

A close-up photograph of a woman's back, showing a black and red dragon tattoo on her left shoulder. She is wearing a red top. The background is a solid red color.

STIEG LARSSON IS THE  
BEST SWEDISH CRIME  
WRITER OF THE DECADE

Kristianstadbladet

# THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

## STIEG LARSSON



Winner of the Glass Key award for  
best Nordic crime novel in 2006

Salander was dressed for the day in a black t-shirt with a picture on it of E.T. with fangs, and the words "I am also an alien". She had on a black skirt that was frayed at the hem, a worn-out black, mid-length leather jacket, rivet belt, heavy Doc Marten boots, and horizontally-striped, green-and-red knee socks. She had put on make-up in a colour scheme that indicated she might be colourblind. In other words, she was exceptionally decked out.

Armansky sighed and shifted his gaze to the conservatively dressed guest with the thick glasses. Dirch Frode, a lawyer, had insisted on meeting and being able to ask questions of the employee who prepared the report. Armansky had done all he civilly could to avoid the meeting taking place, saying that Salander had a cold, was away, or swamped with other work. The lawyer replied calmly that it made no difference – the matter was not urgent and he could easily wait a couple of days. At last there was no way to avoid bringing them together. Now Frode, who seemed to be in his late sixties, was looking at Lisbeth Salander with evident fascination. Salander glowered back with an expression that did not indicate any warm feelings.

Armansky sighed and looked once more at the folder she had placed on his desk labelled CARL MIKAEL BLOMKVIST. The name was followed by a social security number, neatly printed on the cover. He said the name out loud. Herr Frode snapped out of his bewitched state and turned to Armansky.

"So what can you tell me about Mikael Blomkvist?" he said.

"This is Ms Salander, who prepared the report." Armansky hesitated a second and then went on with a smile that was intended to engender

confidence, but which sounded helplessly apologetic. "Don't be fooled by her youth. She is our absolute best researcher."

"I'm persuaded of that," Frode said in a dry tone that hinted at the opposite. "Tell me what she found out."

It was clear that Frode had no idea how to act towards Salander. He resorted to directing the question to Armansky, as if she had not been in the room. Salander blew a big bubble with her gum. Before Armansky could answer, she said, "Could you ask the client whether he would prefer the long or the short version?"

There was a brief, embarrassed silence before Frode finally turned to Salander and tried to repair the damage by assuming a friendly, avuncular tone.

"I would be grateful if the young lady would give me a verbal summary of the results."

For a moment her expression was so surprisingly hostile that it sent a cold shiver down Frode's spine. Then just as quickly her expression softened and Frode wondered whether he had imagined that look. When she began to speak she sounded like a civil servant.

"Allow me to say first that this was not a very complicated assignment, apart from the fact that the description of the task itself was somewhat vague. You wanted to know 'everything that could be dug up' about him, but gave no indication of whether there were anything in particular you were looking for. For this reason it's something of a potpourri of his life. The report is 193 pages long, but 120 pages are copies of articles he wrote or press clippings. Blomkvist is a public person with few secrets and not very much to hide."

“But he does have some secrets?” Frode said.

“Everyone has secrets,” she replied neutrally. “It’s just a matter of finding out what they are.”

“Let’s hear.”

“Mikael Blomkvist was born on 18 January, 1960, which makes him forty-three years old. He was born in Borlänge but has never lived there. His parents, Kurt and Anita Blomkvist, were around thirty-five when the child was born. Both have since died. His father was a machinery installer and moved around a good deal. His mother, as far as I could see, was never anything but a housewife. The family moved house to Stockholm when Mikael started school. He has a sister three years younger named Annika who is a lawyer. He also has some cousins, both male and female. Were you planning to serve coffee?”

This last was directed at Armansky, who hastily pumped three cups of coffee from the thermos he had ordered for the meeting. He motioned for Salander to go on.

“So in 1966 the family lived in Lilla Essingen. Blomkvist went to school first in Blomma and then to prep school on Kungsholmen. He had decent graduating marks – there are copies in the folder. During his prep school days he studied music and played bass in a rock band named Bootstrap, which actually put out a single that was played on the radio in the summer of 1979. After prep school he worked as a ticket collector in the tunnelbana, saved some money, and travelled abroad. He was away for a year, mostly bumming around Asia – India, Thailand, and a swing down to Australia. He began studying to be a journalist in Stockholm when he was twenty-one, but interrupted his studies after

the first year to do his military service as a rifleman in Kiruna in Lapland. It was some sort of macho unit, and he left with good marks. After military service he completed his journalism degree and has worked in the field ever since. How detailed do you want me to be?"

"Just tell what you think is important."

"He comes off a little like Practical Pig in *The Three Little Pigs*. So far he has been an excellent journalist. In the eighties he had a lot of temporary jobs, first in the provincial press and then in Stockholm. There's a list. His breakthrough came with the story about the Bear Gang – the bank robbers he identified."

"Kalle Blomkvist."

"He hates the nickname, which is understandable. Somebody'd get a fat lip if they ever called me Pippi Longstocking on a newspaper placard."

She cast a dark look at Armansky, who swallowed hard. On more than one occasion he had thought of Salander as precisely Pippi Longstocking. He waved for her to get on with it.

"One source declares that up to then he wanted to be a crime reporter – and he interned as one at an evening paper. But he has become known for his job as political and financial reporter. He has primarily been a freelancer, with one full-time position at an evening paper in the late eighties. He left in 1990 when he helped start the monthly magazine *Millennium*. The magazine began as a real outsider, without any big publishing company to hold its hand. Its circulation has grown and today is 21,000 copies monthly. The editorial office is on Götgatan only a few blocks from here."

"A left-wing magazine."

“That depends on how you define the concept ‘left-wing’. Millennium is generally viewed as critical of society, but I’m guessing the anarchists think it’s a wimpy bourgeois crap magazine along the lines of Arena or Ordfront, while the Moderate Students Association probably thinks that the editors are all Bolsheviks. There is nothing to indicate that Blomkvist has ever been active politically, even during the left-wing wave when he was going to prep school. While he was plugging away at the School of Journalism he was living with a girl who at the time was active in the Syndicalists and today sits in parliament as a representative of the Left party. He seems to have been given the left-wing stamp primarily because as a financial journalist he specialises in investigative reporting about corruption and shady transactions in the corporate world. He has done some devastating individual portraits of captains of industry and politicians – which were most likely well deserved – and caused a number of resignations and legal repercussions. The most well-known was the Arboga affair, which resulted in the forced resignation of a conservative politician and the sentencing of a former councillor to a year in prison for embezzlement. Calling attention to crimes can hardly be considered an indication that someone is left-wing.”

“I understand what you mean. What else?”

“He has written two books. One about the Arboga affair and one about financial journalism entitled *The Knights Templar*, which came out three years ago. I haven’t read the book, but judging from the reviews it seems to have been controversial. It prompted a good deal of debate in the media.”

“Money?” Frode said.

“He’s not rich, but he’s not starving. Income tax returns are attached to the report. He has about 250,000 SEK in the bank, in both a retirement fund and a savings account. He has an account of around 100,000 kronor that he uses as cash for working expenses, travel and such. He owns a co-op apartment that’s paid off – 700 square feet on Bellmansgatan – and he has no loans or debts. He has one other asset – some property in Sandhamn out in the archipelago. It’s a cottage of 260 square feet, furnished as a summer cabin and by the water, right in the most attractive part of the village. Apparently an uncle of his bought it in the ‘40s, when such things were still possible for normal mortals, and the cabin ended up in Blomkvist’s hands. They divided things up so that his sister got the parents’ apartment in Lilla Essingen and Blomkvist got the cabin. I have no idea what it might be worth today – certainly a few million – but on the other hand he doesn’t seem to want to sell, and he goes out to Sandhamn fairly often.”

“Income?”

“He’s part owner of Millennium, but he only takes out about 12,000 in salary each month. The rest he earns from his freelance jobs – the total varies. He had a big year three years ago when he took in around 450,000. Last year he only made 120,000 from freelance jobs.”

“He has to pay 150,000 in taxes in addition to lawyer’s fees, et cetera,” Frode said. “Let’s assume that the total is rather high. He’ll also be losing money while serving his gaol term.”

“Which means that he’s going to be cleaned out,” Salander said.

“Is he honest?”

“That’s his trust capital, so to speak. His image is to appear as the

guardian of robust morality as opposed to the business world, and he is invited pretty regularly to pontificate on television."

"There probably isn't much left of that capital after his conviction today," Frode said.

"I don't want to claim that I know exactly what demands are made on a journalist, but after this setback it will probably be a long time before Master Detective Blomkvist wins the Grand Prize for Journalism. He's really made a fool of himself this time," Salander said. "If I may make a personal comment..."

Armansky opened his eyes wide. In the years Salander had worked for him, she had never made a single personal comment in an investigation of an individual. Bone-dry facts were all that mattered to her.

"It wasn't part of my assignment to look at the question of fact in the Wennerström affair, but I did follow the trial and have to admit that I was actually flabbergasted. The thing felt wrong, and it's totally... out of character for Mikael Blomkvist to publish something that seems to be so off the wall."

Salander scratched her neck. Frode looked patient. Armansky wondered whether he might be mistaken or whether Salander really was unsure how to continue. The Salander he knew was never unsure or hesitant. Finally she seemed to make up her mind.

"Quite off the record, so to speak... I haven't studied the Wennerström affair properly, but I really think that Mikael Blomkvist was set up. I think there's something totally different in this story than what the court's verdict is indicating."

The lawyer scrutinised Salander with searching eyes, and Armansky

noticed that for the first time since she began her report, the client was showing more than a polite interest. He made a mental note that the Wennerström affair held a certain interest for Frode. Correction, Armansky thought at once, Frode was not interested in the Wennerström affair – it was when Salander hinted that Blomkvist was set up that Frode reacted.

“How do you mean, exactly?” Frode said.

“It’s speculation on my part, but I’m convinced that someone tricked him.”

“And what makes you think so?”

“Everything in Blomkvist’s background shows that he’s a very careful reporter. Every controversial revelation he published before was always well documented. I went to court one day and listened. He seemed to have given up without a fight. That doesn’t accord with his character at all. If we are to believe the court, he made up a story about Wennerström without a shred of evidence and published it like some sort of journalistic suicide bomber. That’s simply not Blomkvist’s style.”

“So what do you think happened?”

“I can only guess. Blomkvist believed in his story, but something happened along the way and the information turned out to be false. This in turn means that the source was someone he trusted or that someone deliberately fed him false information – which sounds improbably complicated. The alternative is that he was subjected to such a serious threat that he threw in the towel and would rather be seen as an incompetent idiot than fight back. But I’m just speculating, as I said.”

When Salander made an attempt to continue her account, Frode

held up his hand. He sat for a moment, drumming his fingers on the armrest of his chair before he hesitantly turned to her again.

"If we should decide to engage you to unravel the truth in the Wennerström affair... how much chance is there that you'd find out anything?"

"I can't answer that. There may not be anything to find."

"But would you be willing to make an attempt?"

She shrugged. "It's not my place to decide. I work for Herr Armansky, and he decides what jobs he wants to assign to me. And then it depends what sort of information you're looking for."

"Let me put it this way... and I take it that we're speaking in confidence?" Armansky nodded. "I don't know anything about this particular matter, but I do know beyond any doubt that in other situations Wennerström has acted dishonestly. The Wennerström case has seriously affected Mikael Blomkvist's life, and I have an interest in discerning whether there's anything in your speculations."

The conversation had taken an unexpected turn, and Armansky was instantly on the alert. What Frode was asking was for Milton Security to poke around in a case that had already been concluded. A case in which there may have been some sort of threat to the man Blomkvist, and if they took this on would risk Milton colliding with Wennerström's regiment of attorneys. Armansky was not in the least comforted by the thought of turning Salander loose in such a situation, like a cruise missile out of control.

It was not merely a matter of concern for the company. Salander had made plain that she did not want Armansky to act as some sort of

worried stepfather, and since their agreement he had been careful never to behave like one, but in reality he would never stop worrying about her. He sometimes caught himself comparing Salander to his daughters. He considered himself a good father who did not interfere unnecessarily in their lives. But he knew that he would not tolerate it if his daughters behaved like Salander or lived the life she led.

In the depths of his Croatian – or possibly Bosnian or Armenian – heart he had never been able to shed the conviction that Salander's life was heading for disaster. She seemed the perfect victim for anyone who wished her ill, and he dreaded the morning he would be awakened by the news that someone had done her harm.

"An investigation of this kind could get expensive," Armansky said, issuing a warning so as to gauge the seriousness of Frode's inquiry.

"Then we'll set a ceiling," Frode said. "I don't demand the impossible, but it's obvious that your colleague, just as you assured me, is exceedingly competent."

"Salander?" Armansky said, turning to her with a raised eyebrow.

"I'm not working on anything else right now."

"O.K. But I want us to be in agreement about the constraints of the job. Let's hear the rest of your report."

"There isn't much more apart from his private life. In 1986 he married Monica Abrahamsson and the same year they had a daughter, Pernilla. The marriage didn't last; they were divorced in 1991. Abrahamsson has remarried, but they seem to be friends still. The daughter lives with her mother and doesn't see Blomkvist often."

Frode asked for more coffee and then turned to Salander.

"You said that everyone has secrets. Did you find any?"

"I meant that all people have things they consider to be private and that they don't go around airing in public. Blomkvist is obviously a big hit with women. He's had several love affairs and a great many casual flings. But one person has kept turning up in his life over the years, and it's an unusual relationship."

"In what way?"

"Erika Berger, editor-in-chief of Millennium; upper-class girl, Swedish mother, Belgian father resident in Sweden. Berger and Blomkvist met in journalism school and have had an on-and-off relationship ever since."

"That may not be so unusual," Frode said.

"No, possibly not. But Berger happens to be married to the artist Greger Beckman, a minor celebrity who has done a lot of terrible things in public venues."

"So she's unfaithful."

"Beckman knows about their relationship. It's a situation apparently accepted by all parties concerned. Sometimes she sleeps at Blomkvist's and sometimes at home. I don't know exactly how it works, but it was probably a contributing factor to the breakup of Blomkvist's marriage to Abrahamsson."