

MANESCHIJN

“... and it is my great pleasure, ladies and gentlemen, to give you the first ever person to win the Legal Professional of the Year award twice – the Helsinki District Chief Prosecutor, Christer Kokko!”

Amid the thunderous applause of the attendees at this exclusive ball, Kokko rose from his seat, straightened his tuxedo, and began his journey towards the podium. Along the way he acknowledged people he knew he should note, old friends, key rivals, members of the legislative branch. Fully aware of the multitude of virtual knives sticking out from his back, he took his time to reach the podium, where the Prosecutor General already stood, armed with a large and hideous glass statue. Kokko remembered the glee with which he had dumped the first one from his boat en route to his summerhouse, and that helped him smile.

A dozen slaps on the back later he finally climbed onto the podium, gave the Prosecutor General a steely handshake, and accepted the lump of Bohemian crystal with a very nice show of surprise, modesty, and humility. People stood up at their tables and applauded him still, as he tried to wave them down. After some time he reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a slip of paper. He looked at it, shrugged, and stuffed it back into the pocket.

“Mr Prosecutor General, ladies and gentlemen, my friends, and a few selected enemies, I’ll be brief as always. It is indeed a great honour to stand here before you tonight, and accept this singular tribute from the entire legal profession in our country. I do not accept this with a light heart, and I decline to claim any right to this statue, unless my team – stand up, people, please – are acknowledged as well. This statue belongs to you just as much as it belongs to me. No prosecutor works alone, no man is an island. Speaking of islands, I would like to wish all of you a fantastic night at the ball; I must leave you at this point and retire to my own little island to do my part in the building of my new sauna. I am sure I will see many of you there, once it is finished. Again – many thanks! Good night!”

And with that he gave a courtesy bow to the committee that had selected him for the award, shook a dozen more hands on the way down, smiled for some photos at the door, and disappeared. This was nothing new to the community, they had seen him pull much worse stunts, and within minutes the ball was back in party groove.

By the time Kokko reached his BMW X5 in the parking lot, he had already removed his bow tie and cufflinks. He tossed his jacket onto the back seat, climbed in, and zoomed out of the guarded parking lot. Kokko turned on his radio and tuned in Groove FM, and was happy to hear Barry White keep him company when he hit the freeway. A quick touch to the phone button on the steering wheel and the phone asked him who to call.

“Juhola.”

“Juhola”, the synthetic voice of the phone repeated, and then the dial tone sounded in the car. Juhola picked it up on the second ring.

“Yah?”

“How’s the boy?”

“Bubbling with joy.”

Kokko smiled in the dashboard light, amused by the quick pun. “Keep him warm. I’ll be there in ninety minutes.” He hung up.

Peering into the darkness framed by the roadside markers, Kokko once more congratulated himself for having Juhola working for him. In secondary school Juhola had been one of the bullies who mercilessly beat on Kokko for having no mother. She had died when he was three, and living in a squalid hut alone with his dad didn’t help. Furthermore, having a name like Christer was not an asset in the utterly Finnish-speaking town he lived in. Juhola, a total dyslexic, had been his main adversary, until the day Kokko replied to him, “Maybe I got no mother but at least I can write my name”. A quick fist fight made them blood brothers. Their friendship had lasted through Kokko’s departure to attend high school and live with a relative, through his studies, and through his meteoric rise in the judiciary.

Juhola stayed at his home farm and lived off its produce. In addition he worked as a janitor at the many summerhouses of the town. When Kokko bought the large but dilapidated property to build a mansion the like of which no one had ever seen in this country town, he’d first hired Juhola as the foreman. They’d rebuilt the old manor from the ground up, added guest houses, a smoke sauna, and of late, a continuous-heated sauna on the island that was part of the property. This had been built close to the lake, on a special permit, which did not pass without a fair share of adverse publicity in the town. People had also wondered why a simple sauna demanded almost an excavation before its foundations were laid. Kokko had told the planning authority he wanted to make sure the building would stay put and not be affected by the thaw of the ground.

Only Juhola knew what was under the sauna. He built the bunker below alone, with just Kokko helping him in the critical phases. The walls were of tile, the floor a slab of concrete. All that was built remained hidden from view. Juhola returned the topsoil, and the sauna on the bunker looked entirely normal. It was just the hatch on the floor which might have given it away that the foundations were different from a regular one.

After a two-hour drive, Kokko arrived at the lakeshore and went to his boat. It was tied to a jetty that had a locked gate and a single bright lamppost to ward off thieves. He took his bag from the car and opened the gate, already enjoying the upcoming boat ride in the dark. He cast loose the ropes and jumped in, pushing the boat out stern first. The eighty horsepower Honda caught on the first try as always, and he manoeuvred out of the bay before opening up the throttle. The navigation lights of the daycruiser shone on the splashes of water from the bow, and Kokko steered standing up to feel the wind peel away the week, and the gala dinner, and everything that had accumulated on him in the city.

Fifteen minutes later he arrived at the island. He could see Juhola’s aluminum boat moored at the shore, but he tied his boat to a buoy, then jumped in the dinghy tied to the buoy with his bag and rowed ashore. It was such a pleasant feeling to smell the birch wood

smoke. He took his bag to the house and then returned to the sauna. Juhola was there to greet him.

“How’s tricks? Did you get another statue?”

“Yes, another useless piece of fine design. Forgot it in the car, damn it, I wanted to dump it too. I’ll do that later. So, how’s the process?”

“It’s been going on for two weeks now. Bubbles come up about three times a minute now, so it’s not ripe yet. I’ve kept it at 20 degrees sharp. It’s very easy to maintain the temperature down there. Actually you may be able to pull this off any time of the year, it’s so stable.”

“Is it ready for the pan already?”

“I don’t think so. Maybe in another week or so. There was a slight problem with the smell, but I took a blower to the bunker and led the gases away in a tube up the hill. It dispersed just fine up there.”

“Great. Shall we have a sauna? I’d like to lose the city.”

“Sure thing. I’ve heated it already, let’s just get in.”

Juhola and Kokko bathed with abandon for two hours. They beat each other with soaked birch twigs, leaving slight red welts on their backs and thighs. They swam in the cold October lake, birch leaves floating off their bodies into the water. After that they sat on the porch with a beer can and a steaming sausage.

They sat in silence for a while. Looking out to the dark lake, Kokko finished his sausage and beer, and wiped the sweat off his brow. “Let’s go down to it. I want to see it in action.”

They got dressed and opened the small hatch in the floor of the sauna.

Three weeks earlier, Kokko closed the door to his office and made a phone call. “Is that you, Lindholm? Yes, it’s Christer here, Christer Kokko. Yeah, I know it’s been a long time. How’s things? You still in advertising? Self-employed... that figures. I always thought you could sell your services better as an entrepreneur. I’m fine thanks, just fine; listen, pal, I need a favour. Yeah. No, just a favour. Nothing major. I’d need you to produce a label for a bottle of hard liquor. Never you mind. I just need a label. Yes. There’s a little twist.”

Kokko lit a cigarillo and inhaled his lungs full of the fragrant smoke.

“You need to make the label look like it’s South African.”

He leaned back in his leather chair and lifted his shoes to the edge of the table.

“I don’t really care how you produce the thing. For all I care, you can go to South Africa and get some inspiration. Yeah. No, I kid you not. As long as you don’t get inspired too much and forget to deliver, like some time in the past... You’re still on the wagon? Good for you!

Now, you could put some animal on it, hippo, elephant, lion... whatever. Pick any. No, aardvark will not do. Some fierce animal. Panther. That's nocturnal. And the important thing: it must be called Moonshine. In whatever language they speak there, Afrikaans isn't it? Yeah. So, here's the deal. You go there, you find out what Moonshine is in that language, and you make me a label that has a panther on it. The more realistic the label, the better."

Kokko wore a wry smile as he puffed on his cigarillo. "Put on a fake bar code too. Yeah. And a location, pick any town in South Africa, preferably so small it's not known up here. How many? Start with 200. No, make it 500 labels, front and back. ASAP, of course, what'dja expect? I'll pay you 2500 euros for the whole thing, tickets, labels, hotels, the works."

As he flicked the ashes off the cigar and extinguished it into a glass ashtray. "When you're done, fedex the labels to me to my home address, not the office. I'll SMS you the address. Don't make noise about this project, okay? Okay. Cheers, talk to you later." He ended the call with a definite push of the thumb to the red button, and returned to his duties.

After lunch he made another call, this time to Juhola.

"Hello. Do you still have that ATV? Does it have a trailer? Good. Can you meet me at the Rusakoski Mill tonight at nine or so? Know where it is? Great stuff, see you there. Oh hey, bring a couple of shovels. See you."

He hung up the phone and smiled.

Then he remembered another thing and called in his secretary. She walked in with a notepad, as she had done for twenty years, and sat down by his desk. "Marianne, I need you to do some research and find me glass bottles, maybe 3, 4 deciliters, with screw-on cap. I need three hundred of those. I don't care where you buy them. Just do it." She closed the notebook with a hump and left.

Three minutes later she walked in with a printout. On it was a picture of a little glass bottle, along with information, including the supplier's phone number. She slammed the paper on the desk and said, "You call them. I have real work to do," and turned to leave.

Kokko said, "How did you get this so fast?"

Marianne glanced over her shoulder and said, "As my 14-year-old would say, CFG."

Kokko's baffled look made her smirk.

"Check fucking Google."

At nine that night it was raining. Kokko drove through the sleepy little town, and then turned right to follow a river. After twenty minutes he took a left and parked his car when he arrived at a bridge crossing the river at the site of. Juhola's car was there already as well as an ATV on a large trailer.

“Good to see you. Can you get that thing off the trailer? We need to cross the river and get to the old mill,” Kokko said. Juhola backed the ATV onto the ground and they hopped on it. Juhola crossed the bridge and went down to the riverside along a path. Kokko looked around and was satisfied to see no one. He took out a mapcase, but not for finding out where they were.

He knew that fully well. His grandfather had owned and operated the mill along the river. The mill had burned down in 1918, and all that remained were the dam and the foundations, huge blocks of granite impervious to any catastrophic event. In his mapcase, below the transparent window, was a pencil drawing in which the mill was marked as a square, and a path marked with a dashed line led northwest from it. At the end of the line there were the words “½m, 2 boxes”.

Juhola parked the ATV by the mill dam and they got off the vehicle. Juhola took the shovels, and then Kokko led Juhola up across the dam and up the hill to the ruins, and around the granite blocks to the northwest corner of the mill in silence. That was nothing new to Juhola, so he just followed him.

“Did you know these used to be my family lands?” Kokko said and took Juhola by surprise.

“No, I had no idea,” he said.

“My ancestor Jussi Kokko built the first mill here in 1820. That’s when our family moved to this town. His son kept the mill and bought a farm, and his son added to it. My grandfather was the last miller, and his widow lost everything after the Civil War.” He looked around him as if to survey the family estate. “Isn’t it funny how things run in the family? Mine were all millers up until my father, who wasn’t much of anything, and myself. And your family has been farmers for centuries, right?”

Juhola nodded. “Some professions just run along the line. Millers, farmers, teachers, priests, doctors...”

“Police.” With a swift kick, Kokko sent a loose stone flying into the bush. “At least over here, there’s been a Berglund as police chief for all eternity.”

“No, not anymore,” Juhola said. “We’ve had a guy called Jussi Nurminen since the late 90’s. The last Berglund retired then, and his son didn’t appear here to take over. I believe he went into politics instead.”

“That’s news to me,” Kokko said. Juhola’s eyebrows arched with surprise.

Kokko took out a compass, aimed himself in a northwesterly direction, and walked out thirty-five measured paces until he arrived at a large stone. He circled to the northern side of it and said, “This should be it. Hand me a shovel.”

Kokko dug the sandy ground for a while, until he was down about a foot. He didn’t seem to find what he wanted, so he rechecked the map and muttered to himself. Then he went a

metre to the left and started again. Twenty shovelfuls later his tool hit something hard and a muffled, soft sound told them it was not rock.

“A-ha!” Kokko exclaimed and asked Juhola to join him in removing the sand. Together they toiled for some time, until they saw what Kokko had hit. It was a wooden box, maybe one metre by one and a half, and made of thick planks. They cleared the top of the box, then dug around to make it easier to lift it out. There were handles mounted on each end of the box, and when it was free of the sand, it was not too hard to lift it to the ground.

“I’ve never been on a treasure hunt before,” Juhola said.

“You’ll be surprised yet when we find the other box too, and take these to the summerhouse.” Kokko wore a wicked grin.

Half an hour later they had both boxes on the ground. Juhola drove the ATV to the site and they lifted the boxes onto the trailer. At the cars they placed the boxes into Kokko’s BMW, ripping the lining of the boot in the process. Juhola grimaced but Kokko said, “Not to worry. It’s leased. See you at the waterfront.” Juhola nodded and they drove off.

When they got the boxes to the summerhouse, they carried them one by one to the sauna. Getting the boxes down the hatch of the sauna floor was no mean feat, and it took all their strength not to drop them. Kokko wanted the boxes placed in one corner of the bunker and asked Juhola not to open them just yet. They climbed up, secured the sauna and left for the mainland.

At the mainland, Kokko gave Juhola a sealed envelope. “I’d like you to open this home alone, and buy the stuff listed. I’ll pay you back. You probably want to shop around, but not for the prices, if you know what I mean. More like not to stand out. And when you got everything, the bunker is where we’ll carry on so just get it over there, okay? Thanks.”

Juhola nodded. It was not the first odd assignment from Kokko, and would not be the last.

“Oh by the way, I’ll be on a business trip for a couple weeks. The bosses want me and some others to go to the States and see how they run things there. So, if you don’t mind, we could save some time if you also followed the recipe in the envelope?”

When Kokko had returned from the trip and worked all week, on Friday he left for his island by noon and asked his secretary to hold all calls. He went straight to the sauna and down the hatch. Juhola arrived around five in the afternoon, and found the sauna already heated, with the smiling host greeting him at the pier with a beer can. After the sauna they got dressed and went to the bunker. Kokko turned on the lights.

Juhola grinned. “I was wondering when I’d get to see the contents of the boxes.”

Kokko pointed at the two discarded boxes in the far corner of the bunker. “It was pretty heavy going, because inside each wooden box there’s a metal casket. Well sealed, bordering on seaworthy. I sweated for an hour to open them, but here’s what was inside. Have a look.”

A compact pot still stood in the core of the bunker. It had a cylindrical copper vat, a conical upper part that formed into a tube, and a third copper part for cooling the distilled alcohol. A tap was at the lower edge of the cooling device. Under the vat there was a gas burner. Every piece of the still was polished to a high shine.

"It's beautiful," Juhola said.

"Sure is. This was made by my grandfather, Albin Kokko. That's why you see the joined A and K stencilled on the smokestack. He was the village blacksmith and miller, and he was quite a master at metals. I don't think you'll find a finer still anywhere." Juhola went to see and slid his finger along the embossed letters.

Kokko went on. "During the Civil War he wanted to be strictly neutral. He was asked to join the Whites, and wooed to join the Reds, but he said, he was better off grey. He kept to his forge and his mill, working for both sides. Still, his side income project of high quality booze did not sink too well with the Chief of Police here. They chased him around the county, but he was always one step ahead of the cops. Besides, some of the constables were his clients. Numerous stills they mangled into broken metal, but he kept on making them."

"Ah, I see. He buried this during the War?" Juhola asked.

"A bit before, during the summer of 1917 when trouble was looming. Albin decided to put the liquor business on hold for a while. He'd made this still we now have here, but he didn't have a chance to try it out. He built the boxes for it and buried it, and made the map I gave you. Little did he know what would happen in March."

Juhola nodded. "It was bad... everyone lost family that time. My great-grandfather was shot by the Reds when he wouldn't join them. That was in February."

Kokko went on. "Albin thought himself safe, because of his mill, but it didn't save him. On the night of March 15, 1918, the Whites came for him. They thought his loyalties were dubious, and Chief of Police Berglund was keen on getting Albin off the booze business. The turbulent times made it easy for him to have a kangaroo court and get him killed with no questions asked. They didn't even offer him the courtesy of shooting him. They hanged him from the mill bridge, with a rope long enough to have him half awash in the river. My grandmother found him there when he didn't return home. She waded into the river to cut him loose. She lost her mind that night - never ventured out into moonlight after that."

Juhola grimaced. "The bastards."

"Yeah. To add insult to injury, the Whites told Reverend Untola not to allow him a proper burial. He was dumped into the mass grave of the Reds. No headstone, nothing. All because he wouldn't join them. And maybe a bit because of evading Berglund for years."

"We'll see if his last still is a good one."

To the side of the still was the Boy, as the mash vat was traditionally called. It contained about a hundred litres of mash, and there was still a bubble every once in a while in the waterlock to indicate fermentation was still ongoing. Juhola took a bucket and scooped thirty

litres of mash into the still. Then he closed the lid and took a lighter to the burner. Kokko turned on the gas and it leaped into a ring of blue flame under the still.

“Now what?” Juhola asked.

“Now we wait. We’ll keep the temperature of the mash at some 90 degrees. This’ll separate the alcohol nicely.” Kokko inserted a digital thermometer sensor into the vat through a small hole. “I don’t think my grandfather had access to this sort of precision, but he probably knew this stuff by heart, better than we ever will.” Kokko then opened a tap in the wall to allow cold water to enter the collector.

Kokko regulated the flow of gas to the burner, and soon the thermometer indicated 87 degrees.

“We should soon hear dripping from the collector.”

They watched entranced, as the first drops of liquor appeared at the end of the collector tube and dropped into a little jug. The drops began to appear at a quickening pace, which went from chinese water torture into a tiny trickle. Kokko smiled.

“Hello, Grandpa. Good to see you.”

Juhola offered his cup. “Let’s taste it for real.”

Kokko took the jug which had collected maybe half a litre of alcohol, but instead of offering some to Juhola, emptied it into the sewer. “No point in drinking this. It’s mostly impurities, but when we get the next cup, we’ll taste it.” The jug filled up faster than before with a steady flow of clear liquid. Kokko switched a vat under the collector and took the jug, and with a wink, poured Juhola a drink.

“To the end of ninety years without moonshine,” Kokko said, and they clinked their glasses. The first taste was not very satisfying.

“This tastes like a distilled pine tree,” Juhola said, and Kokko agreed.

“There’s impurities still. Let’s not drink more, we’ll distill it again when it’s all done.”

They replaced the little jug with a 20 liter canister and set about waiting for it to be filled. After distilling the entire mash, and then re-distilling the produce, they had fifty-five liters of sixty percent moonshine on their hands.

In the wee hours, after they emerged from the bunker to the porch, Juhola stared out into the calm black lake. He had a sip of the liquor and it burned in his mouth. “Tell me, Kokko, what’s the reason behind this project? I know you got more money you can spend, but the sauna cost you three times as much because of the bunker. And I don’t think other prosecutors dabble in moonshine as a hobby.”

Kokko tasted his drink and squinted his eyes; without his glasses he could not see far. “It’s just something I’ve wanted to do for a while now. I used to have a photograph of my

grandparents on my living room wall. Then, a few months back, my housekeeper dusted the pictured and knocked it off the wall. Between the photo and the frame was the map. She had no idea what it was about, but as soon as I saw it, I knew.”

“What’s with the South African business then? Why take all that trouble?”

Kokko poured some more Maneschijn into his glass and added some tonic. “I was in South Africa once, on a safari of sorts, with my wife. When we were there, she told me she wanted a divorce. Apparently one holiday together every five years didn’t cut it. I got smashed that night, and climbed into a tree with a bottle of some local booze. I sat there in the still of the night, listening to the sounds of the jungle, peering into the moonlight. All I remember thinking was, the only thing that’s truly free anymore in this goddamn world of ours is that moonlight. Even sunlight has been harnessed into energy production, but moonlight is too weak for anything useful. I think I saw all kinds of animals that night, no, not pink elephants but panthers and their prey. It was one of those moments in life that really define it.”

Kokko looked at the label. “Besides, I had to cover the origin somehow. I couldn’t just call this Kokko’s Moonshine. So, Maneschijn it is.”

Juhola tilted his glass to get the last drops and said, “Fair enough. Now you have your bottles. Any other monkey business on the way?”

“No, not monkey business. I’m about to announce my retirement from prosecution and going into the consulting business. I’ve some friends who want me to sit on the boards of their companies; I’m also fed up with law right now, and want to get out of it. Remember the Orivesi marijuana case a couple years back? That was the last straw.”

Juhola tilted his head. “Was it the one with the classic newspaper story? The one that said that ‘the 600 kilos of marihuana were probably not intended for local use at Orivesi’?”

“The same. The 9,500 residents would have been high for quite a while. Anyway, I prosecuted the case. As always, it was the small fry that we caught and threw the book at, and the top dogs went free to their Bermudan villas. The last guy we had on the roster was some poor truck driver sonofabitch. First, the transport company he worked for laid him off. Next, his wife took the Fiat and the kids to mother and announced she’d sue for full custody. And to add insult to injury, she sold the flat.”

Kokko found a sausage they’d fried on the stove during their bath and began munching on it. “So he’d been at this all night truck stop with his coffee, and some Estonians approached him and said they needed him for a few gigs. Just to take a trailer from Tartu to a few select locations in Finland. No strings attached, no questions asked, good money. So he took it – as if he had a choice. Next thing he knows, he’s rolling in dough, and the next thing, the customs spring their trap.” He wrapped his towel around his waist and stood against the porch railing.

“And I got to give him five freaking years. I felt like I was prosecuting my own grandfather. I mean, his crime was trying to add some butter to the bread, and that was just what the trucker was doing. When I saw how his eyes dimmed when I asked for the

appropriate time in the can, and even if he'd be out in two and a half, I told myself enough is enough."

Kokko dried himself off. "All that remains is to have the farewell party. I'll host it here, and I'd need you, and your wife, and that damned good catering company of hers. I want to go out of the profession in style; there'll be a few top dogs and lots of their poodles around here. Two weeks from now. Is that doable? You can tell the caterers it's 30 people, and they can pick whatever they fancy for the table."

"I don't see why not. I'll keep you informed," Juhola said and got dressed.

The party on the island had started around noon, and the transport of the guests took an hour even if there were two extra boats to handle the traffic. Many high-ranking people had been seen on the island before, but never such a bevy of stars. There were attorneys and prosecutors, judges and politicians, and the entire office of the Chancellor of Justice right down to the junior legal secretary.

After the meal, a sumptuous affair of many courses, the party split along gender lines and the ladies went to have a sauna, while the gentlemen smoked cigars and had drinks. Juhola worked as a makeshift butler and topped off glasses all around, navigating in the blue smoke. Kokko was having the time of his life; he slapped people on their backs, laughed at the snide remarks, lit more Cuban cigars with his golden Zippo, and told dangerous stories of past deeds.

In a couple of hours the women returned, lavishing praise on the soft steamy bath they'd had in the sauna. With the party complete once more, and before the men went to have a sauna, Kokko gave a wink to Juhola; then he clinked his glass with his lighter.

"My dear friends, let me take this opportunity to thank each one of you for the work we've shared during the twenty-four years of my career in law. It's been rough at times, much fun, sometimes tedious, but in the best moments, even invigorating. Still, as we all know, we have a longing to change the scene, or just to be free from routines."

Kokko signaled to Juhola, who brought out a tray with bottles of Maneschijn on it.

"So, to celebrate this occasion, I have acquired these bottles of schnapps to give to all of you. The name of the drink – Moonlight, or Moonshine – appeals to me, because only moonlight is free these days." Kokko picked up a bottle from the tray and singled out a man in his forties from the crowd.

"Please accept this first bottle, Minister Berglund, as a token of my appreciation."

Thunderous applause.