



The Burning Stones

Antti Tuomainen

David Hackston, Translator

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In Antti Tuomainen's dark comedic thriller *The Burning Stones*, competition for the CEO position at a Finnish sauna company heats up when someone begins killing off the potential applicants.

Anni is Steam Devil's top salesperson, but she isn't chosen as the forerunner for replacing the CEO when he retires. She shrugs it off and gets back to closing a huge deal in the hopes of distracting herself from her failing marriage to her racing memorabilia-hoarding husband. But when her new boss dies in a mysterious fire and all signs point to murder, Anni becomes the top suspect, and her huge deal begins to fall apart. Another murder, this time with irrefutable evidence—her engraved sauna ladle fashioned into a dagger—pushes her to prove her innocence before she falls victim to the bizarre weaponization of saunas.

The prose is comedic and absurd. Anni frames all in terms of sauna operations, noting that "Steam Devil would lose first its steam, and eventually all the devils who worked for it." On top of that, the officer in charge of the investigation targets Anni for her father's legendary felling of a great elk. Anni recounts the story with a quiet but determined voice, exhibiting her drive to find the truth without losing the potential sale. She is contemplative, reflecting on how her past decisions led her to her current plight; she wonders if there's time left to make her life more meaningful. As the book works toward a resolution to its mystery, Anni's own outlook also transforms; she learns to step out of the shadow of past mistakes.

The Burning Stones is an intriguing mystery novel in which people's mundane obsessions drive them to murder.

JOHN M. MURRAY (March / April 2025)

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