the landscape. I rush under the shelter of the porch. The rain drums on the tin roof above me and water gushes down over the eaves.

The rain continues to fall into the evening, raindrops streaking the windows. I go through Mother's things. There isn't much: a few changes of clothing, a small jewelry box, a bible and perhaps a dozen books. Mother did not collect things, because she would not get to take any of them with her where she was going, where her eternal life would begin. Mother spoke of it often and always in a voice that made it clear she had given it a lot of thought. She could not be sure if her eternal life would be in heaven or somewhere else. Even a prophet cannot see her own future. It was important to just trust that the place would be nice and that you could lead a happy life there free of worry and grief. Mother was sure about one thing, though: there was no need to prophesy there, because in a place like that there was no future and no past.

Henrik, this is happiness: living in the here and now, not reaching out in any direction.

Back then Mother had still been in good shape, living alone in her home in the city of Tepesda, in a tall apartment building. In the same building where we had moved when I was so young that I didn't remember the move at all.

One morning when Mother got up from the breakfast table, she suffered a stroke. She keeled over on the floor and lost her ability to move. The home care nurse found her later. By then Mother had been lying on the floor for five hours. The only thing that moved in her anymore was her heart. Her left hand came back to life only later.

The stroke also took away Mother's ability to speak.

She spent many weeks in the hospital. Her rehabilitation was unsuccessful; she had to be placed in a care facility. I mulled over the decision to take her out of there and bring her to live in my home for a long time. I justified the move to the authorities by highlighting the high cost of institutional care. I would bring Mother to this house, where we spent our summers when I was a child, and which I had later purchased for myself. The name of the village is Ravike.

When I drove to pick up Mother, it was a beautiful summer day. The director of the nursing home, a middle-aged chief physician, came to shake my hand and say goodbye to Mother. The doctor squeezed Mother's shoulder, bowing down and saying in a loud voice, "Isn't it wonderful to go home? You have a good son." Then she stroked Mother's hair. She said to me, "If you need any advice, you can always ask me. Or the nurses."

I pushed Mother's wheelchair out into the sun. Swallows were flitting about above the yard. Getting Mother through the back door of the car was more difficult than I had thought. She was limp and surprisingly heavy. I folded the wheelchair up. That would require more practice as well.

As I slammed the back door shut, I thought, *this is what it will be like now*. Mother looked like a lifeless heap through the glass.

She probably thought it was weird that I kept talking to her through the entire drive. After all, Mother had a quiet son, an introvert, who hadn't even learned to speak until he was five. Maybe she thought I was trying to cover up how nervous I was. I kept glancing at her in the mirror. Her face had no expression thanks to the stroke; her skin was pale and she had bags hanging under her eyes.

Her gaze seemed restless. As if she knew what was waiting for her in the empty downstairs room.

When I pushed Mother's wheelchair into the room after we arrived, and I said, "This room is yours now," her hand started to shake. I was expecting it. I took her hand, wrapped my fingers around her wrist, and squeezed hard. Her skin was damp; I could feel her pulse. *Stop. Stop that shaking.*

Out loud I said, "I thought you would be missing Elviira."

I had spread my sister's things around the room. I hadn't thrown them away when I moved away from home even though we had agreed to do so.

How long ago was that? Thirty years?

The day after the funeral, Mother had locked the door to Elviira's room and said, "This will never be opened." My sister's room turned into a veritable sealed crypt for years. Our three-bedroom apartment had shrunk into a two-bedroom. We had soon gotten used to it.

When I turned 19, I told Mother I was moving out. I was in love and wanted to move in with my fiancée Matilda. I was surprised and shocked when Mother asked me to empty out the closed room. "Since you're leaving, why don't you take everything that reminds me of Elviira on your way," Mother had decided. "Be so kind, Henrik."

It felt as if my sister moved out with me. I had packed Elviira's clothes and things, all of which had not been touched since her death. Mother fled outside and only came back in the evening. She didn't even want to glance into the empty room. She just locked it again and asked if I remembered to leave the vent open.

Now Elviira's clothes from decades ago were lying scattered around here, in the house in Ravike, all over the furniture in the room downstairs. Elviira's books were on the table, on the floor, and on the shelf. The walls were decorated with pictures she had drawn and photographs she had taken. The pictures were mostly of birds. I had hung a snapshot of the photographer herself in the middle of the feathered creatures.

Mother had liked that picture in particular.

The staging was so successful, that in Mother's eyes it would also surely look as if Elviira had just popped out of the room to go to the kitchen or the bathroom.

I released my grip. Mother's hand was still shaking. It looked to me as if her eyes were wet.

I left her alone surrounded by Elviira's things. I stuffed the shopping bags and black trash bags with Mothers things into a cupboard in the front hall without unpacking them.

You have a good son.

I remembered the doctor's words and the expression in my mother's eyes when she had heard them.

After the stroke, the three-bedroom apartment in Tepesda had been sold. I put a small ad in the paper. "Madame H will no longer be receiving visitors beginning February 1. She wishes to thank all of her customers over the years and wishes everyone a happy rest of their lives."

After the ad was published, Mother received a lot of mail from her customers, from people whose lives she had directed with her predictions. I used to read the letters to her in the evening before going to sleep.

Many told stories about how Mother saved their lives by giving them hope in times of trial. Most said that Mother's predictions came true, and some said they hadn't, at least not yet. This didn't seem to matter though, as even they said they thoroughly enjoyed their visit with the famous seer. Some wondered why she quit. They guessed she had retired.

Among Mother's things is a hand-bound book with worn leather covers. It was pushed into a nylon knee sock, all the way down into the foot. The leg of the nylon was wrapped around the book and then stretched so it could be tied. I untie the knot and spin the stocking open. My broken nail tears a hole in it.

The book feels heavy. The covers are thick; I guess there's cardboard under the brown leather.

On the first page Mother had written the words *meredasem kiramat heko jadem.* I don't know what language it is or what those words mean. They sound like a spell in some secret language, or it could just be gibberish. Perhaps Mother had chanted it as a litany during some of her sessions when she was trying to coax the future into revealing itself to her. I don't remember ever hearing it.

A quick browse through the book reveals that it contains various kinds of entries: individual words, diary-like dated passages, aphorisms, and even drawings. I find other words on the pages that are foreign to me. Are they names: Barnren, Wo? Larisa and Hilde are definitely names. I can't remember Mother ever mentioning people with these names though.

I put the book down to examine it in more detail later.

Three weeks after Mother's burial and the start of the rain, the earth swallowed my car.

Apparently the water made the ground soft and it could no longer support the weight of the car. Or maybe there always was some kind of underground void or sink hole that finally gave way under the car. All I heard was a strange swooshing sound, and I ran out to the porch to have a look. It was a hopeless sight: only the roof and an inch or two of the top of the windows was visible anymore. To top it all off, the hole was flooded with clay and water. I stood at the edge of the cave-in for a moment. I had a persistent and absurd thought about how good it was that the car windows were closed so the water couldn't get in.

Rain drops were rattling on the roof of the car.

The vehicle was a goner. It was pointless to imagine I would be able to get help to lift it out. The neighbors had already abandoned their houses, fleeing the flood. The radio had gone silent the week before, and the television had gone dark even before that. The last news I saw was about relentless rainstorms all around the country. The newscaster had explained how remote areas would have to get through on their own, because there was only enough help for the cities.

Mother, I carried out your first wish. You foresaw that the rains would come after your death, but still I did not know to expect such a deluge.

At night after dark, I again did what Mother asked me to do: I slipped into one of Mother's dresses and put on the nylons that had been wrapped around her book. I chose the darkest of the three wigs.

I sat at the table and pressed my palm hard against the tabletop. How often I had seen Mother do the same. I stared without ceasing at the crystal ball I had placed on the table, until I felt ridiculous and peeled off Mother's clothes. Childish games! Some of the paraphernalia that Mother kept was also childish. Were there really adults for whom the crystal ball worked? Or the magic wand? Of course Mother often did readings for children as well. Then, she dressed in a patchwork dress, a wig, and a wizard's hat. She waved the magic wand around and dipped the tip in magic dust in a colored glass jar. The children watched Mother's every trick carefully. Their faces were full of excitement, even fear and alarm.

Just like in Elviira's face and mine when we sat at that very table as children, watching the sparkling magic that floated as dust through the air. Mother had just predicted that we would meet our own princess and prince, and we would live long and happy lives.

At least in my sister's case, Mother was mistaken. One morning in May, my sister climbed into a bird watching tower near our house, fell from the top platform, and damaged her neck. She drowned in the water at the foot of the tower.

The photo of Elviira on the wall downstairs was taken three months before the accident. My sister, who had just turned 13, stands in the photo smiling brightly. In her hand she dangles the figure skates she had received from Mother for her birthday.

How radiant she looks!

Our little Ellie. Mommy's little princess. In the photo, my sister is sporting that infectious smile that she used to wrap Mother, and everybody else for that matter, around her little finger.

I found my sister at the foot of the tower. I had set out specifically to look for her. So I told Mother on that May morning when I showed up in front of her, drenched, shivering, and pale as a ghost. My sister's light shorts had blood on the legs and one of her striped knee socks had ripped. I was told I had particularly cried about the sock, as if the most horrible part of the tragedy had been its tear.

Later Mother explained it was caused by shock: you tend to remember irrelevant details.

I shove Mother's clothes into a trash bag and start to tie the bag closed with paper string. My hand happens upon the jewelry box. It's made of light-colored wood. There are carvings on the cover; if you follow them around you can pick out a spiral figure. Like a chopped up snake coiled with its head in the middle, at its heart. I dump the contents of the box onto the table: decorative pins; a silver ring; earrings: a brooch that has a black, smooth stone in the middle. Junk, I think, and sweep it all into a trash bag with my hand. So Mother had saved at least this much junk over the years. Not much, but something anyway. Presumably items that had memories and stories connected to them, emotions and encounters. I open the clothes sack one more time and drop the bag in there. When I close the bag again, I pull the knots as tight as I humanly can. Mother's notebook lies on the table. That I want to keep. To turn pages that Mother had turned. The rest of her estate is now in the sack.

The rain drums on the corrugated steel roof so steadily that I can't even distinguish it as a specific sound anymore.

I peek out the window. The glass is streaked with trails of drops. Outside is as dark as night. The only reason I can distinguish any details in the garden is that I know they are there. Somewhere out there Mother is being washed down the river with the rain. Under the ground, in pieces. Her feet, her hands, her pelvis. Her flesh, which desires and nerves no longer control. Her eyeballs are floating out into the sea and seeing the heaven and the earth, the clouds and the bottom of the sea, all at the same time. They are also seeing many things that Madame H never saw. Her encapsulated soul lies within those eyes and waits, ready for a new beginning. With her left eye, Mother looks into the depths, with the right she stares into the heavens. She will see everything so clearly, so widely and deeply that the world will be utterly transformed, becoming incomprehensible and foreign. She will end up in the stomach of an eel and in the intestine of a seagull; she will twist and turn, travel and fall. Mother has a large chunk of soil in her bellybutton, like the dropping of a mole. The moles are now crawling in the hollows of her innards.

Mother's world is now quiet and mute.

I walk through the rain to the river and drop the sack into the stream. In the light of my flashlight, I just manage to see the maelstrom seize the bag. It bobs upside down, twists around for a moment as if it's looking for a comfortable position, and then disappears from sight as it is swallowed by the water and the darkness.

II

Henrik has fled to the attic. Up there it is dark, the rain drumming on the steel roof. When he soon opens his eyes, he does not immediately know where he is. He had been sleeping on his arm; he has to stretch it when he wakes up, waiting for the pins and needles as the blood again starts to circulate. The pillow is squashed under his neck and his blanket is only half covering him.

Still now the boy is dreaming. He lies at the bottom of a loathsome cavity. In a shaft with watery clay and something else. He does not know what it is. Tall, dark, wiry, and muscular. Lithe. He splashes in the water.

I awake with a start. My heart is thumping. Did I hear something through my dream? I press my arms against my sides. I feel pins and needles in my right arm. It's so very dark; have to wait for my eyes to get used to it.

I slowly start to pick out details.

I'm lying in the camping bed that I set up yesterday in the attic. Or was it the day before? It felt safe to stand so close to the wall, to smell scent of sawdust and damp wood, slightly musty, a little sharp. The bed snapped open, the steel net base making a high-pitched sound, tensing and rippling for a moment. Last night I set my gear next to the bed before I went to sleep, all in careful order just in case I had to leave in a rush in the middle of the night. A full backpack wrapped in protective plastic with clothes and a few dishes—two plates, a spoon, a fork, a knife and a plastic mug—and a small travel chest welded out of sheet metal along with some smaller steel boxes with food, matches and other useful items.

I lay quietly, motionless. It smells wet; the water stinks. It is as if the darkness was sizzling. Did that wake me up?

I'm cold, although I've slept fully clothed, wearing a shirt, socks, and jogging pants. Before I fell asleep I had even tucked my pants into my socks to make sure my ankles didn't get cold. The blanket was thin, and it seemed to have absorbed some moisture during the night.

There's no heating in the attic; the whole house is chilled. The radiators have been cold for weeks. The boiler no longer hums in the basement because the oil has run out. Water has seeped through the basement walls. Dark, damp patches have appeared on the whitewash, and they are constantly spreading. A musty, damp smell that sticks to clothes has suffused the basement. It seems to get worse every day.

I stare up; I can barely make out the beams supporting the roof and the roof boards on top of them. At least they're still in place. And the roof, it's still holding, a trusted decades-old cover, made by a sheet-metal worker. It'll stand up to anything.

A window, a dark semi-circle.

When I moved up to the attic I decided not to just perch in front of the window staring out. I would cover it. Even without looking, I knew what was happening outside: the water was rising. It had already submerged the roads, fields, pastures, jetties, and porches. Only the roofs of the other houses in the village were visible, and the trees, if they were still standing, only showed their bare tops.

My house was on a small hill, on higher ground than the other houses in Ravike.

Although the flood rose quickly, the villagers only began to pack their things once the water rose to their porches and got onto the floors of the lower levels. We were used to floods; the river threatened every year. But this flood was different: the flow was at once tranquil and rapid. There was something threatening in it. Nobody had experienced rains like this before; the water rose in a day what it usually did in a week. I said nothing when the neighbors speculated about the reasons for the rain. I did not tell them the final words of my mother's last wish. "You have to wait until the rains begin."

Finally all my neighbors had fled before the flood. By families, on boats heaped to the brim. Tired and scared or bitter and angry that no one had come to our rescue.

I had stood on the porch watching the others leave. They had wondering why I wanted to stay. They warned me, shook their heads, tried to persuade me to go. They were quiet as they loaded their boats with food and the things they thought they would need while they were away.

Once the ropes had been released, the stream took hold of the boats and took them downstream where the open sea awaited, dozens of miles away. Did they ever made it that far? Would they end up in the river delta and see the open sea before them? Would there be any ships to rescue them? Did they even know where to guide their boats now that everything was under water?

The following night the stream took my boat. The old, weak rope gave away.

It had been a long time since I had heard noises caused by humans: speech, the knocking of oars on the sides of boats, or against the railing on the porch. Once, in the light of the moon, a lonely deer floated past the house. A starved animal that had given up somewhere upstream and fallen into the river. I would never forget that sight. The deer was just managing to keep its head above water. Its eyes gleamed wet and its breath discharged as steam from its nostrils.

Then—just water. Slowly flowing, brown water. The quiet, numbing sizzle of the rain.

Some time ago the house tilted on its foundation. With a quick crack the eastern corner sank. For a moment I was fixated on the thought: at most two inches. As I stood in the kitchen, I had repeated to myself: *at most two inches. Two at the most.*

The house had sunk two inches. Or the world. Or both. Only two. No problem. Many old houses tilt a little.

I lie there on my back, in the dark, and breathe calmly. I listen. What was that sound? Crackling and creaking?

I rise up on my elbows. The noise is coming from downstairs.

I sit up on the side of the bed. It's difficult because the bed gives way under my weight. The springs have stretched; they're about to give way.

As I get up, I realize what's causing the noise.

I stagger a few steps bending over; I feel about in the darkness with my hands until I reach the hatch. Thankfully I had the sense to paint the hatch white so I could find it in the dark.

There's a square hole next to the open hatch. When I kneel and bend down towards it, I feel the cool flow of air on my face. The water has broken the living room windows and is now streaming through the house unobstructed. The flood has finally worn a channel through the kitchen and the bedroom. A brown, two-foot thick blanket of water coats everything in its path with mud and muck: the floor and its moldings, the rugs, the table and chair legs. It has pushed over the lightest pieces of furniture and carried them away. In the current it twists the wooden flower table, decorative pillows, some shoes, and a wicker chair. And Elviira's clothes. It wouldn't be long until the water would rise to the level of the photographs hanging on the wall, covering Elviira's face.

I move down a few steps on the attic ladder and crouch. I can distinguish the sounds of the water, a steady murmur, and something else—creaking. The darkness is full of creaks and knocks, humming and the sound of the water flowing. Splashing and whirring and knocks, slurping and sloshing.

But creaking, that's a new sound.

The pressure of the water flow is eroding the ground around the foundation. On top of the stone foundation is a timber frame. The beams are alive, pressing against each other as the water beats against the foundation.

I stand on the steps in the dark and try to calm down.

Then comes a sudden crack. It scares me, and I almost fall. I tighten my grip and try to locate the sound. The echo of the crash is receding, still languishing somewhere in the foundation. There, where the water is eating away the ground and grinding away everything in its path. The darkness smells of mud, water, and peat, like a wet dog.

Didn't the house tilt some more?

I get back up into the attic and close the hatch tightly. The sounds from downstairs are muffled. I kick the hatch. After I reach the bed, I open the backpack; I take out the rain pants I had folded on top and pull them on over my jogging pants. I take out a sweater and a raincoat and put them on. Finally I push my feet into the rubber boots.

My hands are shaking.

I make my way to the window and press my finger through the wallpaper that I had used to cover the window and tear the paper into shreds. There's only darkness outside the window.

I lost my only working flashlight a long time ago. The light fell from my pocket into the water when I was climbing onto the roof to tie a raft to the chimney with a thick rope.

I hope to God the stream hasn't cut the rope and taken the raft as well. I built it during the first days of the flood and thought I could load it with stuff and tow it behind my boat. The logs and boards I used to build the raft were dry when I built it. They had been in the wood shed for a few years. The shed itself had been covered during the first days of the flood and then fallen over.

Another crack comes from downstairs, and the house moves. Scared, I grab the backpack and slip it on my back. I use my hands to locate the ladder on the floor and lift it against the trap door in the ceiling. As I stand on the ladder trying to open the trapdoor latches, there's a new, louder crack in the darkness.

At the same moment, the latches open.

I push the hatch with both hands. It's heavy, but it finally rises, sliding suddenly out of place and slipping from my grip, crashing as it falls from the roof and splashes into the water somewhere below, in the dark.

There's a cold wind outside, whipping the rain around.

I squeeze through the skylight onto the roof. It is difficult because of the backpack. The steps of the ladder feel sharp under my hands and feet.

Crawling. Forward, toward the chimney. That way, where those dark outlines are. Water flows down my neck. And down my back, above my waistline. The rope! At least the rope is there... and it isn't hanging limply. It's so tight that the raft must still be there, attached to the other end of the rope!

I squeeze my fingers around the rope and start to descend. The wet steel roof is slippery under my boots; the boot rubber squeals; my feet slip. I fall on my stomach, but my grip holds. The eaves! Now just carefully down along the rope. Then, onto the raft, cut the rope and—

A crack, a bang; the boy's grip gives way and he falls through the darkness and falls down on his side onto the raft. The rope wore through, rubbing against the chimney. The raft breaks away from the side of the house, being caught up in the flow.

After half an hour, the house collapses. It creaks and cracks, and then a huge crash that echoes over the water. The walls turn in on themselves, the boards shatter, the timbers grate, and the steel roof tears with a loud bang.

Henrik neither sees nor hears it. He is lying unconscious on the raft. Thankfully he didn't fall on his back on top of his backpack and hurt himself on the metal food boxes. He also packed the book into a watertight bag, a memory of me. The raft is barely visible as a small light dot in the middle of the stream, about to disappear with the river behind a bend.