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Harbour

Written by John Ajvide Lindqvist

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BANISHED

Where the waves thunder and the storms cry.
Where the breakers crash and the salt water whirls,
that is where the place that is ours rises from the sea.
The legacy that passes from father to son.

LENNART ALBINSSON—RÄDMANSÖ

THE SEA HAS GIVEN
AND THE SEA HAS TAKEN AWAY

Who flies there in the feather-harbour, who climbs
up there out of the black, shining waters?

GUNNAR EKELÖF—TJÄRVEN

Sea buckthorn

Three thousand years ago, Domarö was nothing but a large, flat rock sticking up out of the water, crowned by an erratic boulder the ice had left behind. One nautical mile to the east it was possible to glimpse the round shape that would later rise out of the sea and be given the name Gåvasten. Apart from that, there was nothing. It would be another thousand years before the surrounding islets and islands dared to poke their heads above the water, beginning the formation of the archipelago that goes under the name of Domarö archipelago today.

By that time the sea buckthorn had already arrived on Domarö.

Down below the enormous block left by the ice, a shoreline had formed. There in the scree the sea buckthorn worked its way along with its creeping roots, the hardy shrub finding nourishment in the rotting seaweed, growing where there was nothing to grow in, clinging to the rocks. Sea buckthorn. Toughest of the tough.

And the sea buckthorn produced new roots, crept up over the

water's edge and grew on the slopes until a metallic-green border surrounded the uninhabited shores of Domarö like a fringe. Birds snatched the fiery yellow berries that tasted of bitter oranges and flew with them to other islands, spreading the gospel of the sea buckthorn to new shores, and within a few hundred years the green fringe could be seen in all directions.

But the sea buckthorn was preparing its own destruction.

The humus formed by its rotting leaves was richer than anything the stony shores could offer, and the alder saw its chance. It set its seeds in the mulch left by the sea buckthorn, and it grew stronger and stronger. The sea buckthorn was unable to tolerate either the nitrogen-rich soil produced by the alder, or the shade from its leaves, and it withdrew down towards the water.

With the alder came other plants that needed a higher level of nutrition, competing for the available space. The sea buckthorn was relegated to a shoreline that grew far too slowly, just half a metre in a hundred years. Despite the fact that it had given birth to the other plants, the sea buckthorn was displaced and set aside.

And so it sits there at the edge of the shore, biding its time. Beneath the slender, silky green leaves there are thorns. Big thorns.

Two small people and a large rock (July 1984)

They were holding hands.

He was thirteen and she was twelve. If anyone in the gang caught sight of them, they would just die right there on the spot. They crept through the fir trees, alert to every sound and every movement as if they were on some secret

mission. In a way they were: they were going to be together, but they didn't know that yet.

It was almost ten o'clock at night, but there was still enough light in the sky for them to see each other's arms and legs as pale movements over the carpet of grass and earth still holding the warmth of the day. They didn't dare look at each other's faces. If they did, something would have to be said, and there were no words.

They had decided to go up to the rock. A little way along the track between the fir trees their hands had brushed against each other's, and one of them had taken hold, and that was it. Now they were holding hands. If anything was said, something straightforward would become difficult.

Anders' skin felt as if he had been out in the sun all day. It was hot and painful all over, and he felt dizzy, as if he had sunstroke; he was afraid of tripping over a root, afraid of his hand becoming sweaty, afraid that what he was doing was *out of order* in some way.

There were couples in the gang. Martin and Malin were together now. Malin had gone out with Joel for a while. It was OK for them to lie there kissing when everybody could see them, and Martin said he and Malin had got as far as petting down by the boathouses. Whether or not it was true, it was OK for them to say—and do—that kind of thing. Partly because they were a year older, partly because they were good-looking. Cool. It gave them licence to do a lot of things, and to use a different language too. There was no point in trying to keep up, that would be embarrassing.

You just had to sit there staring, trying to laugh in the right places. That's just how it was.

Neither Anders nor Cecilia was a loser. They weren't outsiders like Henrik and Björn—Hubba and Bubba—but they weren't part of the clique that made the rules and decided which jokes were funny, either.

For Anders and Cecilia to be walking along holding hands was utterly ridiculous. They knew this. Anders was short and borderline spindly, his brown hair too thin for him to give it any kind of style. He didn't understand how Martin and Joel did it. He'd tried slicking his hair back with gel once, but it looked weird and he'd rinsed it out before anyone saw it.

There was something flat about Cecilia. Her body was angular and her shoulders were broad, despite the fact that she was slim. Virtually no hips or breasts. Her face looked small between those broad shoulders. She had medium-length fair hair and an unusually small nose dusted with freckles. When she put her hair up in a ponytail, Anders thought she looked really pretty. Her blue eyes always looked just a little bit sad, and Anders liked that. She looked as if she knew.

Martin and Joel didn't know. Malin and Elin didn't know. They had the feeling, said the right things and were able to wear sandals without looking stupid. But they didn't know. They just did things. Sandra read books and was clever, but there was nothing in her eyes to indicate that she knew.

Cecilia knew, and Anders could see that she knew, which

proved that he knew as well. They recognised one another. He couldn't explain what it *was* that they knew, but it was something. Something about life, about how things really were.

The terrain grew steeper, and as they made their way up towards the rock the trees thinned out. In a minute or two they would have to let go of one another's hands so they'd be able to climb.

Anders stole a glance at Cecilia. She was wearing a yellow and white striped T-shirt with a wide neckline that revealed her collarbone. It was just unbelievable that she had been linked to him for what must be five minutes, that her skin had been touching his.

That she'd been his.

She had been his for five minutes. Soon they would let go, move apart and become ordinary people again. What would they say then?

Anders looked down. The ground was starting to become stony, he had to watch where he was putting his feet. Every second he was expecting Cecilia to let go, but she didn't. He thought perhaps he was holding on so tightly that she *couldn't* let go. It was an embarrassing thought, so he loosened his grip slightly. Then she let go.

He spent the two minutes it took to climb up the rock analysing whether he had, in fact, been holding her hand too tightly, or whether loosening his grip had made her think *he* was about to let go, and so she let go first.

Regardless of what he knew or did not know, he was convinced that Joel and Martin never had this kind of

problem. He wiped his hand furtively on his trousers. It was slightly stiff and sweaty.

When they reached the top of the rock, his head felt bigger than usual. The blood was humming in his ears and he was sure his face was bright red. He stared down at his chest where a little ghost looked out from a circle with a red line through it. *Ghostbusters*. It was his favourite top, and it had been washed so many times that the outline of the ghost was becoming blurred.

‘It’s so beautiful.’

Cecilia was standing at the edge of the rock looking out over the sea. They were up above the tops of the trees. Far below they could see the holiday village where almost all their friends lived. Out at sea the ferry to Finland was sailing along, a cluster of lights moving across the water. Further away and further out there were other archipelagos whose names Anders didn’t know.

He stood as close to her as he dared and said, ‘I think it’s the most beautiful thing in the world,’ and regretted it as soon as the words were out of his mouth. It was a stupid thing to say, and he tried to improve matters by adding, ‘That’s one way of looking at it’, but that wasn’t right either. He moved away from her, following the edge of the rock.

When he had walked all the way round, a distance of perhaps thirty metres, and was almost back with her, she said, ‘It’s odd, isn’t it? This rock, I mean?’

He had an answer to that. ‘It’s an erratic boulder. According to my dad, anyway.’

‘What’s that?’

He gazed out across the sea, fixed his eyes on the Gåvasten lighthouse and tried to remember what his father had told him. Anders made a sweeping movement with his arm, taking in the surrounding area. The old village, the mission, the alarm bell next to the shop.

‘Well...when there was ice. Covering everything here. The ice age. The ice picked up rocks. And when it melted, these rocks ended up all over the place.’

‘So where did they come from? Originally?’

His father had told him that as well, but he couldn’t remember what he’d said. Where could the stones have come from? He shrugged his shoulders.

‘From the north, I suppose. From the mountains. I mean, there are lots of rocks there...’

Cecilia peered over the edge. The top was almost flat, but it must have been at least ten metres deep. She said, ‘There must have been a lot of ice.’

Anders remembered a fact. He made a movement up towards the sky. ‘One kilometre. Thick.’

Cecilia wrinkled her nose, and Anders felt as if he had been stabbed in the chest. ‘Never!’ she said. ‘You’re joking?’

‘That’s what my dad says.’

‘A *kilometre*?’

‘Yes, and...you know how the islands and everything, they kind of keep on coming up out of the sea a little bit more each year?’ Cecilia nodded. ‘That’s because the ice was so heavy it kind of pushed everything down and it’s still...coming back up. Just a little bit, all the time.’

He was on a roll now. He remembered. As Cecilia was still looking at him with an interested expression, he carried on. He pointed over towards Gåvasten.

‘Two thousand years or so ago, there was only water here. The only thing that was sticking up was the lighthouse. Or the rock, I mean. The rock the lighthouse is standing on. There was no lighthouse then, of course. And this rock. Everything else was under water. In those days.’

He looked at his feet, kicking at the thin covering of moss and lichen growing on the rock. When he looked up, Cecilia was gazing out across the sea, the mainland, Domarö. She put her hand on her collarbone as if she was suddenly afraid, and said, ‘Is that *true*?’

‘I think so.’

Something altered inside his head. He started to see the same thing as Cecilia. When he and his dad had been up here the previous summer, the words had just gone into his head as facts, and even though he’d thought it was exciting, he hadn’t really *thought* about it. Seen it.

Now he could see. How *new* everything was. It had only been here for a short time. Their island, the ground on which their houses sat, even the ancient wooden boathouses down in the harbour were just pieces of Lego on the primeval mountain. His stomach contracted as if he were about to faint, vertigo from gazing down into the depths of time. He wrapped his arms around his body and suddenly he felt completely alone in the world. His eyes sought the horizon and found no comfort there. It was silent and endless.

Then he heard a sound to his left. Breathing. He turned his head and found Cecilia's face only a fraction away from his own. She looked into his eyes. And breathed. Her mouth was so close to his that he could feel her warm breath on his lips as she exhaled, a faint hint of Juicy Fruit in his nostrils.

Afterwards he would find it difficult to understand, but that's what happened: he didn't hesitate. He leaned forward and kissed her without giving it a thought. He just did it.

Her lips were tense and slightly firm. With the same inexplicable decisiveness he pushed his tongue between them. Her tongue came to meet his. It was warm and soft and he licked it. It was a completely new experience, licking something that was the same as the object doing the licking. He didn't exactly think that, but he thought something like it, and at that moment everything became uncertain and strange and he didn't know what to do.

He licked her tongue a little bit more, and part of him was enjoying it and thinking it was fantastic, while another part was thinking: *Is this what you're supposed to do? Is this right?* It couldn't be, and he suspected this was where you moved on to petting. But even though his cock was beginning to stiffen as his tongue slid over hers, there was no possibility, *not a chance*, that he was going to start...touching her like that. Not a chance. He couldn't, he didn't know how, and...no, he didn't even *want* to.

Preoccupied with these thoughts he had stopped moving his tongue without noticing. Now she was the one doing the licking. He accepted this with gratitude, the enjoyment

increased slightly, the doubts faded away. When she withdrew her tongue and kissed him in the normal way before their faces moved apart, he decided: *that went quite well.*

He had kissed a girl for the first time and it had gone well. His face was red and his legs felt weak, but it was OK. He glanced at her and she seemed to share his opinion. When he saw that she was smiling slightly, he smiled too. She noticed and her smile broadened.

For a second they gazed into each other's eyes, both smiling. Then it all got too much and they looked out to sea once again. Anders no longer thought it looked frightening in the least, he couldn't understand how he could have thought it did.

I think it's the most beautiful thing in the world.

That's what he'd said. And now it was true.

They made their way back down. When they had got past the stoniest part, they held hands again. Anders wanted to scream, he wanted to jump and smash dried-up branches against the tree trunks, something wanted to come out.

He held her hand, a happiness so enormous that it hurt bubbling away inside him.

We're together. Cecilia and me. We're together now.

Gävasten (February 2004)

'What a day. It's incredible.'

Cecilia and Anders were standing by the window in the living room, looking towards the bay. The ice was covered

with virgin snow, and the sun shone from a cloudless sky, eating away the contours of the inlet, the jetty and the shore like an over-exposed photograph.

‘Let me see, let me see!’

Maja came racing in from the kitchen, and Anders barely had time to open his mouth to warn her for the hundredth time. Then her thick socks skidded on the polished wooden floor and she landed flat on her back at his feet.

In a reflex action he bent down to comfort her, but Maja immediately rolled to one side and wriggled back a metre. Tears sprang to her eyes. She screamed, ‘Stupid stupid things!’ then tore off the socks and hurled them at the wall. Then she got up and ran back into the kitchen.

Anders and Cecilia looked at each other and sighed. They could hear Maja rummaging in the kitchen drawers.

Whose turn?

Cecilia winked and took on the task of intervening before Maja tipped the entire contents of the drawers on to the floor, or broke something. She went into the kitchen and Anders turned back to the glorious day.

‘No, Maja! Wait!’

Maja came running in from the kitchen with a pair of scissors in her hand, Cecilia right behind her. Before either of them could stop her, Maja had grabbed one of the socks and started hacking at it.

Anders seized her arms and managed to get her to drop the scissors. Her whole body was trembling with rage as she kicked out at the sock. ‘I hate you, you stupid thing!’

Anders hugged her, holding her flailing arms fast with his own. 'Maja, that doesn't help. The socks don't understand.'

Maja was a quivering bundle in his arms. 'I hate them!'

'I know, but that doesn't mean you have to...'

'I'm going to chop them up and burn them!'

'Calm down, little one. Calm down.'

Anders sat down on the sofa without loosening his grip on Maja. Cecilia sat down next to him. They spoke softly and stroked her hair and the blue velour tracksuit that was the only thing she would consent to wear. After a couple of minutes she stopped shaking, her heartbeat slowed and she relaxed in Anders' arms. He said, 'You can wear shoes instead, if you like.'

'I want to go barefoot.'

'You can't. The floor's too cold.'

'Barefoot.'

Cecilia shrugged her shoulders. Maja rarely felt cold. Even when the temperature was close to freezing she would run around outdoors in a T-shirt unless somebody said something to her. She slept eight hours a night at the most, and yet it was rare for her to fall ill or feel tired.

Cecilia held Maja's feet in her hands and blew on them. 'Well, you need to put some socks on now. We're going out.'

Maja sat upright on Anders' knee. 'Where to?'

Cecilia pointed out of the window, towards the north-east.

‘To Gåvasten. To the lighthouse.’

Maja leaned forward, screwing her eyes up into the sunlight. The old stone lighthouse was visible only as a vague rift in the sky where it met the horizon. It was about two kilometres away, and they had been waiting for a day like this so they could make the trip they had been talking about all winter.

Maja’s shoulders drooped. ‘Are we going to *walk* all that way?’

‘We thought we might ski,’ said Anders, and the words were hardly out of his mouth before Maja shot off his knee and raced into the hallway. She had been given her first pair of skis on her sixth birthday two weeks earlier, and on only her second practice outing she had done really well. She had a natural talent. Two minutes later she was back, dressed in her snowsuit, hat and gloves.

‘Come on then!’

They ignored Maja’s protests and made a picnic to eat out by the lighthouse. Coffee, chocolate and sandwiches. Then they gathered up their skiing equipment and went down to the inlet. The light was dazzling. There had been no wind for several days, and fresh snow still covered the branches of the trees. Wherever you turned there was whiteness, blinding whiteness. It was impossible to imagine that there could be warmth and greenness anywhere. Even from space the earth must look like a perfectly formed snowball, white and round.

It took a while to get Maja’s skis on because she was so excited she couldn’t stand still. Once the bindings were

tight and the straps of the poles wrapped around her hands, she immediately slid out on to the ice, shouting, 'Look at me! Look at me!'

For once they didn't need to worry as she set off on her own. Despite the fact that she had travelled a hundred metres from the jetty before Anders and Cecilia had even got their skis on, she was clearly visible as a bright red patch in the middle of all the whiteness.

It was different in the city. Maja had run off on her own several times because she had seen something or thought of something, and they had joked about fitting her with a GPS transmitter. Not that it was all that much of a joke, really; they had given it serious consideration, but it felt like overkill.

They set off. Far out on the ice Maja fell over, but she was back on her feet in no time and whizzing along. Anders and Cecilia followed in her tracks. When they had travelled about fifty metres, Anders turned around.

Their house, generally known as the Shack, lay at the edge of the point. Plumes of smoke were rising from both chimneys. Two pine trees, weighed down with snow, framed it on either side. It was a complete dump, badly built and poorly maintained, but right now, from this distance, it looked like a little paradise.

Anders struggled to get his old Nikon out of his rucksack, zoomed in and took a picture. Something to remind him when he was cursing the ill-fitting walls and sloping floors. That it was a little paradise. As well. He put the camera away and followed his family.

After a couple of minutes he caught up with them. He had intended to lead the way, making it easier for Maja and Cecilia as they followed in his tracks through the thick covering of snow, but Maja refused. She was the guide and group leader, and they were to follow her.

The ice was nothing to worry about; this was confirmed when they heard a roaring sound from the direction of the mainland. A car was heading for Domarö from the steamboat jetty in Nåten. From this distance it was no bigger than a fly. Maja stopped and stared at it.

‘Is that a *real* car?’

‘Yes,’ said Anders. ‘What else would it be?’

Maja didn’t reply, but carried on looking at the car, which was on its way towards the point on the opposite side of the island.

‘Who’s driving?’

‘Holidaymakers, probably. Wanting to go for a swim.’

Maja grinned and looked at him with that supercilious expression she sometimes wore, and said, ‘Daddy. Wanting to go for a swim? *Now?*’

Anders and Cecilia laughed. The car disappeared behind the point, leaving a thin cloud of whirling snow behind it.

‘People from Stockholm, then. I expect they’re on their way to their summer cottage to...look at the ice, or something.’

Maja seemed satisfied with this response, and turned to set off again. Then she thought of something and turned back.

‘Why aren’t we people from Stockholm, then? We live in Stockholm, after all.’

Cecilia said, ‘You and I are from Stockholm, but Daddy isn’t, not really, because his daddy wasn’t from Stockholm.’

‘My grandad?’

‘Yes.’

‘What was he, then?’

Cecilia made a vague movement with her lips and looked at Anders, who said, ‘An old fisherman.’

Maja nodded and set off towards the lighthouse, which had now become an extended blot against the bright sky.

Simon was standing on the veranda, tracking their progress through his telescope. He saw them stop and talk, saw them set off again with Maja in the lead. He smiled to himself. That was just typical of Maja. Trying so hard, working, wearing herself out. The child had a dynamo inside her, a little motor spinning away, constantly charging itself. The energy had to go somewhere.

In everything but blood he was her great-grandfather, just as he was grandfather to Anders. He had known them both before their eyes were able to focus on his face. He was an outsider, absorbed into this family that was not his own.

While he was filling the coffee machine he glanced up, from habit, at Anna-Greta’s house. He knew she had gone over to mainland to do some shopping and wouldn’t be back until the afternoon but he looked anyway, and caught himself missing her already.

More than forty years together, and he still longed to see her. That was a good thing. Perhaps it had something to do with living apart. At first he had been hurt when Anna-Greta said yes, she loved him, but no, she had no intention of moving in with him. He could carry on renting his house from her as before, and if the situation didn't suit him it was unfortunate, but so be it.

He had gone along with it, hoping that things would change in time. They did, but not in the way he had thought. Instead he was the one who changed his point of view and after about ten years he'd come to the conclusion that everything worked extremely well. The rent he paid was token. It hadn't gone up by a single krona since he first moved into the house in 1955. One thousand kronor per year. They would spend the money on a trip on the ferry to Finland, eating and drinking nothing but the best. It was a small ritual.

They weren't married—Anna-Greta felt that her marriage to Erik had been one too many—but to all intents and purposes, Simon was her husband and the children's grandfather and great-grandfather.

He went out on to the glassed-in veranda and picked up the telescope. They were still ploughing on out there, they had almost reached the lighthouse now. They had stopped, and he couldn't make out what they were doing. He was trying to adjust the focus so that he could see what they were up to, when the outside door opened.

'Hello there!'

Simon smiled. It had taken him a few years to get used

to the fact that those who lived here all year round simply came stomping into each other's houses without knocking. In the beginning he would knock on people's doors and be rewarded with a long wait. When the door finally opened, the look on the resident's face clearly said, *Why are you standing out here putting on airs and graces? Come inside.*

Boots were removed, there was the sound of throat-clearing in the porch, and Elof Lundberg walked in, wearing his cap as usual, and nodded to Simon.

'Good morning to you, sir.'

'And good morning to you.'

Elof licked his lips, which were dry from the cold, and looked around the room. What he saw didn't appear to provide him with anything worth commenting on, and he said, 'So. Any news?'

Simon shook his head. 'No. The usual aches and pains.'

Sometimes he found it amusing, but today he wasn't in the mood to stand there exchanging pleasantries with Elof until they got down to business, so he decided to flout convention. 'Is it the drill you're after?' he asked.

Elof's eyes narrowed as if this was a completely unexpected question that needed some consideration, but after thinking for a couple of seconds he said, 'The drill. Yes. I thought I might...' he nodded in the direction of the ice, '...go out and see if I have any luck.'

'It's under the steps as usual.'

The last time they had had a really icy winter, three years ago, Elof had come to borrow Simon's ice drill a

couple of times a week. Simon had said Elof was welcome to come and fetch it whenever he needed it and just put it back when he was finished. Elof had made noises indicating agreement, and had continued to come in and ask every single time.

On this occasion, his mission seemingly accomplished, Elof showed no signs of leaving. Perhaps he wanted to get warm before he set off. He nodded at the telescope in Simon's hand.

'So what are you looking at?'

Simon pointed towards the lighthouse. 'The family's out on the ice, I'm just...keeping an eye on them.'

Elof looked out of the window, but of course he couldn't see anything. 'Whereabouts are they?'

'Out by the lighthouse.'

'Out by the lighthouse?'

'Yes.'

Elof was still looking out of the window, his jaws working as if he were chewing on something invisible. Simon wanted an end to this before Elof caught the aroma of the coffee and invited himself to stay for a cup. He wanted to be left in peace. Elof pursed his lips and suddenly asked, 'Has Anders got one of those...mobile phones?'

'Yes, why?'

Elof was breathing heavily as he gazed out of the window, looking for something it was impossible to see. Simon couldn't understand what he was getting at, so he asked again.

'Why do you want to know if he's got a mobile?'

There was silence for a few seconds. Simon could hear the last of the water bubbling through the coffee machine. Elof turned away from the window and gazed at the floor as he said, 'I think you should ring him and tell him...he ought to come home now.'

'Why?'

Silence fell once again, and Simon could smell the aroma of the coffee drifting from the kitchen. Elof didn't seem to notice. He sighed and said, 'The ice can be unsafe out there.'

Simon snorted. 'But it's half a metre thick right across the bay!'

Elof sighed even more deeply and studied the pattern on the carpet. Then he did something unexpected. He raised his head, looked Simon straight in the eye and said, 'Do as I say. Ring the boy. And tell him to gather up his family. And go home.'

Simon looked into Elof's watery blue eyes. Their expression was deadly serious. Simon didn't understand what this was all about, but he had never encountered this level of seriousness, this kind of authority from Elof before. Something passed between them that he couldn't put his finger on, but it made him go over to the phone and key in the number of Anders' mobile.

'Hi, this is Anders. Leave a message after the tone.'

Simon hung up.

'He's not answering. It's probably switched off. What's this all about?'

Elof looked out across the bay once more. Then he pursed

his lips and nodded, as if he'd come to a decision. 'I expect it'll be fine.' He turned towards the hallway and said, 'I'll take the drill for a couple of hours, then.'

Simon heard the outside door open and close. A cold draught whirled around his feet. He picked up the telescope and looked out towards the lighthouse. Three little ants were just clambering up on to the rocks.

'Hang on a minute!'

Anders waved to Maja and Cecilia to get them in the right position and took a picture, two pictures, three pictures with different degrees of zoom. Maja was struggling to get away the whole time, but Cecilia held her close. It looked fantastic with the two small figures in the snow and the lighthouse towering up behind them. Anders gave them the thumbs up and stowed the camera in his rucksack once again.

Maja and Cecilia headed for the bright red door in the lighthouse wall. Anders stayed where he was with his hands in his pockets, gazing at the twenty-metre-high tower. It was built of stone. Not brick, but ordinary grey stone. A building that looked as if it could withstand just about anything.

What a job it must have been. Transporting all that stone here, lifting it, putting it in place...

'Daddy! Daddy, come on!'

Maja was standing next to the lighthouse door jumping up and down with excitement, waving her gloves in the air.

'What is it?' asked Anders as he walked towards them.

‘It’s open!’

Indeed it was. Just inside the door were a collection box and a stand containing brochures. There was a sign saying that the Archipelago Foundation welcomed visitors to Gåvasten lighthouse. Please take an information leaflet and continue up into the lighthouse, all contributions gratefully received.

Anders rooted in his pockets and found a crumpled fifty-kronor note, which he happily pushed into the empty collection box. This was better than he could have hoped for. He had never expected the lighthouse to be open, particularly in the winter.

Maja was already on her way up the stairs, Anders and Cecilia following. The worn spiral staircase was so narrow that it was impossible for two people to walk abreast. Iron shutters fastened with wing nuts covered the window openings.

Cecilia stopped. Anders could hear that she was breathing heavily. She reached out behind her back with one hand. Anders took it and asked, ‘How are you doing?’

‘OK.’

Cecilia carried on upwards as she squeezed Anders’ hand. She had a tendency towards claustrophobia, and from that point of view the lighthouse was an absolute nightmare. The thick stone walls rising up so close together swallowed every sound, and the only light came from the open door down at the bottom and a fainter source of light higher up.

After another forty or so steps it was completely dark behind them, while the light above them had grown

stronger. From somewhere up above they could hear Maja's voice, 'Hurry up! Come and see!'

The staircase ended at an open space in a wooden floor. They were standing in a circular room where a number of small windows made of thick glass let in a limited amount of light. In the middle of the room was another open door in a tower within the tower, with light pouring out.

Cecilia sat down on the floor and rubbed her hands over her face. When Anders crouched down beside her she waved dismissively. 'I'm fine. I just need to..'

Maja was shouting from inside the tower and Cecilia told him to go, she would follow shortly. Anders stroked her hair and went over to the open door, which led to another spiral staircase, this one made of iron. The light hurt his eyes as he climbed the twenty or so steps up to the heart and the brain of the lighthouse, the reflector.

Anders stopped and gazed open-mouthed. It was so beautiful.

From the darkness we ascend towards the light. He made his way up the dark staircase, and it was a shock to reach the top. Apart from a whitewashed border right at the bottom, the circular walls were made entirely of glass, and everything was sky and light. In the middle of the room stood the reflector, an obelisk made up of prisms and different coloured, geometrically precise pieces of glass. A shrine to the light.

Maja was standing with her nose and hands pressed against the glass wall. When she heard Anders coming, she pointed out across the ice, towards the north-east.

‘Daddy, what’s that?’

Anders screwed his eyes up against the brightness and looked out over the ice. He couldn’t see anything apart from the white covering, and far away on the horizon just a hint of Ledinge archipelago.

‘What do you mean?’

Maja pointed. ‘There. On the ice.’

A gust of wind made the powdery snow whirl up, moving like a spirit across the pristine surface. Anders shook his head and turned back to face the room.

‘Have you seen this?’

They examined the reflector and Anders took some pictures of Maja through the reflector, behind the reflector, in front of the reflector. The little girl and the kaleidoscope of light, refracted in all directions. When they had finished Cecilia came up the stairs, and she too was amazed.

They ate their picnic in the light room looking out across the archipelago, trying to spot familiar landmarks. Maja was interested in the graffiti on the white wall, but since some of it required explanations unsuitable for the ears of a six-year-old, Anders took out the information leaflet and started reading aloud.

The lower parts of the lighthouse had been built as early as the sixteenth century, as a platform for the beacons lit to mark the navigable channel into Stockholm. Later the tower was added and a primitive reflector was installed; at first it was illuminated using oil, then kerosene.

That was enough for Maja, and she was off down the stairs. Anders grabbed hold of her snowsuit.