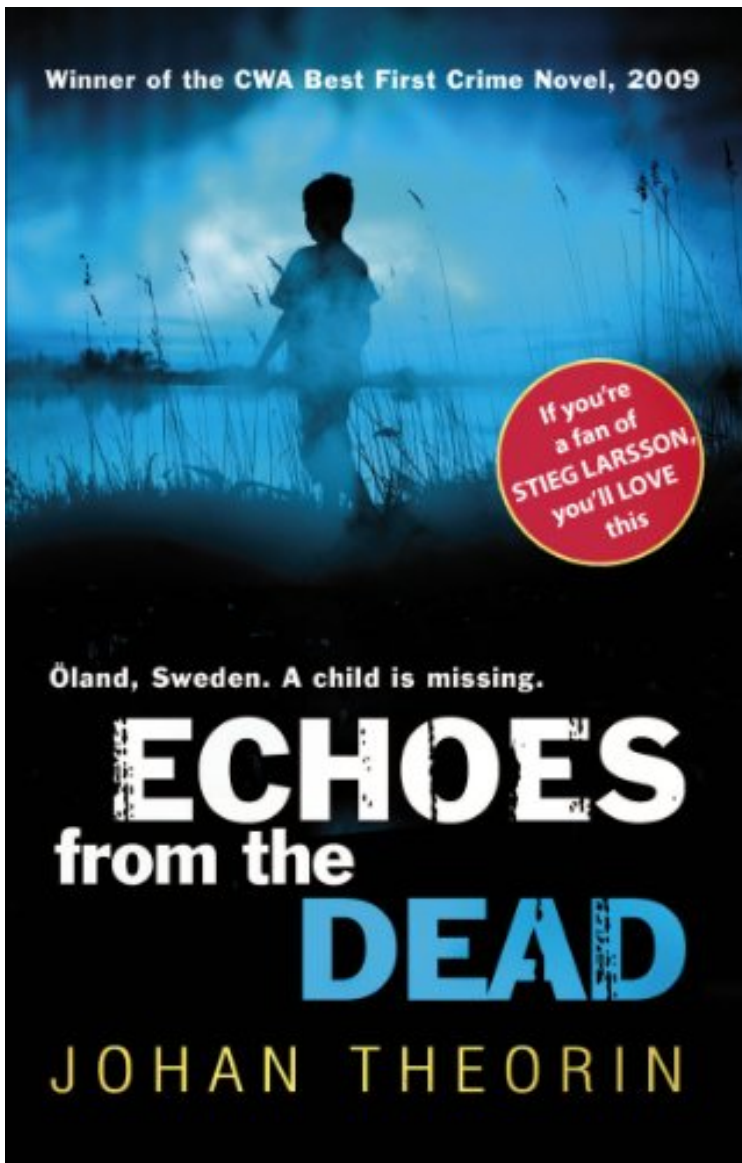


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Echoes from the Dead: Oland Quartet series 1



Par Johan Theorin
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[Mobile ebook] Echoes from the Dead: Oland Quartet series 1

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur'An impressive debut novel' The Times'Fantastic' GuardianCan you ever come to terms with a missing child? Julia Davidsson has not. Her five-year-old son disappeared twenty years previously on the Swedish island of Oland. No trace of him has ever been found.Until his shoe arrives in the post. It has been sent to Julia's father, a retired sea-captain still living on the island. Soon he and Julia are piecing together fragments of the past: fragments that point inexorably to a local man called Nils Kant, known to delight in the pain of others. But Nils Kant died during the 1960s. So who is the stranger seen wandering across the fields as darkness falls?It soon becomes clear that someone wants to stop Julia's search for the truth. And that he's much, much closer than she thinks . . .ExtraitChapter OneWhen her Father, Gerlof, rang

one Monday evening in October, for the first time in almost a year, he made Julia think of bones, washed up onto a stony shore. Bones, white as mother-of-pearl, polished by the waves, almost luminous among the gray pebbles at the water's edge. Fragments of bone. Julia didn't know if they were actually there on the shore, but she had waited to see them for over twenty years. Earlier that same day, Julia had had a long conversation with the social security office, and it had gone just as badly as everything else this autumn, this year. As usual she had put off getting in touch with them for as long as possible in order to avoid hearing their sighs, and when she had finally called she was answered by a robotic machine asking for her personal ID number.

When she had keyed in all the numbers, she was put through to the next step in the telephone network labyrinth, which was exactly the same as being put through to total emptiness. She had to stand there in the kitchen, looking out of the window and listening to a faint noise on the other end of the line, an almost inaudible rushing like the sound of distant running water. If Julia held her breath and pressed the receiver against her ear, she could sometimes hear spirit voices echoing in the distance. Sometimes they sounded muted, whispering; sometimes they were shrill and despairing. She was trapped in the ghostly world of the telephone lines, trapped among those pleading voices she sometimes heard from the kitchen fan when she was smoking. They echoed and mumbled through the building's ventilation systems she could hardly ever make out a single word, but she would still listen with great concentration. Just once she'd heard a woman's voice say with absolute clarity, It really is time now. She stood there by the kitchen window, listening to the rushing noise and looking out onto the street. It was cold and windy outside. Autumn-yellow birch leaves tore themselves away from the rain-soaked surface of the road and tried to escape from the wind. Along the sidewalk's edge lay a dark gray sludge of leaves, crushed to a pulp by car tires, which would never leave the ground again. She wondered if anybody she knew would pass by out there. Jens might come strolling around the corner at the end of the terrace, wearing a suit and tie like a real attorney, carrying his briefcase, his hair

newly cut. Striding out, his gaze confident. He would see her at the window, stop in surprise on the sidewalk, then raise his arm, waving and smiling at her . . . The rushing noise suddenly disappeared, and a stressed-out voice filled her ear: "Social security. Inga." This wasn't the new person who was supposed to be dealing with Julia's case; her name was Magdalena. Or was it Madeleine? They'd never met. She took a deep breath. "My name is Julia Davidsson, and I wanted to ask if you could""What's your personal ID number?""It's . . . I've already entered the number on the telephone keypad.""It hasn't come up on my screen. Can you give me the number again?" Julia repeated the number, and there was silence at the other end of the

line. She could hardly even hear the rushing noise anymore. Had they cut her off on purpose? "Julia Davidsson?" said the voice, as if she hadn't heard Julia introduce herself. "How can I help?" "I wanted to extend it.""Extend what?" "My sick leave.""Where do you work?" "At the hospital, stersjukhuset, the orthopedic department," said Julia. "I'm a nurse." "Was she still a nurse? She'd had so much time off in recent years that she probably wasn't even missed in orthopedics anymore. And she certainly didn't miss the patients, constantly moaning about their ridiculous little problems when they didn't have a clue about real unhappiness." "Have you got a note from your doctor?" asked the voice. "Yes.""Have you seen your doctor today?" "No, last Wednesday. My psychiatrist.""So why didn't you call earlier?" "Well, I haven't been feeling very well since then . . ." said Julia, thinking, Nor before then, either. A constant ache of longing in her

breast. "You should have phoned us the same day . . ." Julia heard a distinct breath, perhaps even a sigh. "Okay, this is what I'm going to have to do," said the voice. "I'm going to have to go into the computer and make an exception for you. Just this time.""That's very kind of you," said Julia. "One moment . . ." Julia stayed where she was by the window, looking out onto the street. Nothing was moving. But then someone came walking along the sidewalk from the busier road that cut across; it was a man. Julia could feel ice-cold fingers clutching at her stomach, before she realized that this man was too old, he was bald and in his fifties and dressed in paint-spattered dungarees. "Hello?" She saw the man stop at a building on the opposite side of the street, key in a security code, and open the door. He went in. Not Jens. Just an ordinary, middle-aged man. "Hello? Julia?" It was the voice again. "Yes? I'm still here.""Right, I've made a note on the computer to say that your doctor's note is on the way to us.""Good. I . . ." Julia fell silent. She looked out onto the street

again. "Was there anything else?" "I think . . ." Julia gripped the receiver. "I think it's going to be cold tomorrow.""Right," said the voice, as if everything were perfectly normal. "Have you changed your account details, or are they the same as before?" Julia didn't reply. She was trying to find something ordinary and normal to say. "I talk to my son sometimes," she said in the end. There was a brief silence, then the voice could be heard again: "As I said, I've made a note . . ." Julia hung up quickly. She remained standing in the kitchen, staring out of the window and thinking that the leaves out on the street were forming a pattern, a

message she couldn't understand however long she gazed at it, and she longed desperately for Jens to come home from school.No, it would have to be from work. Jens should have left school many years ago.What did you become in the end, Jens? A firefighter? An attorney? A teacher?Later that day she was sitting on her bed in front of the television in the narrow living room of her one-room apartment, watching an educational program about adders; then she changed channels and watched a cooking program where a man and a woman were frying meat. When that finished, she went back into the kitchen to see if the wineglasses in the cupboards needed polishing. Oh yes, if you held them up to the light, you could see tiny white particles of dust on the surface, so she took the glasses out one by one and polished them. Julia had twenty-four wineglasses, and used them all in rotation. She drank two glasses of red wine each evening, sometimes three.That evening, when she was lying on her bed beside the TV, wearing the only clean blouse left in her closet, the telephone in the kitchen began to ring.Julia blinked when it first rang, but didn't move. No, she wasn't going to obey it. She wasn't obliged to answer.The telephone rang again. She decided she wasn't at home, she was out doing something important.She could see out of the window without raising her head, even if all she could see were the rooftops along the street, the unlit streetlamps, and the tops of the trees stretching above them. The sun had gone down beyond the city, and the sky was slowly growing darker.The telephone rang for the third time.It was dusk. The twilight hour.The telephone rang for the fourth time.Julia didn't get up to answer it.It rang one last time, then there was silence. Outside, the streetlamps were starting to flicker, beginning to spread their glow over the tarmac.It had been quite a good day.No. There weren't any good days, actually. But some days passed more quickly than others.Julia was always alone.Another child might have helped. Michael had wanted them to try for a brother or sister for Jens, but Julia had said no. She had never felt sure enough, and in the end Michael had stopped asking.Often when Julia didn't answer the telephone, she got a recorded message as a reward, and when it had stopped ringing this evening, she got up from the bed and picked up the receiver, but all she could hear was the rushing noise.She put the phone down and opened the cupboard above the refrigerator. The bottle of the day was standing there, and as usual the bottle of the day was a bottle of red wine.To be perfectly accurate, it was the second bottle of red wine of the day, because at lunchtime she'd finished off a bottle she'd started the previous evening.The cork came out with a soft popping sound as she opened the wine. She poured a glass and knocked it back quickly. She poured a fresh glass.The warmth of the wine spread through her body, and now she could turn and look out through the window. It had grown dark out there, the streetlamps illuminating only a few round patches of tarmac. Nothing was moving in the glow of the lamps. But what was hiding in the shadows? It was impossible to see.Julia turned away from the window and emptied her second glass. She was calmer now. She had been feeling tense since the conversation with the benefits office, but now she was calm. She deserved a third glass of wine, but she could drink that more slowly, in front of the TV. She might put on some music soon, Satie perhaps, take a pill, and get to sleep before midnight.Later the telephone rang again.On the third ring she sat up in bed, her head bowed. On the fifth she got up, and by the seventh she was finally standing in the kitchen.Before the telephone rang for the ninth time, she picked up the receiver. She whispered:"Julia Davidsson."The reply was not a rushing noise, but a quiet, clear voice:"Julia?"And she knew who it was."Gerlof?" she said quietly.She no longer called him Dad."Yes . . . it's me."There was silence once more, and she had to press the receiver closer to her ear to hear."I think . . . I know a bit more about how it happened.""What?" Julia stared at the wall. "How what happened?""Well, how it all . . . with Jens."Julia swallowed."Is he dead?" she asked.It was like walking around with a numbered ticket in your hand. One day your number was called, and then you were allowed to go up and collect the information. And Julia thought of white fragments of bone, washed up on the shore down in Stenvik, despite the fact that Jens had been afraid of the water."Julia, he must be""But have they found him?" she interrupted him."No, but . . ."She blinked. "Then why are you calling?""Nobody's found him. But I've""In that case, don't call me!" she screamed, and slammed the phone down.She closed her eyes and stayed where she was, beside the telephone.A numbered ticket, a place in the queue. But this wasn't the right day, Julia didn't want this to be the day when Jens was found.She sat down at the table, turning her gaze to the darkness outside the window, thinking nothing, then looked at the telephone again. She got up, walked over to it, and waited, but it remained silent.I'm doing this for you, Jens.Julia picked up the receiver, looked at the scrap of paper which had been stuck to the white kitchen tile above the bread bin for several years, and dialed the number.Her father answered after the first ring."Gerlof Davidsson.""It's me," she said."Julia. Yes."Silence. Julia gathered her courage."I shouldn't have slammed the phone down.""Oh, it's . . .""It doesn't help.""No, well," said her father. "It's just one of those things.""What's the weather like on land?""Cold and gray," said Gerlof. "I

haven't been out today." There was silence once more and Julia took a deep breath. "Why did you call?" she said. "Something must have happened." He hesitated before replying. "Yes . . . a few things have happened here," he said, then added, "But I don't know anything. No more than before." "No more than I do, thought Julia. I'm sorry, Jens." "I thought there was something new." "But I've been doing some thinking," said Gerlof. "And I think there are things that can be done." "Done? What for?" "So that we can move on," said Gerlof, then quickly went on: "Can you come over here?" "When?" "Soon. I think it would be a good idea." "I can't just take off," she said. But it wasn't that impossible she was signed off work long-term. She went on: "You have to tell me . . . tell me what it's about. Can't you tell me that?" Her father was silent. "Do you remember what he was wearing that day?" he asked eventually. That day. "Yes." She'd helped Jens to get dressed herself that morning, and afterward she'd realized he was dressed for summer, despite the fact that it was autumn. "He was wearing yellow shorts and a red cotton shirt," she said. "With the Phantom on it. It had been his cousin's, it was one of those transfers you could do yourself, with the iron, made of thin plastic . . ." "Do you remember what kind of shoes he had on?" asked Gerlof. "Sandals," said Julia. "Brown leather sandals with black rubber soles. One of the straps across the toe of the right one had come loose, and several straps on the left one were about to come loose too . . . They always did that at the end of the summer, but I'd stitched it back on . . ." "With white thread?" "Yes," said Julia quickly. Then she thought about it. "Yes, I think it was white. Why?" There was silence for a few seconds. Then Gerlof replied: "An old sandal is lying here on my desk. It's been mended with white thread. It looks as if it would fit a five-year-old . . . I'm sitting here looking at it now." Julia swayed and leaned against the countertop. Gerlof said something else, but she broke the connection and there was silence once again. The numbered ticket this was the number she had been given, and soon her name would be called. *Revue de presse* "Evocative and haunting, with a subtle sense of menace that grows with each page" (Simon Beckett, author of *The Chemistry of Death*) "An impressive debut novel... Theorin's excellence in conveying bleak atmosphere is matched by his insight into sensitive family relationships" (THE TIMES) "Fantastic... Theorin's prose is wonderfully descriptive" (GUARDIAN) "There is warmth in Theorin's narrative and the gradual piecing together of the story leads to an unexpected denouement" (SUNDAY TELEGRAPH) "Sheer storytelling grip such as this is relatively rare. A particular strength is the evocation of locale and atmosphere here; it is masterfully done" (THE GOOD BOOK GUIDE)