***Lars Kepler – Stalker***

No matter how weird it may sound – I have always been interested in detective stories. Ever since I was 10 and read my dad’s book, I have seen and read a lot of stories including murder, killers and the way the law tried to get them. I have been given this book by my teacher about a year ago yet could not find the time to read it for a long time. Thankfully, I needed a few minutes to dive into it were given to me and I am glad for the choice I made.

The book starts with a link to a weird video being sent to the National Criminal Investigation Department, which no one thought of as of a serious thing. It was considered to be a stupid joke at first. The shaky camera looking through a window owned by a woman putting on tights was a rather strange shot to observe. The detectives changed their minds very quickly when the woman’s body was found dead.

A different woman, Margot Silverman, is working on this particular case. She has watched the video countless times and is convinced that the team is dealing with a serial killer. She is driven to find out what exactly was his motive. Meanwhile, the criminal uploads a new film. The scene is almost similar – just a regular woman in her living room, coming home from a run, taking off her joggers and eating a tub of ice cream while watching something on the television. There is nothing strange about it. The detectives try to identify the woman or her location, but there is no way they would be able to do it based on the material they have seen.

The point of view then changes. The woman we have been introduced to in the clip, Susanna Kern, seems to be scared about a weird scratching noise she has heard outside. She decides to call her husband who is currently in a different country and is looking forward to being with him again. It calms her down for a little while and she takes a relaxing shower. After coming back to the living room, she realises she had forgotten close the front door. Panic rushes through her whole body and she quickly closes it. The feeling of uneasiness does not leave her though so she goes and checks the door again. When she comes back to the living room to finally sit down and eat her ice cream peacefully, she is surprised by a reflection of a man with a kitchen knife in his hand. She panics and hides in her bathroom and then even proceeds to give the man her credit card information, hoping that he will leave her alone after that. After waiting a little she leaves the bathroom. The innocent „burglar“ she thought has already left greets her with multiple lethal stabs.

Erik Maria Bark is remembering all the good times he used to have with his son, who no longer lives with him nor does his ex-wife. He is a psychiatrist specialising in trauma, therefore he is often called to help the police with relaxing witnesses. That is exactly the reason he has been called to the Karolinska Universal Hospital with his colleague Nelly to help Margot Silverman with interrogating of Björn Kern, the husband of Susanna. He had found her dead and Silverman is desperately trying to make him talk about it in order to prevent similar cases from happening.

The last chapter is about Erik wanting to play the piano. He booked the lessons for his son’s birthday at first but later realised he was the one who wanted to play the instrument, projecting his desires on the child.

I really enjoyed the story so far, even though the actual plot is not fully revealed yet I think that the fact I read about 40 pages, which is much more than I intended to, only shows how much I liked it. I personally love it when authors change up the point of view of the story, it makes it so much more dynamic. I loved the descriptions even though I know not many people find them interesting. The story itself was so easy to read – with every page I read I longed for the next one and I wished for the lesson to never end. I am looking forward to see how to story unravels. It perhaps means more freezing scenes sending shivers down my spine like the one where Susanna saw her killer in the reflection of her own window. If I was reading the scene at home, I would probably check my own door and see if it was really locked. The concept of seeing a video of a victim that you know is about to be killed is just completely terrifying too. I cannot imagine myself in the position of Margot Silverman or the other detectives when they knew what was about to happen but could not do anything about it. I am glad my teacher recommended this book to me.

**Lars Kepler – Stalker (part 2)**

The story of Erik’s effort in trying to learn how to play the piano continues. He feels like he failed miserably and even though his teacher praised him for doing great for an absolute begginer, he still calls her to apologise. He then proceeds to listen to the song he is aiming to learn and laughs at his own clumsiness.

Margot Silverman is arriving at the crime scene. Although the other detectives have already interviewed all the neighbours from the block, she has only now just decided to show up. The police still has no suspects nor have they any witnesses, besides Björn, who unfortunately only encountered his wife being already dead. When they finally go inside in their protective clothes to not ruin anything, they find out Susanna has already been moved around – a lot actually. The bloody evidence, such as footprints or stained have been wiped clumsily. Almost all the original patterns have been destroyed. On the other hand the detectives were able to identify that Susanna was still standing on her feet when the murderer gave her the lethal stab.

It seems that Susanna fought for her life and even tried to get away. She has also been moved and winded up in the bedroom. Her face has been deformed. What could have been destroyed on her face was not left untouched. The whole area around her face, neck and chest have been brutally damaged and she also received stabs. Then they find something strange in her hand. The dead woman is clutching a small porcelain head of a deer. Did her husband put it in her palm or was it the killer?

Erik is supposed to perform hypnosis on Björn Kerner, who is not able to recall and talk about the traumatic experience of finding his beloved wife dead. Erik assures him that hypnosis is just a way of relaxing his mind. Silverman demands he will finally make Björn speak. Erik hypnotises him and makes him walk back into the house, just as the night when the incident happened. Even though Björn is able to visualise the scene, he is keeping the things he is seeing to himself. Björn finds his wife in his memories again as she leans against an armchair while the whole room is covered in blood. She is wearing her kimono and is covering her ear with her hand, while a strain of blood finds its way down her elbow.

Erik wakes the traumatised husband up. Although he has recorded the whole process, he lies about not turning the camera on to Silverman. Bark describes the memories of Björn Kern as only seeing blood and the smashed face of his wife, not mentioning the position she was in. When Silverman leaves, Bark starts a conversation with his colleague Nelly about a former patient. The man they are talking about has posed a victim in a very similar way that Susanna was positioned. He admits on not telling the police about this important detail and he is aware that he might lose his job. He knows he is no detective, yet he wants to see if the alibi of the man checks out.

The story is now getting so much more exciting. The crime scene, the unexplainable porcelain statue in the victim’s hand, the hypnosis of Björn Kern. It starting to feel like the classic detective story we all adore. I think the hypnosis from the point of view of Björn only added to the authenticity of the experience. I have no idea how the story is going to continue – which is the best way for the story to be. The feeling of excitement from reading the book only grows stronger if you cannot even guess what is about to happen next. Erik’s theory on matching the crime with a similar case from the past and his „brave“ decision to not tell the police seem a little irresponsible to me, but we will see how the story continues. I am really getting drawn into the plot and I am enjoying it so far.

**Lars Kepler – Stalker (part 3)**

Erik truly rushes home – he even forgets to take his outdoor clothes off. He runs to his very won archive, where he keeps all of his important documents and also on several hard drives. Erik desperately searches for the notes he made about the case of Rocky Kyrklund from nine year ago. Obviously, life was very different back then. Erik himself was working in the Crisis and Trauma Centre and no longer remembers how he got the opportunity to join a different work team. Rocky Kyrklund was being held custody on suspicion of murdering a woman in her thirties. Her murder was very violent and probably committed with hatred and anger. She was found lying in her bathroom with her right hand around her neck. The evidence that has been found on the crime scene was firmly attesting against Rocky due to it being his fingerprints and hair. Unfortunately, Rocky has been involved in an accident and his brain has been damaged for his life – he would suffer severe memory loss and epileptic seizures.

At the time Erik was having meetings with this man, he would often faint and knock off stuff with his two metres tall and huge body. He never admitted nor denied the murder – he claimed he could not recall the woman he was accused of. Sometimes, mall segments of his memories would come to the surface of his mind and he would remember small details such as having intercourse with her or the texture of a rug they were lying on. Rocky has been diagnosed with a narcissistic personality disorder and paranoia. Erik has had his own opinion on whether Rocky was guilty and the reasons why he thinks so, but he was not responsible for deciding on that matter. Yet the thing he could and was ought to express opinions about was the fact that Rocky’s temper and his mental disorder could result in him committing different crimes in the future.

During one of their last meetings Rocky proclaimed to have remembered everything that had happened but stated that he had alibi. He handed a note with a name and an address to Erik, had a seizure and completely forgot about the topic of the conversation. Erik never took Rocky’s alibi seriously. He was found guilty and sentenced to secure psychiatric care.

Nine years later, a different woman has been killed in a similar way – with aggression directed towards her face, chest and neck. It is very unfortunate that this kind of murders is not very unusual – slaughtering people is done this way in many cases. The only thing that really connected the two was the hand covering the victims‘ facial areas. The parallels are not that obvious but still are there.

Erik can wait no longer – he does the thing he should have done a long time ago – he calls the senior consultant Simon Casillas. He promises to visit and says that he has to interview Rocky. He kind of regrets his decision but knows, that if Rocky’s alibi was genuine he has to be released. And if so, the new murder would be connected to the old one. Erik would have to confess everything.

I really enjoy Erik’s enthusiasm for the case. Even though he did not have to, he checked all of his old notes and starts to find links between the two cases. I am looking forward to finding out what is going to happen at the meeting he just arranged. I hope it is going to bring at least some light to the old case which may be helpful in the case of Susanna Kern.

**Lars Kepler – Stalker (part 4)**

Saga Bauer – a new character in the story, is driving through the town and even though she is wearing no makeup and has not washed her hair in a few days she could still be considered one of the most beautiful women. She parks by a red-brick building with seemingly no one inside of it. She takes out the glass and leaves the car. She has to sneak around the building so that no one can see her enter. When she looks at the jar, memories flash through her. There was a reason he kept her alive – yet she did not know why he had done that yet. He decided to spare her, so she decided to end him.

She replays the way she killed him in her mind again, the way the gun fired, the way his own blood spread around him. She swears she killed him but his body has never been found. She steps inside the only office that has still been occupied and greeted the man inside. He inspects the jar she has brought him up the light as well as the finger floating around in the cloudy liquid inside of it. They both suppose the finger belongs to Jurek Walter. Saga has spent more than a year looking for him. One day, she decided to go check the beach, even though she had already been there before and had not found anything. But that day she met an old man who said he had found a dead body on the shore. It was not a full body, just the torso and one arm. The man brought the dead body out the water. The terrible smell was attracting his dogs so he cremated it. Before he did that, he took a few picture of the corpse, that show a few gunshot holes on the body. Saga is not sure why he did not simply call the police to this day.

Then Saga follow Nils Åhlén, the man she is with, into the closest pathology laboratory. He puts on a protective overall and offers her a chair to sit on. He photographs the jar Saga has brought. The thing inside of it is a finger that has been preserved in strong alcohol for 4 months. He uses tweezers to take it out and the nauseating smell of rotting meat fills up the room. He informs Saga that the finger has been removed long after death. Even though the finger has swollen Åhlén was still able to get fingerprints from it. He tries to match it to the person they were hoping they had found. And they did. The finger used to belong to Jurek Walter.

Åhlén asks Saga why it was so important to find Walter’s body and she replies that she could not try to find Joonas body before this ones. Still Saga does not believe Joona is dead – she argues he has phoned her several years ago. She thinks he had arranged his suicide so his wife and daughter could go into hiding with him. And because she believes this theory, she now has to find Joona to tell him that Walter is dead and he has been found. Åhlén advices she goes to the Nordic Museum. When she arives, she shoots its glass door open, checks a name engraved into a crown from a figurine and leaves the place.

I did not really like this part. I could not understand a thing that was happening and the connections just did not make any sense to me. But that is just the way books are sometimes – and it is often advised if one is writing a story, to not tell the reader everything so the story can unravel and uncover its mysteries. I do not really know what to think of these two characters that appeared in these few chapters I have read. I guess simply have to read on to understand.

**Lars Kepler – Stalker (part 5)**

Saga catches a train and leaves the Stockholm Central Station. She is headed for a twelve hour ride to bring Jonna good news. She is going to announce that Walter Jurek is no longer alive and this time she also has proof, since she had found his body and proved it to really be him. She remembers the time in the past, when Jurek threatened Joona and his partner. At first they did not think much of it and they only started to take it seriously after Jurek managed to reach out of his cell and snatch the partner’s wife and children. Joona became more aware. He arranged his wife and daughters to „die“ in a car accident, created new identities for them and they no longer stayed in touch. As long as Jurek was alive there was a high chance of something bad happening to them.

Saga has to change trains twice to get to Joona’s place. She is not really sure where exactly he lives, so she plans on asking in the local shop. After arriving in the small town, surrounded by nothing but thick, dark woods she has to face the fact that she has no idea where the shop is. She luckily meets a couple willing to give a hand in a car passing by. The couple, always arguing, helped her to get to the shop and it was not really difficult to figure out where Joona lives. The life in the town seemed to stop a long time ago, so the shop assistant knew exactly who Saga is looking for. She had to walk extra five kilometres to find the house and was obviously very exhausted after the long journey she had to take.

Joona was not excited about her arrival and wanted her to leave even before she informed him about the things that had happen. But simple „He’s dead“ quickly changed his mind. He could not believe Saga’s words at first so she advised him to call the pathologist who helped her with the identification. Meanwhile, Saga herself sat down with one of his daughters, who took care of him and they talked about everything that had happened. The daughter explained that she had to rebuilt the bond she used to have with her father after not seeing him for so long. They used to talk for hours and hours the first few weeks after they have been reunited. Joona is very happy about the situation not being dangerous for him nor his family anymore. We later learn that he even paid for his daughter’s university in France. He is so excited he even asks Saga to stay for dinner, but her train leaves in two hours and she returns to Stockholm.

The story then returns to Erik Maria Bark. He continues with his piano lessons and even though he thinks he has messed it up completely every time, his instructor still praises him and assures him, that he is in fact doing a really job. There is definitely some chemistry between the two of them.

The other day, Erik is going to visit Rocky to see if he has any legit alibi. If he did, the old and the recent case would be somehow linked and he would have to confess everything to the police. He knows he might lose his job because of this. Rocky is locked in the biggest facility for people, who would normally go to jail but due to their mental illness they cannot be put there. He meets Rocky who still suffers from severe memory loss, but he manages to recognise Erik. Erik questions him whether he remembers the case and what he allegedly had done. Rocky reassures him that there is no way that he did not commit a crime – because he remembers doing it. Erik is now sure that the 2 cases are not connected.

I am really glad that the little story of Saga’s investigation is now all clear to me. I was shocked that the recent case and Rocky’s case are not linked in any way – it all made perfect sense to me. But that is what I like about reading – you always think you are right and the author is still able to shock you with how the story continues.

**Lars Kepler – Staker (part 6)**

Nihls Åhlen parks by the National Criminal Investigation Department and is supposed to look at two bodies. When entering the building, he notices a man sleeping wrapped up in a blanked on the pavement. He does not send the man away he walks past him instead and opens the door. The man suddenly wakes up and it turns out it is Joona, who came to check on the evidence that proves that Walter Jurek is dead – the chopped off hand. Åhlen is supposed to meet Margot Silverman, but he still invites the old friend to have a little chat and show him the hand. We find out that Joona used to be a detective as well. The two men talk about everything that has happened since they have seen each other for the last time and Joona shares the story of how he lost his beloved wife who lost her long, tiring battle with cancer.

When Silverman arrives, she realises Joona might help her with the cases she is dealing with at the moment. She still believes the offender is a serial killer driven by the feeling that he is superior to the society and is way ahead of the police. He explains the whole situation with videos of victims being shared on the internet before they get killed and has Joona look at the bodies. Silverman also has new kind of „evidence“. They now have the victims diary with unexplainable „h“ symbols written at the bottom of some pages. When examining the body, Joona notices something no one else noticed before – the deceased Maria Carlsson, the first victim, has had her tongue pierced but the stud was missing. Joona requested to watch the video to find proof to that theory.

Silverman takes him to her office and he gets to meet all of his former colleagues. Since he arranged his death in the past as well as his family‘s, it was a bunch of rather uncomfortable glances and greetings. Joona has also been involved in a bad accident in which he has hurt his leg permanently, so walking through the whole building only brought him pain and discomfort too. After finally getting into Margot’s office Joona watches the video quite a few times and then finally finds what he was looking for. He pauses the recording 5 seconds before its end and zooms in onto Maria‘s mouth. At first glance there is nothing interesting about the particular picture, but after Joona points out the tongue piercing she has, everyone pays attention. The stud in her tongue has a tiny Saturn jewel at the end and Joona corrects the detectives – the thing written on some pages of Maria’s diary is not a letter but it is in fact a symbol for Saturn.

After some research, Joona and Margot found Maria’s friend and they go and meet her to interrogate her. Thanks to the girl’s information, they find out that she and Maria were a very particular group of people who were involved in group sex. They called it saturnia and the man who created it used to give out jewellery with little Saturns on them. Maria used to mark her meetings with the Saturn symbols in her diary. The woman talked about the last time she met the group – after the deed was done, they realised that someone has taken a video of it and posted in on the interned. She even cut off her contact with Maria and did not even know the poor woman has died.

Meanwhile, Erik Maria Bark still attends his piano lessons, still feeling like he is messing everything he is doing up. Jackie, his visually impaired teacher is very patient with him and after her daughter goes to sleep, she has a glass of wine with Erik. They talk about their tragic marriages. Jackie was in a long term abusive relationship, but she has managed to escape it and save herself and her daughter as well. Erik talks about how his wife met someone better and left him for another man. The scene ends with them confessing their feelings for each other and kissing.

I am starting to get so interested in the story. There is so much new information and I am still trying to make up my mind on how the story is going to continue. Every page brings new surprises. The things that did not make sense are clear now but that does only mean there is room for different and new information. Also, I love the way the author describes things, even the smallest details sometimes.

**Lars Kepler – Stalker (part 7)**

In the last chapter, we found out about one of the victims, Maria Carlsson, has been regularly group intercourse. One of the two men – Eugene and Filip, who got her into this kind of actions, has started to get jealous over the time and only wanted to keep Maria for himself. Margot Silverman is suspicious he may have murdered her and wants to find him, even though no one has seen him for a long time.

Joona has no way of going back home, because he spent all of his money on his daughter’s studies and his journey to Stockholm. He hasn’t slept in a few days and is only relying on kind-hearted people on the streets giving out food for the homeless. Margor Silverman set sup a meeting with him and her colleague Adam and they discuss the way they are going to find the two men. Not even his friends have heard of Filip, but the detectives suppose Eugene might know more. Since there was another saturnia planned for this week, Adam decided to attend it, arrest Eugene and find out where actually is.

It was not too hard to attend the saturnia meeting, Adam only had to check into a hotel and enter the notorious „Retro Room“. Even though there has been many scenes he did not want to see, he finally finds Eugene and arrests him, so he cannot warn Filip. Otherwise, he might escape them and they are not completely sure whether he is the killer or not. Eugene reveals that his friend has been having psychotic and paranoid episodes after being overdosed with a dangerous psychedelic drug and even tried to harm him once in the past. He is not exactly sure where the man is, but he knows for sure that he has rented a lot of storerooms and perhaps is hiding there.

Adam and Joona have to drive to the building Eugene advised them to visit and they soon realize that since the building is a private property, they will not be able to enter by the main gate. Joona throws a rock and breaks a window and they can now easily break in. They check the security cameras and it seems like whole 2 sectors are not visible. Suddenly, a faint light flickers through one of the screens. It is an international emergency signal – three quick flashes and three longer ones followed by three short ones.

They hurry to the underground garage and enter the storerooms. They are looking for Filip or the mysterious someone, who sent out the signal, but the place is rather strange – the light flickers all the time and all they can hear are weird drumming sounds. After a few more steps, Joona asks Adam to stop. Suddenly, a woman appears in the middle of the hallway – barefoot, tied up with a steel wire and she looks like someone is tugging the band around her wrist. A Great Dane – a huge dog, appears from behind her and approaches Joona and Adam. They try to shoot it, but both the dog and the woman start escaping, so the men end up chasing them around the hallways. Joona tries to fire at the dog once again, but misses it and the dog wants to attack him. He attempts to fight back but due to his injured leg and a strong migraine he’s been having he is not able to. Adam is trying to protect him, but a second dog launches itself at him out of nowhere.

These few chapters have been really thrilling. Some of the scenes have left me speechless and I had to process them long after reading them. I am really concerned about the faith of Joona and Adam, but I hope nothing bad happens to them. We still do not know if Filip or Eugene have something to do with the murders, but I have a feeling the information they might be able to give will be useful in the further investigations of Margot Silverman and her team.

**Lars Kepler – Stalker (part 8)**

Adam gets attacked by the dog and Joona tries to save him. He is not able to shoot the dog from the position he is in, so he just helps Adam hide behind a bed. However, the dog is not willing to let go of Adam’s arm despite Joona’s desperate trying. Suddenly, the dog lets go and disappears, because the woman from before has called it. She stands in the hallway, still tied up with a piece of metal wire. Joona and Adam follow her and are able to find the man they came to the storerooms in the first place – Filip Cronstedt.

Joona and Adam want to talk to him, but he doesn’t seem alright. His pupils are dilated, he’s shaking and there’s froth around his moth. He looks out of his mind and is repetitively talking about being on videos. He holds two women, sisters Carola and Sophia, captive. The detectives try to communicate with Filip but he is really aggressive and is keeping a knife to one of the girls’ throat. The two men are trying to calm him down but it doesn’t help, so Joona aims his gun at him. Due to his raging migraine, he passes out and Sophia takes his gun. She doesn’t understand that Adam and his partner, now lying on the floor unconscious, are trying to set them free. Affected by pure fear and anger, she shoots Adam in his chest and then hits Filip as well.

The point of view now changes again and we are able to see what Erik Maria Bark is up to. He has stopped in the grocery store to buy some popcorn and meets one of his former patients who used to psychotic episodes because of the guilt of his brother’s death and putting his childhood dog down. He helps the boy with bags full of food and drops him at his house. Then he rushes to his piano lessons. Eric carries his teacher’s, Jackie’s daughter Madeleine to bed and notices the walls in her room are covered in rude words, swears and scribbles. The next day, he offers to repaint her room. In this chapter, we can also contemplate about the progress Erik has not only made in his piano skills, but his relationship with Jackie as well.

When Margot and Adam meet again in the office, they talk about what had happened. Adam accepts, that going to the storerooms with no backup was a bad idea and they discuss the possibility of Filip being the murderer, since he had a lot of cameras that he could possibly use to take the videos they received, had known one of the victims, Maria, has no alibi for that day and on top of all of that – has kept two other women captive. Adam makes her aware of Joona thinking that Filip is not the murderer – it would be too easy. A phone rings and it is clear, that a new video from the killer is out. They immediately call the hospital in which Filip ended up if there was a possibility that he might have escaped. Filip was sedated and had been for hours.

The woman in the video is Sandra Lundgren. Her mom calls her and wants to pick her up for dinner at her place, but Sandra declines her. She feels like she’s being watched but she blames the feeling on her medication. A person dressed in yellow appears in her hallway and stabs her. She lets out her last breath while feeling an unbearable pain of a knife going through her face.

This few chapters I managed to read contained a lot of action and actually made the story progress and move a little bit. The desperate realization of the detectives when they received the new video is always a bit shocking, because often the author is focusing on so many different things and when another murder happens, it really hits you. I am amazed by Joona’s ability to somehow being right and I’m looking forward to the next steps the team is going to take to solve and prevent more slaughters to happen.