

During the autumn of 2015, I gained a decisive insight. I had been publicising the fourth book in the *Millennium* series, travelling around the world and sitting for endless interviews, and tossing and turning in a succession of hotel beds at night, and sometimes I would revisit a thought I had been wrestling with for some time:

Why does Lisbeth Salander have a dragon tattooed on her back?

The tattoo is, as you know, her best-known identifying mark. She has it already at the beginning of Stieg Larsson's first book. It's simply there, a self-evident part of her persona. But we never find out why. We just sense that the dragon is a part of her power.

I wondered about it more and more. I discovered that a tattoo of that importance – a work of art stretching from the base of the back to the shoulder blade – hardly comes cheap and, as the series begins, Salander is still a young woman with no money, who is dependent on a guardian to look after her.

She must have had to work hard to be able to afford it. She must have been incredibly motivated, and that woman, as we know, does nothing unless there is good reason for it. I became increasingly convinced that only a major drama could have driven her to the tattoo studio, something which would deepen the mythology around her. And so I lay there during my sleepless nights and turned the question over in my mind.

I had read up on dragons. I asked others how they saw them. My British publisher, Christopher MacLehose, suggested that I should visit Storkyrkan, the cathedral in Gamla Stan, the old town of my home city Stockholm, where there is a magnificent 15<sup>th</sup>-century statue of St George slaying a dragon with his sword. Christopher felt that the monument could provide a new perspective on an old story – especially if viewed through Salander's eyes.

I had of course been in Storkyrkan before – it is one of Stockholm's classic tourist destinations – and one cold winter's day, after my long tour had come to an end, I stepped inside and stood in wonder in front of the statue. At first, I saw only what I had seen each time before, St George on his horse attacking the monster. But then it struck me: you could as easily perceive it as a terrible assault on a dragon rather than a heroic deed, especially with the dragon lying on its back with a spear through it, screaming in terror. But that was not the most important insight that day.

Next to the dragon stood the bronze figure of a woman, disinterestedly looking on, and it took me a surprisingly long time to realise that she was meant to portray the virgin whom St George is rescuing. To me she seemed no more than an indifferent observer, and at that moment, a thrill coursing through my chest, I realised what had happened to Lisbeth Salander, what had made her have the dragon tattooed on her back.

In an instant I recognised something new and momentous about the darkness which has led her to become the most iconic heroine in modern times. That is what I write about in *The Girl Who Takes an Eye for an Eye*.

**David Lagercrantz, Stockholm, 18 June, 2017**