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THE GIRL WHO PLAYED WITH FIRE

Stieg Larsson

Translated from the Swedish by Reg Keeland



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A Note About the Author

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PROLOGUE

She lay on her back fastened by leather straps to a narrow bed with a steel frame. The harness was tight across her rib cage. Her hands were manacled to the sides of the bed.

She had long since given up trying to free herself. She was awake, but her eyes were closed. If she opened her eyes she would find herself in darkness; the only light was a faint strip that seeped in above the door. She had a bad taste in her mouth and longed to be able to brush her teeth.

She was listening for the sound of footsteps, which would mean he was coming. She had no idea how late at night it was, but she sensed that it was getting too late for him to visit her. A sudden vibration in the bed made her open her eyes. It was as if a machine of some sort had started up somewhere in the building. After a few seconds she was no longer sure whether she was imagining it.

She marked off another day in her head.

It was the forty-third day of her imprisonment.

Her nose itched and she turned her head so that she could rub it against the pillow. She was sweating. It was airless and hot in the room. She had on a simple nightdress that was bunching up beneath her. If she moved her hips she could just hold the cloth with her first two fingers and pull the nightdress down on one side, an inch or so at a time. She did the same on the other side. But there was still a fold under the small of her back. The mattress was lumpy. Her isolation sharply amplified all the tiny sensations that she would not otherwise have noticed. The harness was loose enough that she could change position and lie on her side, but that was uncomfortable because then she had to keep one hand behind her, which made her arm keep going to sleep.

She was not afraid. But she did feel a great pent-up rage.

At the same time she was troubled by unpleasant fantasies about what was going to happen to her. She detested this helplessness. No matter how hard she tried to concentrate on something else—to pass the time and to distract her from the situation she was in—the fear came trickling out. It hovered like a cloud of gas around her, threatening to penetrate her pores and poison her. She had discovered that the most effective method of keeping the fear at bay was to fantasize about something that gave her a feeling of strength. She closed her eyes and conjured up the smell of gasoline.

He was sitting in a car with the window rolled down. She ran to the car, poured the gasoline through the window, and lit a match. It took only a moment. The flames blazed up. He writhed in agony and she heard his screams of terror and pain. She could smell burned flesh and a more acrid stench of plastic and upholstery turning to carbon in the seats.

She must have dozed off, because she did not hear the footsteps, but she was wide awake when the door opened. The light from the doorway blinded her.

He had come, at any rate.

He was tall. She did not know how old he was, but he had reddish-brown, tangled hair and a sparse goatee, and he wore glasses with black frames. He smelled of aftershave.

She hated the smell of him.

He stood at the foot of the bed and observed her for a long time.

She hated his silence.

She could see him only in silhouette from the light in the doorway. Then he spoke to her. He had a dark, clear voice that stressed, pedantically, each word.

She hated his voice.

He told her that it was her birthday and he wanted to wish her happy birthday. His tone was not unfriendly or ironical. It was neutral. She thought that he was smiling.

She hated him.

He came closer and went around to the head of the bed. He laid the back of a moist hand on her forehead and ran his fingers along her hairline in a gesture that was probably intended to be friendly. It was his birthday present to her.

She hated his touch.

She saw his mouth move, but she shut out the sound of his voice. She did not want to listen. She did not want to answer. She heard him raise his voice. A hint of irritation at her failure to respond. He talked about mutual trust. After a few minutes he stopped. She ignored his gaze. Then he shrugged and began adjusting her leather straps. He tightened the harness across her chest a bit and leaned over her.

She twisted suddenly to the left, away from him, as abruptly as she could and as far as the straps would allow. She pulled up her knees to her chin and kicked hard at his head. She aimed at his Adam's apple and the tip of her toe hit him somewhere below his jaw, but he was ready for that and turned away so it was only a light blow. She tried to kick again, but he was out of reach.

She let her legs sink back down onto the bed.

The sheet slid down onto the floor. Her nightdress had slid up above her hips.

He stood still for a long time without saying a word. Then he walked around the bed and tightened the foot restraint. She tried to pull her legs up, but he grabbed hold of one ankle, forced her knee down with his other hand, and fastened her foot with a leather strap. He went around the bed and tied down her other foot.

Now she was utterly helpless.

He picked up the sheet from the floor and covered her. He watched her in silence for two minutes. She could sense his excitement in the dark, even though he did not show it. He undoubtedly had an erection. She knew that he would reach out and touch her.

Then he turned and left, closing the door behind him. She heard him bolt it, which was totally unnecessary because she had no way of getting free from the bed.

She lay for several minutes looking at the narrow strip of light over the door. Then she moved and tried to feel how tight the straps were. She could pull her knees up a bit, but the harness and the foot restraints grew taut immediately. She relaxed. She lay still, staring at nothing.

She waited. She thought about a gasoline can and a match.

She saw him drenched with gasoline. She could actually feel the box of matches in her hand. She shook it. It rattled. She opened the box and selected a match. She heard him say something, but she shut her ears, did not listen to the words. She saw the expression on his face as she moved the match towards the striking surface. She heard the scraping sound of sulphur. It sounded like a drawn-out thunderclap. She saw the match burst into flame.

She smiled a hard smile and steeled herself.

It was her thirteenth birthday.

PART 1

Irregular Equations

DECEMBER 16–20

Equations are classified by the highest power (value of the exponent) of their unknowns. If this is one, the equation is of first degree. If this is two, the equation is of second degree, and so on. Equations of higher degree than one yield multiple possible values for their unknown quantities. These values are known as roots.

The first-degree equation (the linear equation):

$$3x-9 = 0 \text{ (root: } x = 3\text{)}$$

CHAPTER 1

Thursday, December 16–Friday, December 17

Lisbeth Salander pulled her sunglasses down to the tip of her nose and squinted from beneath the brim of her sun hat. She saw the woman from room 32 come out of the hotel side entrance and walk to one of the green-and-white-striped chaises longues beside the pool. Her gaze was fixed on the ground and her progress seemed unsteady.

Salander had seen her only at a distance. She reckoned the woman was around thirty-five, but she looked as though she could be anything from twenty-five to fifty. She had shoulder-length brown hair, an oval face, and a body that was straight out of a mail-order catalogue for lingerie. She had a black bikini, sandals, and purple-tinted sunglasses. She was American and spoke with a southern accent. She dropped a yellow sun hat next to the chaise longue and signalled to the bartender at Ella Carmichael's bar.

Salander put her book down on her lap and sipped her iced coffee before reaching for a pack of cigarettes. Without turning her head she shifted her gaze to the horizon. She could just see the Caribbean through a group of palm trees and the rhododendrons in front of the hotel. A yacht was on its way north towards St. Lucia or Dominica. Further out, she could see the outline of a grey freighter heading south in the direction of Guyana. A breeze made the morning heat bearable, but she felt a drop of sweat trickling into her eyebrow. Salander did not care for sunbathing. She had spent her days as far as possible in shade, and even now was under the awning on the terrace. And yet she was as brown as a nut. She had on khaki shorts and a black top.

She listened to the strange music from steel drums flowing out of the speakers at the bar. She could not tell the difference between Sven-Ingvars and Nick Cave, but steel drums fascinated her. It seemed hardly feasible that anyone could tune an oil barrel, and even less credible that the barrel

could make music like nothing else in the world. She thought those sounds were like magic.

She suddenly felt irritated and looked again at the woman, who had just been handed a glass of some orange-coloured drink.

It was not Lisbeth Salander's problem, but she could not comprehend why the woman stayed. For four nights, ever since the couple had arrived, Salander had listened to the muted terror being played out in the room next door to hers. She had heard crying and low, excitable voices, and sometimes the unmistakable sound of slaps. The man responsible for the blows—Salander assumed he was the woman's husband—had straight dark hair parted down the middle in an old-fashioned style, and he seemed to be in Grenada on business. What kind of business, Salander had no idea, but every morning the man appeared with his briefcase, in a jacket and tie, and had coffee in the hotel bar before he went outside to look for a taxi.

He would come back to the hotel in the late afternoon, when he took a swim and sat with his wife by the pool. They had dinner together in what on the surface seemed to be a quiet and loving way. The woman may have had a few too many drinks, but her intoxication was not obnoxious.

Each night the commotion in the next-door room had started just as Salander was going to bed with a book about the mysteries of mathematics. It did not sound like a full-on assault. As far as Salander could tell through the wall, it was one repetitive, tedious argument. The night before, Salander had not been able to contain her curiosity. She had gone out to the balcony to listen through the couple's open balcony door. For more than an hour the man had paced back and forth in the room, declaring that he was a jerk who didn't deserve her. Again and again he said that she must think he was a fraud. No, she would answer, she didn't, and she tried to calm him. He became more intense, and seemed to give her a shake. So at last she gave him the answer he wanted ... *Yes, you are a fraud.* And he immediately took this as a pretext to berate her. He called her a whore, which was an accusation that Salander would have taken measures to combat if it had been directed at her. It had not been, but nevertheless she thought for a long time about whether she ought to take some sort of action.

Salander had listened in astonishment to this rancorous bickering, which all of a sudden ended with something that sounded like a slap in the face. She had been on the point of going into the hotel corridor to kick in her neighbours' door when silence descended over the room.

Now, as she scrutinized the woman by the pool, she could see a faint bruise on her shoulder and a scrape on her hip, but no other injury.

Some months earlier Salander had read an article in a *Popular Science* that someone had left behind at Leonardo da Vinci Airport in Rome, and she developed a vague fascination with the obscure topic of spherical astronomy. On impulse she had made her way to the university bookshop in Rome to buy some of the key works on the subject. To be able to get a grasp of spherical astronomy, however, she had had to immerse herself in the deeper mysteries of mathematics. In the course of her travels in recent months she had been to other university bookshops to seek out more books.

Her studies had been unsystematic and without any real objective, at least until she wandered into the university bookshop in Miami and came out with *Dimensions in Mathematics*, by Dr. L. C. Parnault (Harvard University Press, 1999). That was just before she went down to the Florida Keys and began island-hopping through the Caribbean.

She had been to Guadeloupe (two nights in a hideous dump), Dominica (fun and relaxed, five nights), Barbados (one night at an American hotel where she felt terribly unwelcome), and St. Lucia (nine nights). She would have considered staying longer had she not made an enemy of a slow-witted young hoodlum who haunted the bar of her backstreet hotel. Finally she lost patience and whacked him on the head with a brick, checked out of the hotel, and took a ferry to St. George's, the capital of Grenada. This was a country she had never heard of before she bought her ticket for the boat.

She had come ashore on Grenada in a tropical rainstorm at 10:00 one November morning. From the *Caribbean Traveller* she learned that Grenada was known as Spice Island and was one of the world's leading producers of nutmeg. The island had a population of 120,000, but another 200,000 Grenadians lived in the United States, Canada, or Britain, which

gave some indication of the employment market in their homeland. The terrain was mountainous around a dormant volcano, Grand Etang.

Grenada was one of many small, former-British colonies. In 1795, Julian Fedon, a black planter of mixed French ancestry, led an uprising inspired by the French Revolution. Troops were sent to shoot, hang, or maim the rebels. What had shaken the colonial regime was that even poor whites, so-called *petits blancs*, had joined Fedon's rebellion without the least regard for racial boundaries. The uprising was crushed, but Fedon was never captured; he vanished into the mountainous Grand Etang and became a Robin Hood-like legend.

Some two hundred years later, in 1979, a lawyer called Maurice Bishop started a new revolution, which the guidebook said was inspired by the Communist dictatorships in Cuba and Nicaragua. But Salander was given a different picture of things when she met Philip Campbell—teacher, librarian, and Baptist preacher. She had taken a room in his guesthouse for the first few days. The gist of the story was that Bishop was a popular folk leader who had deposed an insane dictator, a UFO nutcase who had devoted part of the meagre national budget to chasing flying saucers. Bishop had lobbied for economic democracy and introduced the country's first legislation for sexual equality. And then in 1983 he was assassinated.

There followed a massacre of more than a hundred people, including the foreign minister, the minister for women's affairs, and some senior trade union leaders. Then the United States invaded the country and set up a democracy. As far as Grenada was concerned, this meant that unemployment rose from around 6 percent to almost 50 percent and the cocaine trade once more became the largest single source of income. Campbell shook his head in dismay at the description in Salander's guidebook and gave her some tips on the kinds of people and neighbourhoods she should avoid after dark.

In Salander's case, such advice normally fell on deaf ears. However, she had avoided making the acquaintance of the criminal element on Grenada by falling in love with Grand Anse Beach, just south of St. George's, a sparsely populated beach that went on for miles. There she could walk for hours without having to talk to or even encounter another living soul. She moved to the Keys, one of the few American hotels on Grand Anse, and

stayed for seven weeks, doing little more than walking on the beach and eating the local fruit, called chin-ups, which reminded her of sour Swedish gooseberries—she found them delightful.

It was the off season, and barely a third of the rooms at the Keys Hotel were occupied. The only problem was that both her peace and quiet and her preoccupation with mathematical studies had been disturbed by the subdued terror in the room next door.

• • •

Mikael Blomkvist rang the doorbell of Salander's apartment on Lundagatan. He did not expect her to open the door, but he had fallen into the habit of calling at her apartment every week or so to see whether anything had changed. He lifted the flap on the mailbox and could see the same heap of junk mail. It was late, and too dark to make out how much the pile might have grown since his last visit.

He stood on the landing for a moment before turning on his heel in frustration. He strolled leisurely to his own apartment on Bellmansgatan, put on some coffee, and looked through the evening papers before the late TV news *Rapport* came on. He was irritated and depressed not to know where Salander was. He felt stirrings of unease and wondered for the thousandth time what had happened.

He had invited Salander to his cabin in Sandhamn for the Christmas holidays. They had gone for long walks and calmly discussed the repercussions of the dramatic events in which they had both been involved over the past year, when Blomkvist went through what he came to think of as an early midlife crisis. He had been convicted of libel and spent two months in prison, his professional career as a journalist had been in the gutter, and he had resigned from his position as publisher of the magazine *Millennium* more or less in disgrace. But at that point everything had turned around. A commission to write a biography of the industrialist Henrik Vanger—which he had regarded as an absurdly well-paid form of therapy—had turned into a terrifying hunt for a serial killer.

During this manhunt he had met Salander. Blomkvist unconsciously stroked the faint scar that the noose had left beneath his left ear. Salander

had not only helped him to track down the killer—she had saved his life.

Time and again she had amazed him with her odd talents—she had a photographic memory and phenomenal computer skills. Blomkvist considered himself virtually computer illiterate, but Salander handled computers as if she had made a pact with the Devil. He had come to realize that she was a world-class hacker, and within an exclusive international community devoted to computer crime at the highest level—and not only to combatting it—she was a legend. She was known online only as *Wasp*.

It was her ability to pass freely into other people's computers that had given him the material which transformed his professional humiliation into what was to be “the Wennerström affair”—a scoop that a year later was still the subject of international police investigations into unsolved financial crimes. And Blomkvist was still being invited to appear on TV talk shows.

At the time, a year ago, he had thought of the scoop with colossal satisfaction—as vengeance and as rehabilitation. But the satisfaction had soon ebbed. Within a few weeks he was sick and tired of answering the same questions from journalists and the financial police. *I'm sorry, but I can't reveal my sources*. When a reporter from the English-language *Azerbaijan Times* had come all the way to Stockholm to ask him the same questions, it was the last straw. Blomkvist cut the interviews to a minimum, and in recent months he had relented only when the woman from *She* on TV4 talked him into it, and that had happened only because the investigation had apparently moved into a new phase.

Blomkvist's cooperation with the woman from TV4 had another dimension. She had been the first journalist to pounce on the story, and without her programme on the evening that *Millennium* released the scoop, it might not have made the impact it did. Only later did Blomkvist find out that she had had to fight tooth and nail to convince her editor to run it. There had been massive resistance to giving any prominence to “that clown” at *Millennium*, and right up to the moment she went on air, it was far from certain that the battery of company lawyers would give the story the all clear. Several of her more senior colleagues had given it a thumbs-down and told her that if she was wrong, her career was over. She stood her ground, and it became the story of the year.

She had covered the story herself that first week—after all, she was the only reporter who had thoroughly researched the subject—but some time before Christmas Blomkvist noticed that all the new angles in the story had been handed over to male colleagues. Around New Year's Blomkvist heard through the grapevine that she had been elbowed out, with the excuse that such an important story should be handled by experienced financial reporters, and not some little girl from Gotland or Bergslagen or wherever the hell she was from. The next time TV4 called, Blomkvist explained frankly that he would talk to them only if "she" asked the questions. Days of sullen silence went by before the boys at TV4 capitulated.

Blomkvist's waning interest in the Wennerström affair coincided with Salander's disappearance from his life. He still could not understand what had happened.

They had parted two days after Christmas, and he had not seen her for the rest of the week. On the day before New Year's Eve he telephoned her, but there was no answer.

On New Year's Eve he went to her apartment twice and rang the bell. The first time there had been lights on, but she had not answered the door. The second time there were no lights. On New Year's Day he called her again, and still there was no answer, but he did get a message from the telephone company saying that the subscriber could not be reached.

He had seen her twice in the next few days. When he could not get hold of her on the phone, he went to her apartment and sat down to wait on the steps beside her front door. He had brought a book with him, and he waited stubbornly for four hours before she appeared through the main entrance, just before 11:00 at night. She was carrying a brown box and stopped short when she saw him.

"Hello, Lisbeth," he said, closing his book.

She looked at him without expression, no sign of warmth or even friendship in her gaze. Then she walked past him and stuck her key in the door.

"Aren't you going to offer me a cup of coffee?" he said.

She turned and said in a low voice: "Get out of here. I don't want to see you ever again."

Then she shut the door in his face, and he heard her lock it from the inside. He was bewildered.

Three days later, he had taken the tunnelbana from Slussen to T-Centralen, and when the train stopped in Gamla Stan he looked out the window and she was standing on the platform less than two yards away. He caught sight of her at the exact moment the doors closed. For five seconds she stared right through him, as though he were nothing but air, before she turned and walked out of his field of vision as the train began to move.

The implication was unmistakable. She wanted nothing to do with him. She had cut him out of her life as surgically and decisively as she deleted files from her computer, and without explanation. She had changed her mobile phone number and did not answer her email.

Blomkvist sighed, switched off the TV, and went to the window to gaze out at City Hall.

Perhaps he was making a mistake in going to her apartment from time to time. His attitude had always been that if a woman clearly indicated that she did not want anything more to do with him, he would go on his way. Not respecting such a message would, in his eyes, show a lack of respect for her.

Blomkvist and Salander had slept together. It had been at her initiative, and the relationship had lasted for half a year. If it was her decision to end the affair—as surprisingly as she had started it—then that was OK with Blomkvist. He had no difficulty with the role of *ex-boyfriend*—if that was what he was—but Salander's total repudiation of him was astonishing.

He was not in love with her—they were about as unlike as two people could possibly be—but he was very fond of her and really missed her, as exasperating as she sometimes was. He had thought their liking was mutual. In short, he felt like an idiot.

He stood at the window a long time.

Finally he made a decision. If Salander thought so little of him that she could not even bring herself to greet him when they saw each other in the tunnelbana, then their friendship was apparently over and the damage irreparable. He would make no attempt to contact her again.

Salander looked at her watch and realized that although she was sitting, perfectly still, in the shade, she was drenched with sweat. It was 10:30. She memorized a mathematical formula three lines long and closed her book, *Dimensions in Mathematics*. Then she picked up her key and the pack of cigarettes on the table.

Her room was on the third floor, which was also the top floor of the hotel. She stripped off her clothes and got into the shower.

A green lizard eight inches long was staring at her from the wall just below the ceiling. Salander stared back but made no move to shoo it away. There were lizards everywhere on the island. They came through the blinds at the open window, under the door, or through the vent in the bathroom. She liked having company that left her alone. The water was almost ice cold, and she stayed under the shower for five minutes to cool off.

When she came back into the room she stood naked in front of the mirror on the wardrobe door and examined her body with amazement. She still weighed less than ninety pounds and stood four foot eleven. Well, there was not much she could do about that. She had doll-like, almost delicate limbs, small hands, and hardly any hips.

But now she had breasts.

All her life she had been flat-chested, as if she had never reached puberty. She thought it had looked ridiculous, and she was always uncomfortable showing herself naked.

Now, all of a sudden, she had breasts. They were by no means gigantic—that was not what she had wanted, and they would have looked ridiculous on her otherwise skinny body—but they were two solid, round breasts of medium size. The enlargement had been well done, and the proportions were reasonable. But the difference was dramatic, both for her looks and for her self-confidence.

She had spent five weeks in a clinic outside Genoa getting the implants that formed the structure of her new breasts. The clinic and the doctors there had absolutely the best reputation in all of Europe. Her own doctor, a charmingly hard-boiled woman named Alessandra Perrini, had told her that her breasts were abnormally underdeveloped, and that the enlargement could therefore be performed for medical reasons.

Recovery from the operation had not been painless, but her breasts looked and felt completely natural, and by now the scars were almost invisible. She had not regretted her decision for a second. She was pleased. Even six months later she could not walk past a mirror with her top off without stopping and feeling glad that she had improved her quality of life.

During her time at the clinic in Genoa she had also had one of her nine tattoos removed—a one-inch-long wasp—from the right side of her neck. She liked her tattoos, especially the dragon on her left shoulder blade. But the wasp was conspicuous and it made her too easy to remember and identify. Salander did not want to be remembered or identified. The tattoo had been removed by laser treatment, and when she ran her index finger over her neck she could feel the slight scarring. Closer inspection would reveal that her suntanned skin was a shade lighter where the tattoo had been, but at a glance nothing was noticeable. Altogether her stay in Genoa had cost 190,000 kronor.

Which she could afford.

She stopped dreaming in front of the mirror and put on her panties and bra. Two days after she had left the clinic in Genoa she had for the first time in her twenty-five years gone to a lingerie boutique and bought the garments she had never needed before. Since then she had turned twenty-six, and now she wore a bra with a certain amount of satisfaction.

She put on jeans and a black T-shirt with the slogan CONSIDER THIS A FAIR WARNING. She found her sandals and sun hat and slung a black bag over her shoulder.

Crossing the lobby, she heard a murmur from a small group of hotel guests at the front desk. She slowed down and pricked up her ears.

“Just how dangerous is she?” said a black woman with a loud voice and a European accent. Salander recognized her as one of a charter group from London who had been there for ten days.

Freddy McBain, the greying reception manager who always greeted Salander with a friendly smile, looked worried. He was telling them that instructions would be issued to all guests and that there was no reason to worry as long as they followed all the instructions to the letter. He was met by a hail of questions.

Salander frowned and went out to the bar, where she found Ella Carmichael behind the counter.

“What’s all that about?” she said, motioning with her thumb towards the front desk.

“Matilda is threatening to visit us.”

“Matilda?”

“Matilda is a hurricane that formed off Brazil a few weeks ago and yesterday tore straight through Paramaribo, the capital of Surinam. No-one’s quite sure what direction it’s going to take—probably further north towards the States. But if it goes on following the coast to the west, then Trinidad and Grenada will be smack in its path. So it might get a bit windy.”

“I thought the hurricane season was over.”

“It is. It’s usually September and October. But these days you never can tell, because there’s so much trouble with the climate and the greenhouse effect and all that.”

“OK. But when’s Matilda supposed to arrive?”

“Soon.”

“Is there something I should do?”

“Lisbeth, hurricanes are not for playing around with. We had one in the seventies that caused a lot of destruction here on Grenada. I was eleven years old and lived in a town up in the Grand Etang on the way to Grenville, and I will never forget that night.”

“Hmm.”

“But you don’t need to worry. Stay close to the hotel on Saturday. Pack a bag with things you wouldn’t want to lose—like that computer you’re always playing with—and be prepared to take it along if we get instructions to go down to the storm cellar. That’s all.”

“Right.”

“Would you like something to drink?”

“No thanks.”

Salander left without saying goodbye. Ella Carmichael smiled, resigned. It had taken her a couple of weeks to get used to this odd girl’s peculiar

ways and to realize that she was not being snooty—she was just very different. But she paid for her drinks without any fuss, stayed relatively sober, kept to herself, and never caused any trouble.

The traffic on Grenada consisted mainly of imaginatively decorated minibuses that operated with no particular timetable or other formalities. The shuttle ran during the daylight hours. After dark it was pretty much impossible to get around without your own car.

Salander had to wait only a few minutes on the road to St. George's before one of the buses pulled up. The driver was a Rasta, and the bus's sound system was playing "No Woman No Cry" full blast. She closed her ears, paid her dollar, and squeezed in next to a substantial woman with grey hair and two boys in school uniforms.

St. George's was located on a U-shaped bay that formed the Carenage, the inner harbour. Around the harbour rose steep hills dotted with houses and old colonial buildings, with Fort Rupert perched all the way out on the tip of a precipitous cliff.

St. George's was a compact and tight-knit town with narrow streets and many alleyways. The houses climbed up every hillside, and there was hardly a flat surface larger than the combined cricket field and racetrack on the northern edge of the town.

She got off at the harbour and walked to MacIntyre's Electronics at the top of a short, steep slope. Almost all the products sold on Grenada were imported from the United States or Britain, so they cost twice as much as they did elsewhere, but at least the shop had air-conditioning.

The extra batteries she had ordered for her Apple PowerBook (G4 titanium with a seventeen-inch screen) had finally arrived. In Miami she had bought a Palm PDA with a folding keyboard that she could use for email and easily take with her in her shoulder bag instead of dragging around her PowerBook, but it was a miserable substitute for the seventeen-inch screen. The original batteries had deteriorated and would run for only half an hour before they had to be recharged, which was a curse when she wanted to sit out on the terrace by the pool, and the electrical supply on Grenada left a lot to be desired. During the weeks she had been there, she

had experienced two long blackouts. She paid with a credit card in the name of Wasp Enterprises, stuffed the batteries in her shoulder bag, and headed back out into the midday heat.

She paid a visit to Barclays Bank and withdrew \$300, then went down to the market and bought a bunch of carrots, half a dozen mangoes, and a big bottle of mineral water. Her bag was much heavier now, and by the time she got back to the harbour she was hungry and thirsty. She considered the Nutmeg first, but the entrance to the restaurant was jammed with people already waiting. She went on to the quieter Turtleback at the other end of the harbour. There she sat on the veranda and ordered a plate of calamari and chips with a bottle of Carib, the local beer. She picked up a discarded copy of the *Grenadian Voice* and looked through it for two minutes. The only thing of interest was a dramatic article warning about the possible arrival of Matilda. The text was illustrated with a photograph showing a demolished house, a reminder of the devastation wrought by the last big hurricane to hit the island.

She folded the paper, took a swig from the bottle of Carib, and then she saw the man from room 32 come out on the veranda from the bar. He had his brown briefcase in one hand and a glass of Coca-Cola in the other. His eyes swept over her without recognition before he sat on a bench at the other end of the veranda and fixed his gaze on the water beyond.

He seemed utterly preoccupied and sat there motionless for seven minutes, Salander observed, before he raised his glass and took three deep swallows. Then he put down the glass and resumed staring out to sea. After a while she opened her bag and took out *Dimensions in Mathematics*.

All her life Salander had loved puzzles and riddles. When she was nine her mother gave her a Rubik's Cube. It had put her abilities to the test for barely forty frustrating minutes before she understood how it worked. After that she never had any difficulty solving the puzzle. She had never missed the daily newspapers' intelligence tests; five strangely shaped figures and the puzzle was how the sixth one should look. To her, the answer was always obvious.

In elementary school she had learned to add and subtract. Multiplication, division, and geometry were a natural extension. She could add up the bill in a restaurant, create an invoice, and calculate the path of an artillery shell fired at a certain speed and angle. That was easy. But before she read the article in *Popular Science* she had never been intrigued by mathematics or even thought about the fact that the multiplication table was math. It was something she memorized one afternoon at school, and she never understood why the teacher kept going on about it for the whole year.

Then, suddenly, she sensed the inexorable logic that must reside behind the reasoning and the formulas, and that led her to the mathematics section of the university bookshop. But it was not until she started on *Dimensions in Mathematics* that a whole new world opened to her. Mathematics was actually a logical puzzle with endless variations—riddles that could be solved. The trick was not to solve arithmetical problems. Five times five would always be twenty-five. The trick was to understand combinations of the various rules that made it possible to solve any mathematical problem whatsoever.

Dimensions in Mathematics was not strictly a textbook but rather a 1,200-page brick about the history of mathematics from the ancient Greeks to modern-day attempts to understand spherical astronomy. It was considered the bible of math, in a class with what the *Arithmetica* of Diophantus had meant (and still did mean) to serious mathematicians. When she opened *Dimensions in Mathematics* for the first time on the terrace of the hotel on Grand Anse Beach, she was enticed into an enchanted world of figures. This was a book written by an author who was both pedagogical and able to entertain the reader with anecdotes and astonishing problems. She could follow mathematics from Archimedes to today's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California. She had taken in the methods they used to solve problems.

Pythagoras' equation ($x^2 + y^2 = z^2$), formulated five centuries before Christ, was an epiphany. At that moment Salander understood the significance of what she had memorized in secondary school from some of the few classes she had attended. *In a right triangle, the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.* She was fascinated by Euclid's discovery in about 300 BC that a perfect number

is always a multiple of two numbers, in which one number is a power of 2 and the second consists of the difference between the next power of 2 and 1. This was a refinement of Pythagoras' equation, and she could see the endless combinations.

$$6 = 2^1x(2^2 - 1)$$

$$28 = 2^2x(2^3 - 1)$$

$$496 = 2^4x(2^5 - 1)$$

$$8,128 = 2^6x(2^7 - 1)$$

She could go on indefinitely without finding any number that would break the rule. This was a logic that appealed to her sense of the absolute. She advanced through Archimedes, Newton, Martin Gardner, and a dozen other classical mathematicians with unmitigated pleasure.

Then she came to the chapter on Pierre de Fermat, whose mathematical enigma, "Fermat's Last Theorem," had dumbfounded her for seven weeks. And that was a trifling length of time, considering that Fermat had driven mathematicians crazy for almost four hundred years before an Englishman named Andrew Wiles succeeded in unravelling the puzzle, as recently as 1993.

Fermat's theorem was a beguilingly simple task.

Pierre de Fermat was born in 1601 in Beaumont-de-Lomagne in southwestern France. He was not even a mathematician; he was a civil servant who devoted himself to mathematics as a hobby. He was regarded as one of the most gifted self-taught mathematicians who ever lived. Like Salander, he enjoyed solving puzzles and riddles. He found it particularly amusing to tease other mathematicians by devising problems without supplying the solutions. The philosopher Descartes referred to Fermat by many derogatory epithets, and his English colleague John Wallis called him "that damned Frenchman."

In 1621 a Latin translation was published of Diophantus' *Arithmetica* which contained a complete compilation of the number theories that Pythagoras, Euclid, and other ancient mathematicians had formulated. It

was when Fermat was studying Pythagoras' equation that in a burst of pure genius he created his immortal problem. He formulated a variant of Pythagoras' equation. Instead of $(x^2 + y^2 = z^2)$, Fermat converted the square to a cube, $(x^3 + y^3 = z^3)$.

The problem was that the new equation did not seem to have any solution with whole numbers. What Fermat had thus done, by an academic tweak, was to transform a formula which had an infinite number of perfect solutions into a blind alley that had no solution at all. His theorem was just that—Fermat claimed that nowhere in the infinite universe of numbers was there any whole number in which a cube could be expressed as the sum of two cubes, and that this was general for all numbers having a power of more than 2, that is, precisely Pythagoras' equation.

Other mathematicians swiftly agreed that this was correct. Through trial and error they were able to confirm that they could not find a number that disproved Fermat's theorem. The problem was simply that even if they counted until the end of time, they would never be able to test all existing numbers—they are infinite, after all—and consequently the mathematicians could not be 100 percent certain that the next number would not disprove Fermat's theorem. Within mathematics, assertions must always be proven mathematically and expressed in a valid and scientifically correct formula. The mathematician must be able to stand on a podium and say the words *This is so because ...*

Fermat, true to form, sorely tested his colleagues. In the margin of his copy of *Arithmetica* the genius penned the problem and concluded with the lines *Cuius rei demonstrationem mirabilem sane detexi hanc marginis exiguitas non caperet*. These lines became immortalized in the history of mathematics: *I have a truly marvellous demonstration of this proposition which this margin is too narrow to contain*.

If his intention had been to madden his peers, then he succeeded. Since 1637 almost every self-respecting mathematician has spent time, sometimes a great deal of time, trying to find Fermat's proof. Generations of thinkers had failed until finally Andrew Wiles came up with the proof everyone had been waiting for. By then he had pondered the riddle for twenty-five years, the last ten of which he worked almost full-time on the problem.