[Author 1 speaking]
Hi!

[Author 2 speaking]
Hi!

[Author 1 speaking]
I am Alexandra.

[Author 2 speaking]
And I am Alexander. And together, we write under the pen name Lars Kepler.

And we would love to read a small part from our latest novel, Lazarus.

[Authors reading]
Karen draws her pistol as Mats pushes the door open and calls into the apartment.

“This is the police! We’re coming in!”

Karen looks at the pistol in her pale hand. For a few moments, the black metal object looks completely alien.

“Karen?”

She looks up and meets Mats’s eye, then raises the pistol, turns toward the apartment, and goes inside with her other hand over her mouth.

She doesn’t see any trash bags in the hall. The stench must be coming from the bathroom or the kitchen.

The only sounds are her boots on the vinyl floor and her own breathing.
She walks past a narrow hall mirror and into the living room, quickly securing the corners and glancing around at the chaos. The television has been tipped over, potted ferns have been smashed. The sofa bed is standing askew, one of its cushions torn open, and the floor lamp is lying on its side.

She aims her pistol toward the hallway leading to the bathroom and the kitchen, lets Mats move past her, and then follow him.

Their boots crunch on broken glass.

One wall lamp is lit, small dust particles hovering in its light.

She stops and listens.

Mats opens the bathroom door, then lowers his weapon. Karen tries to look in, but the door is blocking the light. All she can make out is a dirty shower curtain. She takes a step closer, leans forward, and nudges the door. Light reaches across the titles.

The sink is smeared with blood.

Karen shudders. Then she suddenly hears a voice behind them. An old man, talking quietly. She’s so startled that she lets out a yelp as she swings around and aims her pistol along the hallway.

No one is there.

She returns to the living room, hears a laugh, and points her gun at the sofa, her body full of adrenaline.

There could easily be someone hiding behind it.

Karen hears Mats trying to say something to her, but doesn’t catch what.

Her pulse is throbbing in her head.

She moves forward slowly, her fingers resting on the trigger, then notices she’s shaking and steadies herself with her other hand.

The next moment, as the old man starts to sing again, she realizes that the voice is coming from the stereo.

Karen continues around the sofa, then lowers her weapon and stares at the dusty cables and empty bags of potato chips.

“Okay,” she whispers to herself.

On top of the stereo is a CD case from the Institute for Language and Folklore. The same track is playing on a loop, over and over again. An old man says something in
heavy dialect, laughs, then starts to sing—"There's a wedding here at our farm, with empty plates and cracked dishes"—before falling silent.

Mats is standing in the doorway, gesturing for her to move on, eager to get to the kitchen.

It's almost dark outside now. The curtains are quivering gently in the heat from the radiators.

Karen follows her partner into the hall. The air is thick with the smell of excrement and cadaver, strong enough to make their eyes water. She sways slightly and reaches out to the wall for support with the hand holding the pistol.

She can hear Mats taking short, shallow breaths, and focuses on not letting her nausea overwhelm her.

She follows him into the kitchen and stops.

On the linoleum floor lies a naked person with a bulging stomach and a swollen head.

A pregnant woman with a distended, gray-blue penis.

The floor lurches beneath her and her vision contracts.

Mats is leaning against the chest freezer, moaning gently.

Karen tries to tell herself that she's in shock. She can see that the dead body is a man's, but the swollen stomach and spread thighs make her think of a woman giving birth.

She can feel her hands trembling as she puts her pistol back in its holster.

The body is in an advanced stage of decomposition. Large parts of it look slack and wet.

Mats crosses the floor and throws up so hard in the sink that the vomit splashes the coffeemaker on the counter.

The dead man's head looks like a blackened pumpkin> His jaw is broken, and the gullet and Adam's apple have been pushed out through the deformed mouth by the gases that have built up inside.

There was a fight, Karen thinks. He got injured, broke his jaw, hit his head on the floor, and died.

Mats vomits again, then spits out the bile.

Karen looks back to the man's stomach, parted legs, and groin.
Mats is sweating badly and his face is white. Just as she’s about to go over and help him, someone grabs hold of her leg. She lets out a shriek. She fumbles for her pistol, then realizes it’s the girl from the apartment next door.

“You’re not allowed in here,” she gasps.

“It’s fun,” the girl says, looking at her with dark eyes.

Karen’s legs are shaking as she leads the child back through the apartment and out onto the landing.

“No one’s allowed in,” she says to the man from the maintenance company.

“I was just opening the window,” he replies.

Karen really doesn’t want to go back into the apartment. She knows she’s going to end up having dreams about this, waking in the middle of the night with the man’s spread legs etched on her retina.

When she enters the kitchen, Mats is shutting off the faucet in the sink. He looks at her with wet eyes.

“Are we done here?” she asks.

“Yes, I just want to look in the freezer,” he says, pointing to the bloody fingerprints around the handle.

He wipes his mouth, opens the lid, and leans forward.

Karen watches as his head jerks back and his mouth opens without a sound.

He staggers backward, and the freezer slams shut so hard that it makes a coffee cup on the table jump.

“What is it?” she asks, walking closer.

Mats is clutching the edge of the sink. He knocks over a plastic bottle. His pupils have shrunk to the size of a drop of ink, and his face is unnaturally white.

“Don’t look,” he whispers.

“I need to know what’s in the freezer,” she says. She can hear the fear in her own voice.

“For the love of god, don’t look…”