It happened every year, was almost a ritual. And this was his eighty-second birthday. When, as usual, the flower was delivered, he took off the wrapping paper and then picked up the telephone to call Detective Superintendent Morell who, when he retired, had moved to Lake Siljan in Dalarna. They were not only the same age, they had been born on the same day—which was something of an irony under the circumstances. The old policeman was sitting with his coffee, waiting, expecting the call.

"It arrived."
"What is it this year?"
"I don't know what kind it is. I'll have to get someone to tell me what it is. It's white."
"No letter, I suppose."
"Just the flower. The frame is the same kind as last year. One of those do-it-yourself ones."
"Postmark?"
"Stockholm."
"Handwriting?"
"Same as always, all in capitals. Upright, neat lettering."

With that, the subject was exhausted, and not another word was exchanged for almost a minute. The retired policeman leaned back in his kitchen chair and drew on his pipe. He knew he was no longer expected to come up with a pithy comment or any sharp question which would shed a new light on the case. Those days had long since

Excerpted from

*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*


207 words