

1 Monday, 2 December 1985

'Fuckin' whistle player, move on, keep your fuckin' head down!'

Tom Nolan presses his head into the wet clay and sees from a corner of his eye how his commander Pat Daly is raging. 'I'll kick your fuckin' head off. Move, move. '

His cheek rubs over a sharp stone, he does not notice that blood flows from a wound, he actually does not feel anything anymore.

With his last ounce of strength he pushes the crate with explosives through the mud.

Do not fall asleep, not now! His mate Liam got kicked so hard yesterday that he thought his tibia was broken. Just keep going, do not close the eyes, never give up!

Waves of memories crash at his head. The image that lingers is the white, thatched cottage on the road from Tourmakeady to Westport. Through the small, round window he sees his mother. She is absorbed in her knitting and does not look up as he walks along the muddy path in front of the house, a weekend bag in his hand. He leaves without a word and gives her no chance to say goodbye to her only son. He has often felt guilty about this over the past six months. He knows, however, that she would never let him go if he had told her what he was going to do.

His bag contained no more than some clothes, a Bible and three whistles. Without the whistles he would not have been able to persevere during the last months. He thanks God every day for still having his instruments. Without His help they had ended up as a pile of molten metal in the fire. Pat Daly spoke to them on the day of their arrival. They had joined the army. Therefore all ties with the past had to be broken. Daly told all the ten boys to display the contents of their bags on a long wooden table and ordered them to put all personal objects on the smouldering bricks of peat. So pictures of relatives, silver statuettes in memory of the first communion and favourite books got lost in the flames. In despair of losing his whistles Tom asked if he could play one last time before throwing them into the fire. What he had hoped happened. Nine boys and Pat Daly listened breathlessly to his interpretation of Four Green Fields, the song about the sons who continue the struggle of their fathers. "Good lad," said Pat Daly. He was allowed to keep his whistles.

Tom is in shock when he realizes that he had closed his eyes again. Somewhere in the distance, he hears Pat Daly screaming. His voice is no longer as loud as before.

'Move, move. Keep your head down.'

Dazed Tom starts to look where he is and where he has to go. Then, suddenly, there is the bang. A piercing pain in his face coincides with the strange feeling that his head is separated from his torso.

2 Thursday, 5 December 1985

Three days later Tom Nolan wakes up. The first thing he feels is a stabbing pain in his head. When he opens his eyes he sees a nurse. With a finger on her mouth she tells him silently to remain still. He gets scared. Why is he not hearing anything? Why does the nurse not talk to him? Then he hears footsteps in the corridor, followed by the opening of the door to his gray-white room. A black-haired man with a sharp face enters the room. He wears a white coat and a cigarette hangs between his lips.

'So, you woke up? That's good. For the time being, you have to stay as still as possible. This reduces the risk of chronic headaches due to a neglected concussion. You've already met Clodagh, I see. She will take care of you the next days. She cannot talk, but understands you. Good luck!'

Tom tries to say something in vain. He gently feels his head with his right hand. His fingers do not bump on his skin, but on dust. The nurse stands next to him and holds his hand. Again she gestures him to lie still and then slips out of the room.

Confused, Tom tries to think where he is. He moves his gaze without moving his head. He is sure he has never seen this room before. How did he get here? How long has he been here? He closes his eyes and concentrates on the pain in his head. Where does it hurt exactly? At the back or near his ear? He is not able to locate the pain.

Then Clodagh comes in again. She has a mirror in her hand and keeps it so that Tom can see himself. He is startled by the sight. His whole head, except for his eyes and mouth, is wrapped in white. Carefully he feels with his fingertips whether it is true what he sees. He cautiously puts his arm down again and sees a hose running from his forearm to a plastic bag filled with a transparent liquid.

His eyes are closed and he tries to remember how he ended up in this room. Slowly a picture emerges from the fog in his head. It is a rock behind which he is waiting. But for what? He is cold and his clothes are covered in mud. It is raining constantly. Then someone yells something that he doesn't understand. He concludes that he must leave his place and continue to crawl through the long wet grass.

Clearly now, he oversees the muddy terrain where they have crawled around in the pouring rain for days. Again and again they got the same assignment: bring the box with explosives from one side of the field to the other. All his muscles are sore and he can no longer keep his eyes open from fatigue. Pat Daly's voice keeps on hammering. 'Go on, go on! Stay there, stay down! Move, don't move!' Over and over again. The urge to get up and walk away is getting stronger. Yet he does not. It is all about the blood of his father. It is his job to ensure that his father did not die for nothing. That is why he reported to the army. Now he has to persevere. He must continue the struggle that killed his father.

Despite the pain that his head seems to be splitting, he does not doubt his mission. Although he can not remember what has happened and why he is lying in this bed, he is sure he will continue. As soon as the headache is over, he will report again to Pat Daly. He will show Pat that he is a good soldier and that he is still fully committed to their battle.

He spends Christmas Day in the company of the silent Clodagh, doctor Jim Finnerty and Liam, his mate who was allowed to leave the training camp especially for the occasion. From him he hears what exactly happened. According to Liam, Tom ignored Pat Daly's commands three times in succession. When Tom then set up to look around, Daly went mad. In an attack of blind frenzy, he kicked Tom against the side of his head. Everyone heard the crackling of bones and feared the worst. An hour later Tom, who was still unconscious, was taken away with a truck. Jim Finnerty adds that luckily the damage appeared less than expected. Only Tom's cheekbone was broken and he had suffered a considerable concussion. The doctor expects Tom to be recovered by mid-January, although he cannot guarantee that he will be completely relieved of his headache.

3 Thursday, January 15, 1986

Tom Nolan feels thin layers of ice that have formed on the boggy peat ground last night braking under his feet. Blindfolded he is lead through rough terrain. He has to be careful not to slip or stumble. Hard hands push him into a car that already starts driving away before he is properly seated. He falls over and a hand on his shoulder prevents him from getting up. His head thunders through the thumping of the car that drives the dirt road at high speed. He does not care. He knows he is being transferred to one of the most important centers of the PIRA, the Provisional Irish Republican Army. There it will be clear whether his dream will come true, whether he will become a member.

The car stops after less than an hour, which means that the journey has taken less time than Tom expected. Since his feeling tells him they have driven north, they must be somewhere in County Mayo, or maybe Sligo and not, as he had thought, in Donegal. He will probably never find out. Nobody knows where the headquarters of their army are located, only the highest leaders.

Someone pulls Tom by the arm, tells him to leave the car and to keep his hands off the blindfold. To his surprise, he is pushed into another car, which immediately drives away at high speed. The man behind the wheel tells him to lie flat on the couch. Tom still has the feeling that they are driving north. Longer than the first stage, and the roads become worse. They must be somewhere in County Donegal, deserted, hilly and close to Northern Ireland.

The journey through the remote western parts of Ireland comes to an end in some kind of garage. Car doors open and behind the car other doors are slammed. A man, probably the driver, sits next to him and fiddles with the strings of the hood that is over his head. To his surprise, he sees almost nothing when the hood is removed. The man steps out again and keeps the door open for him. Tom follows him through a dark room and concludes that it is indeed the driver. Suddenly a number of fluorescent lamps start to flash and then emit a bright light. In the left corner of the room a fat, bald headed man is standing next to a door. With a nod for the driver and an inquiring look at Tom, he keeps the door open.

The room they enter has no windows. A large woodworm eaten table fills half of the room. From the ceiling a single bulb of no more than twenty-five watts hangs down above the table. Two men sit next to each other on the long side of the table.

'Tom Nolan,' says the man with black hair and dark eyes. Tom does not dare to look at him and murmurs in the affirmative.

'We've heard what happened,' says the other man with short red hair and a full beard. 'Nevertheless, Pat Daly said that you are good, and motivated. Therefore you will be invited to make a deal. Before we do that, we give you one opportunity to step out. If you do that, we'll take you away and you'll never hear from us again.' Both men behind the table look at Tom tightly. He does not need time to think. He has done enough in the past month.

'I have no doubts,' he replies.

‘We did not expect anything else,’ says the man with the black hair. ‘Listen carefully. From now on you are a soldier in the Provisional Irish Republican Army. That means there is no way back. You will kill people, you will perhaps be killed yourself. Betrayal means death. And that does not only apply to yourself. If you betray us, you endanger the lives of family members up to the third degree. From now on, you do what you are told by us. Is that clear?’

Tom nods. This is not new to him. Pat Daly has told them numerous times, especially after the end of heavy exercises. Three of the eight boys had therefore dropped out prematurely. But he did not. At this very moment he feels stronger than ever. From today his life will really start.

‘We have heard that you are good at the whistle.’

Tom does not respond.

‘You’ll be taken to Armagh tonight. There you are under the command of Darragh Jennings. You came to Northern Ireland to earn money as a musician. As a whistle player you may occasionally join the band Gavin, with whom you play a lot in Belfast. Any question?’

Tom shakes his head, although he has no idea what to imagine. The driver who has been waiting in the corner of the room gestures him to stand up and leave the room. Moments later Tom is back in the backseat of the car, again with a hood over his head. At last it can all begin, he thinks relieved. Is it a coincidence that he is taken to Armagh? That is the city where his father was ambushed by the British Special Air Service and was shot dead by a sniper.

ACT 1.

Monday 2 October 11.00

Guido Landgraaf opens the door of his study and greedily sniffs the salty sea air that is carried along by the strong west wind. He will miss the villa in Bloemendaal. In a week the house will be cleared for the new residents. He will travel eastward with pain in his heart. It will be a difficult last week of his old life. The walks along the beach, the view over the dunes, the daily bike ride along the winding, undulating cobblestone road to Bloemendaal. In a week, these are no more than beautiful memories. And there is only an uncertain future. He has experienced this before and knows that he will not be happy before he knows more or less what he has got in his hands.

Until the day of the move, he will ask himself if he and his wife, Marieke van Boxbergen, have made a sensible decision. Is it wise to leave the beautiful village of Bloemendaal and start all over again in Deventer? Will he be happier on the quiet Lankbergen estate than here? How serious and realistic is his desire to write a book in peace? He knows that those are meaningless questions. The decision has been made and it will take at least a year before all questions can be answered.

It is no coincidence that they go to Deventer. His wife grew up near the estate where they will settle. Her origins have certainly helped to acquire the estate. There were three or four candidates who were willing to pay the asking price of eleven million. For the seller, however, it was not only about the money. It was as important that the new owner would manage the estate in the tradition of the five families who lived there since the construction of the original house in 1348. Although Guido Landgraaf has no idea what that means, he does not doubt that he can continue the age-old tradition in an appropriate way.

To escape from his contemplations, he picks up the magazine he received yesterday by mail. *"I have been received as a friend and I am leaving with applause."* The journalist could not have captured the feeling of Guido Landgraaf better. The article in the renowned and normally extremely critical news magazine was nothing less than a hymn. The journalist interviewed a large number of leading figures from the national business community and all expressed their admiration for the way Landgraaf directed the merger between the two largest energy companies in the Netherlands and a Belgian company. The merging of three companies into one company that counts internationally is his *pièce de résistance*, his opus magnum. The company ZONNU is his brainchild and the successful start of the company is his merit.

The article is a relief after the constant fuss about top salaries of directors of large companies. Journalists who put him and his colleagues down as immoral graders do not know what they are talking about. More than once he has been inclined to invite a journalist in question to take over his work for one week after reading such a biased article again. Decide on investments of tens of millions, negotiate with the trade unions about dismissal and transfer of personnel, negotiate strategically with the national and European competition authorities, dine with the Prime Minister to convey his vision on the international energy market, be constantly alert to movements in the market, be prepared for unexpected attacks by the really big global players. Very few people are capable to carry the burden that's on the shoulder of a CEO of the largest energy company in the Netherlands. It requires vision, insight, superiority, intelligence, persuasion and above all empathy. In addition, you must be able to sustain it, both physically and mentally. You are challenged the utmost twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Only the very strongest keep that up. Anyone should understand that the market is happy to pay a lot of money for people like him. Scarcity raises prices, it's as simple as that.

Moreover, the fifty million, which he has earned after his retirement through the sale of his options and shares, is a pittance compared to the value increase of the company. And every citizen ultimately benefits from that value increase. By people like him, banks can invest, the economy continues to run, the state receives tax and pensions can be paid.

Fortunately, he no longer has to justify himself every day. In a month he is no longer interesting for the press and a month later everyone has forgotten Guido Landgraaf. By that time, Marieke and he have installed themselves on their new estate and he will start realizing his dream. With the help of all life experience and wisdom he has

gained in his work, he will write a book of great depth. He will amaze the reader with his insights into human nature.

Thursday, November 2, 22:00

Exactly one month later Marieke van Boxbergen utters a horrible cry. Guido Landgraaf also scares, but does not react. Never show that you are afraid, angry or sad, that's what his work has taught him. He sees that the entrance gate to the estate has been destroyed and concludes in a fraction of a second that someone has driven a truck or a tractor against it. The right door is forcibly lifted out of the hinges and is bent to the ground. The other door is crooked but still attached to the sandstone gate. A break-in, Guido thinks immediately. Just like a few years ago when thieves had access to their villa in Bloemendaal in the same way. He drives over the driveway to the house as quickly as possible.

A second cry from Marieke warns him just in time. He presses the brakes of his Mercedes with full force and thanks to the ABS comes to a standstill at less than ten centimeters of a huge obstacle. What the hell is that? The bright light from the headlights of the Mercedes is reflected in a white, formless obstacle.

'A pig,' his wife says with a trembling voice. Her face is pale.

'Not one, there are two of them,' Guido states pragmatically. Calmly he steps out of the car to see if it is indeed two pigs. A horrible stench comes to meet him. His stomach pulls together and he must contain himself not to vomit. Cursing, he gets back into the car and pulls the door shut with a bang. He accelerates aggressively. Sand and stones splash. With a quick steering motion he tries to avoid hitting the dead beasts, but he crushes the snout of one pig with the rear wheel.

'You want some?' he asks with a glass of whiskey in his hand. Marieke bites the nail of her little finger and shakes her head.

'Are not you going to call the police?' she asks.

He stares at his broken reflection in the windows of the garden doors. Would the thugs who put the pigs on the driveway look at him from the dark garden? He has left behind the shock and anger and wonders rationally who could be responsible for this brutal action.

Even before they moved into the mansion it was clear that not everyone in Deventer was happy with their arrival. On the day of the relocation, the local newspaper headlined '*Man of fifty million buys Deventer estate*'. A group of citizens called on the Mayor and Aldermen to prohibit establishment within the municipal boundaries of people who had enriched themselves at the expense of society. A columnist expressed his displeasure about exorbitant salaries of some directors and wondered if someone like Landgraaf had the right to buy one of Deventer's finest manor houses as an outsider.

The following week Guido Landgraaf gave an interview in which he explained why he and his wife had chosen to move to Deventer. They did not intend to take the estate away from the people, but rather restore it in its old glory. He promised that a large part of the estate would be opened to the public and that part will only become more beautiful in the coming years.

He thinks it's a pity for the people of Deventer that most of them do not understand that his arrival can actually mean a huge impulse for Deventer. They should listen to their own local captains of industry who understand the changes he has to offer. Several entrepreneurs have already let him know that they would like to make use of his network. Naturally, he has agreed to this. It can contribute to his acceptance by the Deventer inhabitants. For that reason, he also responded last week to the invitation to meet the mayor and the municipal secretary at the town hall. In a relaxed atmosphere, they had an animated and pleasant conversation about what he could mean for the city.

After all those encouraging sighs, the brutal demolition of the entrance gate and the dead pigs came down hard on him.

'You're going to call the police anyway?' Marieke asks again.

'I don't know yet. In any case, I will ask Geert to remove pigs as early as possible tomorrow morning and have the fence repaired.'

Geert Hadeking is fifty-eight years old and has been working as a gardener on the estate since he was sixteen. A short introductory meeting was sufficient for Landgraaf to ask Hadeking to continue his work. In his career he has conducted hundreds of job interviews and he thereby developed a flawless instinct to see the true person behind the façade of the presentation. Geert Hadeking is reliable, knowledgeable and committed. The man therefore had to be kept part of the estate. In order to take away any doubts in advance, Landgraaf offered him five hundred euros in the month extra. The smile on Hadeking's face showed he did the right thing.

6 Sunday, November 19, 7.30

Guido Landgraaf sighs as he opens the economic supplement to the newspaper. *'Taxpayers pay the price for excessive remuneration,'* is the headline of a full-page article. He quickly scans the text. Yes, there he already reads his name. *'A CEO like Guido Landgraaf took full advantage of the establishment of the new company ZONNU. Like many executives he claims it is right to put the interests of the shareholders, who saw their assets rise as a result of the merger, first. They do not feel responsible for the fate of the divested loss-making parts of the company.'*

He walks to the kitchen to make an espresso. The rain hits hard against the kitchen door. He pushes the curtain aside to let the first light of the day in. Ponds form on the terrace outside. Then he notices a white surface in the forest on the other side of the lawn. It looks like a cloth that hangs between the trees. He peers through the rain, but it is too dark to see details. He unlocks the kitchen door and puts on his new clogs. With a big umbrella above his head he walks towards the white plane. Halfway through the lawn he sees what it is: a white sheet that is stretched with ropes between two trees. The material is written with irregular, drawn out letters: Landgraaf Get Off!

From under the umbrella he stares at the sheet and allows the situation to enter his mind. People have penetrated the estate somewhere and have hung up the curtain at night. Did they only do this? Why do people do this? Is it about him? Is it about his money? Is it about the estate? Or is it just jokes of rowdy village boys who want to bully him?

He must prevent Marieke from seeing the canvas. That would only lead to unnecessary panic. Probably the harassments will stop of their own accord if he does not respond to it. With his fingertips he can reach the canvas and pull it down. He does not have to pull hard to tear off the soaked sheet at the edges. He will ask Geert Hadeking to remove the ropes from the tree today.

Fortunately, Marieke is still sleeping. Unnoticed he stuffs the sheet into the gray container and hangs his wet morning coat in the bathroom. The longer he thinks about the sheet, the demolished entrance gate and the two dead pigs on the driveway, the less he understands what it is all about. Therefore he can not think of what to do. Should he give a signal that he does not like it? And to whom? He realizes that his knowledge of the village, of the people who live here, is lacking.

Two hard taps on the kitchen door interrupt his contemplations. It is Geert Hadeking. Guido gestures him to enter. The gardener carries a folded white sheet on his arm.

'It was hanging at the entrance gate,' he says.

'Landgraaf get off, I presume.'

Geert Hadeking nods.

'I walked around and removed two others. I put them in the container. Or did you want to see them?'

'No, please throw them away. There was another one over there.' He points to the forest. 'Do not say anything about it to my wife.'

Geert Hadeking nods again.

7 Friday, December 1, 12.30

Detective Ellen van Dorth looks outside. It has been raining steadily for hours on end. Large ponds have formed on the Muggeplein. A lead-gray sky hangs above the houses on the other side of the square. Ellen can not keep her attention to the book she started reading yesterday afternoon at the request of head of district Gerard Maas. Her thoughts constantly wander off to the rendezvous with her ex-boyfriend Max. Last night they met in the Thai restaurant on the Oudezijds Armsteeg, in the heart of Amsterdam, where they used to eat once a week. She closes the book on page 125.

'Oh, it was he ...?' The title of the book is printed in white letters on the gray photo of a seemingly random Swedish shopping street. Or is that exactly the place where the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was murdered in 1986? Gerard Maas wants to know if the book about the murder of the then-living Kurdish lawyer Mahmut Bilgili and the alleged connection with the murder of Olof Palme gives reason to reinvestigate the closed case. According to the authors, a journalist and a former detective, the murder of Bilgili and perhaps those on Olof Palme could have been resolved if at the time all available information had been used. Ellen was then in elementary school and she tries to think whether she has active memories of the event that undoubtedly dominated the news for a long time.

She is startled by the sound of her mobile. On the display she sees that it is Sandra, a friend from Amsterdam.

‘Hi, Ellen.’
 ‘It’s Sandra, am I disturbing you?’
 ‘No, frankly, I was only dreaming.’
 ‘That sounds good. What about?’
 ‘Yesterday I met Max in Amsterdam.’
 ‘Max? Is he in the Netherlands? I thought he lived in France.’
 ‘That is true. For three years he has been investigating some kind of soil layer in southern France. But now they have offered him a job in Amsterdam. To investigate whether the layer he has studied in the South of France also occurs in other parts of the world and whether the layer contains the same fossils there.’
 ‘And he does that in Amsterdam?’
 ‘No, he will have to travel a lot. Next month he leaves for Brazil for six weeks.’
 ‘So you still have contact.’
 ‘Contact again. We have only seen each other once for the past three years, that was when he graduated.’
 ‘What about his French wife? Is she also coming to Amsterdam? I thought he was married.’
 ‘No, he’s certainly not married. But that’s the only thing I’m sure of. From the few things Max wanted to say about it, I concluded that his relationship with her was not great at all and that she had no idea why he was in Amsterdam.’
 ‘Jee, typical Max. After all, wasn’t it that vagueness and lack of clarity that drowned and discouraged you? I image him calling his girlfriend from Brazil to tell her that he has a new job and that he will not be home in the next three years.’
 ‘It was not that bad. I was particularly annoyed by his lack of decisiveness. When he lived with me in Deventer, nothing came out of his hands at all. Reading newspapers, surfing the Internet and running was more important than studying geology or making sure that there were groceries when I came home from a hard day’s work.’
 ‘Was it any fun yesterday?’
 ‘It was very cozy. That was never the problem between us. It was always fun to go to the pub with Max.’
 ‘Actually, that’s also the reason I called. I just arrived at Deventer station for a meeting at the Latin School. Do you know where that is?’
 ‘It’s a beautiful building at the Grote Kerkhof, less than ten minutes from the station.’
 ‘I’ll be ready around five o’clock. Do you like it if I pass by?’
 ‘That’s no less than a pleasant surprise. From the Latin School you can easily walk to the police station at the Mugeplein. It’s not far.’
 ‘Great, then you’ll see me. How are things going, everything all right? And Norman? Norman, that’s his name, is it?’
 ‘Perfect, things are going really well.’
 ‘Good, I can use some advice. You’ll see me at five o’clock.’

Ellen thinks about Norman. How long do they know each other now? Almost a year and a half. She is still amazed at how smooth and easy it is. Norman takes good care of himself and her. Like her, he is ambitious in his work, so she does not have to justify herself if she has to work unexpectedly on weekends or evenings. Her friends wonder why Norman and she are not yet living together. If it is up to Norman, he moves in with her tomorrow. Yet there is something that holds her back. She increasingly wonders what that is. Is she missing something in the relationship with Norman? But then what? Or is it her own fear to make a definitive choice? Over and over again she hears Max’s first reaction to her description of Norman. "That’s not for you, you need resistance." She obviously defended Norman. He was steadfast, didn’t allow to be trifled with, had a good spirit, was funny, could cook well. "I do not know him, but it sounds like a nice boy," Max replied and apologized for his impulsive response. Yet his words remained. Max knew her like no other and his comment was certainly not motivated by resentment or jealousy.

Ellen opens the book about the murder of Olof Palme and the Deventer Kurdish lawyer again. Although it must have been a big business, she never heard her mentor Joseph Laros say anything about the case. She walks to his room.

‘Can I persuade you to join me for a Turkish pizza?’ asks Ellen. ‘And to answer some questions,’ she adds.
 ‘Alas,’ Joseph answers. ‘I have been summoned to lunch with the boss, in our canteen.’
 Joseph’s face at the last word leaves no misunderstanding about his aversion to the food served there.
 ‘Company restaurant,’ Ellen corrects him with a laugh.
 ‘Transit station of starch, palm oil, saturated fat and flavor enhancers, and then I still express myself mildly.’
 ‘Can’t you say it’s extremely urgent to help me?’
 ‘I’m afraid Gerard does not believe that.’
 ‘Then I wish you a lot of strength. Do you have time this afternoon?’
 ‘What is it about?’

‘About Mahmut Bilgili,’ Ellen says.

‘The book.’

Ellen nods.

‘I can tell you something about it, even though I was never directly involved. Drop by.’

One hour later Ellen recognizes the sound of Joseph's footsteps through the long corridor of the police station. His room is three rooms further than the room she shares with her colleague Brian Jansen. She immediately follows him.

‘Eaten well?’ she asks.

‘Fries and a Frikandel with lots of mayonnaise,’ Joseph answers with a satisfied expression. ‘That is by far the best that our canteen has to offer.’

Ellen shakes her head disapprovingly.

‘Coffee?’

‘Please. Was it interesting?’ she asks.

‘You do not even attempt to conceal your curiosity.’

‘That's why I do this work,’ Ellen replies with a smile. ‘It does not happen often that Gerard Maas informally has lunch with a detective.’

‘We have a job,’ Jozef says. Ellen cannot conceal the small shock that hits her. Is it a new murder case? The murder cases she has worked on to date have always been extremely intensive; hard work, high pressure.

‘No dead body this time, but it's a strange story.’

Ellen's heart begins to beat faster. She has been working as a detective for three years now under the guidance of Jozef and there is absolutely no question of routine or habituation. Every case is still an adventure with uncertain consequences.

‘Do you know the name Guido Landgraaf?’ Jozef asks.

‘I read about him in the newspaper. Wasn't he discredited because of his salary?’

‘In particular due to the increase in value of his shares and options after the merger of a number of energy companies. According to Gerard Maas, who, of course, knows all the details about that, that man could put fifty million in his pocket.’

‘Every citizen in the Netherlands therefore pays Landgraaf a few euros as a reward for his services.’

‘Landgraaf will of course fight that opinion, but in general I think it's true.’

‘I am at least a client of ZONNU, I understood from a letter I found on the doormat a few weeks ago.’

‘Like everyone else. But that's not what this is about. Did you also understand that Guido Landgraaf recently settled in Deventer? To be precise at the Lankbergen estate.’

Ellen looks surprised.

‘I read that the estate was bought by someone with a lot of money. I had not made the link with the Landgraaf of ZONNU.’

‘Why should you? A man with too much money who buys an estate does not concern us. Nevertheless, Gerard Maas is worried. He heard from an acquaintance that someone or a group of people are rather concerned about the arrival of Landgraaf.’

‘And?’

‘That is everyone's right, of course. Only in this case some sort of disappreciation is shown quite clearly.

Although Gerard did not know everything, he had heard that the entrance gate to the estate was vandalized. It was also rumored that dead pigs had been deposited on the estate. And last week somebody had seen banners hanging with the text Landgraaf Get Off!’

‘And the police does not know anything about that?’ Ellen asks in amazement.

‘That is exactly what Gerard Maas is worried about. Why does Landgraaf report it himself to the police? Does he want to solve it himself?’

‘Maybe, he is used to solving problems as a director.’

‘A good director uses people who can do things better than himself.’

‘Did Gerard Maas give you an assignment? Should we visit Landgraaf?’ Ellen asks. ‘I don't think that's appropriate.’

‘Personally I don't see why, but Gerard thought it too early for that. He thinks that Landgraaf should report on his own accord,’ Jozef says.

‘So? Should we go around asking incognito if someone has heard or seen something?’

‘Something like that, yes. The assignment was whether I wanted to extend my feelers,’ Jozef replies laughing.

Ellen also laughs. ‘I have never had such an assignment. Yet my feeling says that we are not finished with this. Would you like to take a closer look at Guido Landgraaf this afternoon? Then I call a number of people who may know something more about it,’ Jozef says.

‘Fine, and the book about Palme? Do you know it?’

‘I did not read it, but I know just what it says.’

‘And do you have an opinion about it?’ Joseph shakes his head.

‘Not really. It is plausible that the Kurdish PKK is the link between the murder of Olof Palme in Sweden and the murder of Bilgili in Deventer. Even the possible perpetrators mentioned in the book seem to me to be justified suspects.’

Joseph is silent.

‘But?’

‘Well, is there a but? The murder of Bilgili will no longer be solved. And I think that also applies to the murder of Olof Palme. But that does not say anything about the book. That does point us to certain phenomena that are still current.’

‘You mean the PKK?’

‘For example, but there are more groups active that have little to do with our legal system. We don’t have a clue about what happens in those kind of groups. And if we happen to be involved, we do not understand. The book you just read is a good illustration of that. And therefore worth reading.’

‘That’s a nice conclusion. I turn on the computer and go searching for information on Guido Landgraaf.’

8 Friday, December 1, 15:00

Rob Meier trudges to the kitchen and picks up the last can of beer from the fridge. Each step causes a stabbing pain in the right side of his rib cage. He clamps the cold metal with his right arm against his belly and opens it with the index finger of his left hand. He can not actually use his right hand at all. He may have to go to the doctor only once to ask if it is normal for it to take more than three weeks before any improvement is noticeable. But he prefers not to. Suppose the doctor keeps asking and wants to know what really happened. In the hospital they were satisfied with his statement that he had been bitten in his hand by the Rottweiler of his grandfather while he was standing on the kitchen stairs to replace a lamp. And that he had fallen on the dining table with his ribs by the unexpected attack of the dog. Until he can not do otherwise, he prefers not to tell anyone the embarrassing defeat in Amsterdam.

With the can of beer in his hand he stands in front of his aquarium with tropical fish. That needs to be cleaned. A green layer has formed on the glass in three weeks. The Cardinaletras and Guppies do not bother and swim happily around. But where are the Kemp Fish and Paradise Fish? You have to keep a constant eye on them. Males are distinctly aggressive and able to kill their own species. The ideal composition is one male and three females. This is where the burgundy, male Kempvis comes out. Proudly he swims around with his long fluttering fins. The Cardinal Tetra's and Guppies swim in a large arc around him, past the mirrored glass. On the other side of the one-and-a-half-meter aquarium, the brightly colored male Paradise fish now appears. Of both species the females probably hide between the stones and the water plants.

A shiver pulls through his body when he thinks back to the police dog who put his teeth in his forearm and hand and did not let go. In spite of this he was, sedated by the combination of beer, Bacardi-cola and a double dose of speed, trying to hit the agent of the riot police with his self-made spear. The spear hit the policeman on the plexiglass that protected his face. For a moment the policeman backed away, but regained his balance and then fell on him. Rob had no chance against the policeman, who went completely wild, and the dog who still hung onto his arm. He could not defend himself against the incessant strokes on his rib cage. The policeman had knocked him unconscious if a colleague had not calmed him down. Heavily bleeding Rob staggered back to his mates who had seen much earlier than he that they had no chance against the police force standing between them and the white-red Ajax supporters. Back in his own ranks he felt the pain and had to grab himself on a lamppost in order not to fall through his legs. One of his fellows tore his Go Ahead shirt to pieces and tied strips of yellow-red fabric around his hand to stop the bleeding. Harry Beerenkamp pulled out a small bottle and mixed the contents with a bottom of beer. ‘GHB, you’ll sleep well,’ he said compellingly, leaving Rob no choice but to drink it. The pain did indeed disappear like snow in the sun.

The next morning the pain awakened him at five o'clock. A large red spot had formed in the bed sheet. The strips of cloth around his hand were soaked with blood. He wanted to get up, but a stabbing pain in his rib cage threw him back on the bloody mattress. In vain he tried to fall asleep again. In the course of the next day, the pain in his hand became worse and worse. He also suspected that a number of ribs had been broken. There was nothing to do but to visit the hospital. The doctor found four broken bones in his hand, a ruptured muscle, five deep inflamed flesh wounds and severely bruised ribs. He wrote absolute rest for three weeks.

He drinks the sixth can of today's beer in one gulp. In an hour, he has to go to Harry Beerenkamp. The thought causes a flurry of nausea. Nervously he puts the can of beer to his mouth and finds that it is empty. It is too late to go to the store. He knows Harry has already called him a few times a sissy. In order not to fall completely

outside the group, he must be there tonight, he also knows that it is not wise. ADO The Hague is visiting and it will definitely not be a quiet evening.

Now the female Paradise fish also appear. As usual, they are inseparable. They swim behind the male in their fixed triangle formation. As if they challenge him. Why doesn't he get out? That question has been tormenting him for several months. Since he is banned from the stadium of his beloved club and he can no longer see the matches, it is actually no longer about anything. It does not matter anymore whether Go Ahead Eagles has won or lost. The same thing happens every Friday night. First a minimum of twenty cans of beer, half an hour before the end of the game a few pills and when the game has ended they go looking for the opponent's supporters. Only because Harry Beerenkamp says they have to. Why does no one revolt against Harry? Why does everyone pay hundreds of euros to Harry for pills that make them sick all weekend? Maybe he should talk about it with his two best friends, Timo and Arend. Do they think that way? Or is he the only one who has second thoughts?

Groaning, he searches for his red-yellow Go Ahead shirt that he has not worn since the accident in Amsterdam. He feels like vomiting when he imagines a confrontation tonight. For the first time in his life, he hopes that the police will have organized things adequately. He knows they won't.

9 Friday, December 1, 4 pm

Marieke van Boxbergen stands in front of the high window of the living room and looks gloomy over the lawn surrounded by broad borders. Outside it is gray and wet. The treetops have disappeared in the fog. Is this the realization of her dream? She had imagined the return to Salland as a kind of homecoming. Her birthplace as the end of a long journey. But nothing is less true. She has often moved in her life, but she has never felt more like a stranger than here. Can she ever be as happy here as in Bloemendaal? Why did she really want to move? Was it the hunt for memories of her happy childhood? Or did the romantic image of a life as baroness at an immense estate beckon, as she knows it from English films? She has not yet tasted that feeling of happiness.

Moreover, she is afraid. Not in the least because of the annoying incident with the entrance gate and the dead pigs on the driveway course. But also because of the negative messages in the newspaper. The whole situation gives her an uncomfortable feeling. What is happening in the woods around them? Sometimes she is haunted by the impression that they are constantly being watched.

Guido does not seem to be bothered. Maybe that's what really affects her. He regards it as pointless to go to the police. 'They have other priorities,' he says. She does not agree with that. She can not understand why Guido is not willing to do what every other citizen would do right away. If only for the insurance. Is he afraid of even more publicity? Or is something else going on?

She sees that it takes him, like herself, to find his way. For him it is not just the new environment, his whole life has turned upside down. He has been the center of attention for the last ten years. Every day from nine to nine was filled with appointments in which he played the leading role. That came to an abrupt ending. It was a transition with the highest possible impact. Guido says he loves to learn something new every day about the estate and that he feels like giving birth of his book. She can not really believe it. As far as she knows Guido has never shown any interest in nature and he has never made any effort to write a letter to friends abroad. Maybe his retirement and relocation has put him a little bit off track. She has heard of people who are in a state of shock without being aware of it.

Marieke looks at the clock. It is four o'clock, Guido will not be home before seven. She walks to the telephone and calls 0900-8844.

'Police Deventer, what can I help you with?'

'You speak with Marieke van Boxbergen, the wife of Guido Landgraaf. We have recently moved to the Lankbergen estate and I would like to speak with the Chief.'

'Maybe you can tell me what it's about,' the woman asks kindly.

'I understand that I am taking you aback with my question. However, it is a very delicate issue that I would like to discuss personally with the Chief Commissioner.'

'In Deventer there is a district manager.'

'Can you put me through to the district manager?'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, it is a matter of great importance.'

'I will try, but I can not promise anything. It is not customary for someone to want to speak to the district manager.'

It takes the woman less than half a minute to get someone on the phone.

'You speak to Sonja Gerbrand, secretary of Mr. Maas, the district manager.'

'My name is Marieke van Boxbergen, I am the wife of Guido Landgraaf. Perhaps you have read in the newspaper that we have been living at the Lankbergen estate for a few months.'

The secretary does not respond.

'There have been a number of problems that I would like to discuss with the district manager for a few minutes. Is that possible?'

'That is not common. Has there been a burglary?'

'No, it's something else. It is a delicate issue. I do not want to embarrass you, but it is of great importance that I speak to Mr Maas personally.'

'Your name?' the secretary asks briefly.

'Marieke van Boxbergen, wife of Guido Landgraaf.'

'Wait a minute please.'

'Hello, you speak with Gerard Maas.' The voice does not sound unfriendly. 'What can I do for you?'

Relieved Marieke tells what happened.

'So your husband did not think it necessary to inform the police?'

'No, and I do not understand why. Maybe he expects it to be stopped by itself. But I do not believe that. I'm afraid. That's why I call you.'

'And your husband? Does he know you are calling?'

'No, he is not at home.'

'I understand your problem. I think you made the right decision to call. Will I send someone along to make an official report? Then we have a start and we can assess what is the best follow-up.'

Marieke is shocked by the word official report. At the same time she realizes that it is a logical consequence of her anxiety.

'Fine,' she says.

10 Friday, December 1, 16.30

'Hello, Ellen.'

Ellen looks surprised. It is Gerard Maas.

'Busy?' he asks.

'I have gathered some information about Guido Landgraaf.'

'Good, you've heard what Jozef and I talked about?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know where Josef is?'

'He went home early. They got friends for dinner.'

Gerard Maas sits down on the edge of the table in the middle of the room.

'I was just called by Marieke van Boxbergen.'

'The wife of,' Ellen says.

'Exactly. She is worried.'

'I get that.'

'Do you want to visit her? Just to hear her story. Her husband does not know that she has called.'

'Why?'

'Ask her.'

Half an hour later Ellen drives her Opel Corsa over the winding driveway of the Lankbergen estate. She is surprised about the length of it. She never realized the presence of such a large enclosed estate in the heart of the roads and paths where she regularly walks and cycles with Norman. It must have cost millions.

'Thank you for coming so quickly,' Marieke van Boxbergen greets her with distinction. The wife of the well-known Guido Landgraaf makes a sympathetic impression. Ellen would not give her fifty years, but she knows from research on the internet that she is fifty-seven or fifty-eight. She takes Ellen to the kitchen, where a fire is burning.

'The best place in the house,' she says. 'Coffee, tea, anything else?'

'A glass of water will be fine,' Ellen replies.

When they sit down, Ellen notices that Marieke van Boxbergen keeps biting her lip. Does she always do that, or is she nervous?

'Did you hear anything from your boss?'

'He told me something, but maybe it's better that you tell the whole story.'

'Good. We live here since October. Did you get anything from the commotion around my husband, Guido Landgraaf?'

Ellen nods.

'It was about his salary, right?'

‘And about people who thought that we did not have the right to buy this estate. In itself, I can understand that emotion. I have also sometimes wondered whether Guido's reward was in proportion to what he did. I have worked for years in addiction care myself. Often I was completely destroyed at the end of a working day. And in one month I earned just as much as Guido in one day. Anyway, that's not what it's about now.’

‘Are you still working with addicts?’ Ellen asks.

‘No, in Bloemendaal I started my own health practice fifteen years ago. Once we have settled, I want to build a new clientele here.’

‘Fifteen years? And yet you have decided to leave Bloemendaal.’

Marieke van Boxbergen sighs hardly noticeably.

‘Yes, you must know that I was born here in the neighborhood.’

‘The name indeed indicates that.’

‘I grew up in the very small village of Middel. My father worked at Thomassen and Drijver in Deventer. I have not received much luxury and wealth from home. The benefits of Guido, due to the merger he successfully brought to an end, enabled us to buy this estate. We saw it as a one-time opportunity to give our life a spin once more.’

‘That makes sense, in a way. But you have not been granted a quiet start of your new life for the time being.’

‘No, it is slightly different than I had imagined. And that's what worries me.’

‘If I understood correctly, it started with a vandalized entrance gate and pigs on the driveway.’

‘It was on November 2 to be exact, a Thursday night. I immediately wanted to call the police, but Guido was convinced that it were jokes of young people from the neighborhood. A kind of hazing. According to him, attention would be grist to the boys' mill. Ignoring seemed best to him. ’

‘With a little goodwill you could see those pigs as a bad joke. The demolishing of an entrance gate however is of another category.’

‘Exactly, that's why I'm glad you're here. Now the police has been formally informed, in case something happens again.’

To Ellen's surprise, it seems that Marieke van Boxbergen intends to end her conversation at this point.

‘I also heard something about banners,’ Ellen says therefore.

‘Banners? There, uh, I do not know anything about that,’ Marieke van Boxbergen stammers. ‘How, eh, from whom did you hear that.’

‘From Gerard Maas, and I do not know how he got that information.’

Ellen doubts whether she should play an open card. Why not, she concludes.

‘To be honest, my colleague and I were given the assignment this morning to find out what was true about the rumors that strange things were happening at the Lankbergen estate.’

Marieke van Boxbergen looks at Ellen with disquiet.

‘Strange things? I only know about the entrance gate and the dead pigs.’

‘The other is the banners. We understood that someone has hung several banners with the text Landgraaf Get Off!’

‘That's new to me.’

‘Maybe the rumor is not right.’

‘I immediately call Guido.’

Marieke van Boxbergen takes her mobile from the bag on the kitchen counter and dials a number. She does not leave the kitchen.

‘Am I interrupting?’

‘...’

‘So, get out of the meeting. It's urgent. I just heard something about banners in our garden. Is that true?’

‘...’

‘Geert took them away?’

‘...’

‘Then why do not I know anything about it?’

‘...’

‘I never asked you to worry about me. For now, I know enough.’

Without waiting for an answer from her husband, she presses the red button.

‘Well, you hear it,’ she says. ‘My husband did not want to worry me and ordered the gardener Geert Hadeking to remove the banners. You will get a strange impression from our relationship.’

Ellen does not respond.

‘So you do not know when those banners have hung there.’

Silently Marieke van Boxbergen shakes her head. Ellen sees that the woman wants to say something, but doubts, or searches for the right words.

‘Maybe it's not wise to say it now, but I'll do it anyway,’ she says eventually.

Ellen looks unmoved and says nothing.

‘Guido has been seriously overworked once before. Then he did strange things.’

Marieke van Boxbergen is silent again. With her eyes, however, she now invites Ellen to ask questions.

‘Was that recently?’

‘No, between 1990 and 1995.’

‘Do you have reasons to think that the same situation could happen again?’

‘That is terribly difficult to assess. Then his overwork was caused by too much pressure from his work. Now he is of course retired. The work pressure has therefore disappeared abruptly. On the other hand, I notice that the stream of negative publicity about his benefits leaves its mark. Especially his portrayal as an immoral thief, touches him much more than he shows.’

‘Is that perhaps a reason for him to want to start a new life?’

‘I never saw it that way. Maybe.’

‘You said he did strange things then. May I ask what?’

‘Uh, that is not so relevant,’ Marieke van Boxbergen answers hesitantly. ‘Maybe I should not have told it. Well, this has also been said. Let's not say anything about it.’

‘Do you want to tell me more?’

Marieke van Boxbergen shakes her head.

‘And your husband? I assume you will inform him about this conversation.’

‘I do,’ the woman says with a nod.

‘I leave it to you and your husband's initiative to report the banners in your garden. Do you agree? I will make an official report of this meeting. Next week I will come by to have it read.’

11 Saturday 2 December 8 am

Rob Meier knows he is too late to reach the bathroom. He moves his head aside so that he does not puke in his bed. He does not care anymore. His head is bursting and terrible cramps turn his stomach inside out. However, that pain is dwarfed by the nails that seem to pierce his hand. Groaning, he lays his sweaty head on the clammy pillow. He has to drink some water, but how does he get to the tap? With each hand movement, a high voltage electrical shock surges from his wrist through the rest of his body. He has not been so bad before. A sharp stabbing pain in his head causes a panic attack. Maybe he has been poisoned by Harry Beerenkamp's pills and he is dying of a gruesome death here.

In feverish dream images he sees again and again the grimy smirk of the ADO supporter who immediately knew that he could not use his hand. In no time, the tattooed hooligan grabbed his arm and hit his injured hand with full force against a lamppost. He almost fainted from the pain. If, at that moment, the police had not appeared, he would have lost consciousness at the next blow. Fortunately, the baldheaded fighter let go of him, after having placed another side-swipe at his sleep. With his last strength Rob removed himself from the arena.

Inconspicuous he crept between the houses to the main road. Despite the pain, he could breathe a sigh of relief, glad that he had survived.

Nothing is left of that relief now. His own pain is one thing. In addition, there is Harry Beerenkamp. The disastrous 6-1 defeat of their club, of which Rob, Harry and some twenty others witnessed from outside the stadium, had made Harry frantic. After the final signal he implored that no man from The Hague would cross the river IJssel alive. From a black plastic bag he took a box of bright yellow pills. Directly from Japan, produced for personal use by the Jakuza, which according to Harry were the most violent criminals in the world. The pills worked completely counterproductive. Rob did not feel anything anymore, which was not bad in itself. The side effect however was that he lost all sense of direction, he did not know what was ahead, behind, left or right. Harry himself, with bloodied head, walked like a headless chicken and shouted over and over again: ‘all children in The Hague will be orphans.’ When Harry called everyone to regroup for a new attack, Rob saw no other option than to squeeze out.

Harry will undoubtedly hear that Rob has dropped out prematurely. Rob has enough experience to know that Harry is not going to let him get away with that. Coming days Harry will certainly call him to account. That is why he must take action now.

He screams when tries to leave his bed. It seems as if someone is laying a red-hot iron bar on his tibia. Then he remembers the kick of the hooligan. That guy must have had steel points in his shoes. He does not dare to look at his leg because it feels as if the two parts of his broken tibia have been pushed over each other. There is no chance that he can reach the hospital on his own. He stumbles moaning to the telephone and calls 0900-8844.

‘Police Deventer, what can I do for you?’

Rob feels like screaming.

‘Rob Meier here. I'm badly injured and I have to go to the hospital, arghh..’

The groan is not played. He will not keep it up for long.

‘Can I have your adress?’

'Boecholtstraat 140.'

'Can you say something more precisely what is going on?'

'I'm in a lot of pain,' Rob groans. 'My tibia is broken, my hand probably too, I have a heavy concussion and am very nauseated. I almost faint.'

'I'm sending an ambulance.'

Exhausted Rob falls to the ground. He will soon be in the hospital. For the time being there he be there safe for Harry Beerenkamp.

12 Tuesday 5 December 8.30 hours

'Good morning, Brian,' Ellen greets her roommate. There is a present on her keyboard, wrapped in Santa Claus paper.

'What is that?' she asks. 'Has the Saint been around?'

'That's what it looks like,' Brian replies grinning.

'Shall I open it?'

'Why not?'

It is a chocolate letter E.

'Has the holy man from Madrid been here too?'

Josef is standing in the doorway, with an identical package in his hand.

'It has been a long time since Santa Claus surprised me. That demands a drink. May I invite you for a cup of coffee in my room?' he asks.

Ellen grabs her notebook. She has to catch up with Jozef about her conversation with Marieke van Boxbergen.

'Can we talk about the residents of the Lankbergen estate?' Ellen asks when they have finished their coffee.

'I heard from Gerard that he sent you to Marieke van Boxbergen on Friday.'

'Yes, too bad you were not there.'

'Did Landgraaf come home unexpectedly?'

'No, not that. In my innocence I asked her about the banners. Turned out she did not know anything about it. She immediately phoned her husband who gave as an excuse that he had not wanted to worry her. She was furious.'

'Did she make any impression on her husband?'

'I wonder. Yesterday I went back to let her read the official report of her statement.'

'Was Landgraaf there this time?'

'No, that's why we do not have a report on the banners yet. Landgraaf had told her he did not think it necessary.'

Joseph shakes his head.

'Weird people.'

'Especially Landgraaf. Marieke van Boxbergen seems a strong and sensible woman to me. Yet she is worried.'

'And Landgraaf pretends nothing is wrong.'

'That's what it's like.'

'Is her concern based on that one incident, or is there more to it?'

'She was not clear about that. I got the impression that the situation was distressing her.'

'You mean the estate?'

'I think it's more, it's the whole shift. The new house, the new environment, the new life of her husband.'

'Hm.'

'So my question is, are we putting more energy into this?'

Joseph looks at Brian.

'Boy, tell me something smart.'

Brian laughs uncertainly.

'If someone else mentioned a scrapped entrance gate and dead pigs on the driveway, we would certainly do something with it. It is more than a joke. Then add the banners,' he says.

'So you would start an investigation?' Ellen asks.

Brian nods.

'What about those banners? Do they still have them?' he asks.

'No, Landgraaf had instructed Hadeking to remove them immediately,' Ellen says.

'And apparently with the order not to inform his wife,' Joseph sighed. 'How stupid do you have to be to reap fifty million?'

Ellen shakes her head.

'Then we have very few leads for an investigation,' she says and looks at Jozef.

'Let's do the following. You delve a little deeper into the lives Guido Landgraaf and his wife. In a week or two we will go to Lankbergen again, to hear if she is still worried,' Jozef concludes.

Ellen doubts whether she agrees with Josef's proposal. The facts are too serious to do nothing. On the other hand, she has no idea what they could do. Especially Marieke van Boxbergen's concern is bothering her. She was not playing.

13 Wednesday, December 20 7:00

There are ice flowers on the window of the kitchen door. Guido Landgraaf shudders. He turns to the tiled stove and opens the door to see if the fire is already large enough for larger blocks. Despite all the unpleasant events of the past few weeks, he still enjoys life as a landlord every day. It brings him back to the essence of existence. He warms himself with the wood from his own soil, eats the hares and pheasants that Geert Hadeking has shot for him and cuts kale from the vegetable garden behind the house.

How did he survive all these years, running from meeting to meeting, spending hours wandering aimlessly at airports, studying for nights on incomprehensible numbers and crawling through the mud for awkward journalists and arrogant shareholders?

The soft sputtering of his Bezzera machine indicates that his espresso is ready. According to the weather forecast, the east wind continues for a few days and so today it will be a nice clear day. He is looking forward to the job he is going to do together with Hadeking, the felling of a monumental beech that has been damaged by mold and therefore may be cut down. It was a surprise that Hadeking asked him if he wanted to help. Although he had offered the gardener his help to the maintenance work immediately after entering the mansion, Hadeking had not asked for it until yesterday. Guido Landgraaf attributed this to a form of modesty and decided to take the time to build up a relationship of trust with his gardener. Cutting the beech together will certainly be a step in the right direction.

Guido Landgraaf spreads two sandwiches and takes place with yesterday's paper at the large oak kitchen table. The fire in the stove is now so intense that the slider at the back can be closed. Thanks to the ingenious smoke extraction system, the blue-white tiles absorb heat on all sides of the stove. In about half an hour the stove is so hot that an armful of logs will suffice for the rest of the day.

Landgraaf is startled by a soft knock on the window of the kitchen door. He gestures to enter Hadeking.

'Good morning Geert, coffee?'

Hadeking looks uncertain.

'Normally I always start immediately and at ten o'clock I drink coffee from the thermos.'

'But I assume you have no objection drinking a cup of fresh coffee now.'

'No, no, that's fine,' he says hesitantly.

'Moreover, it is still bitterly cold and dark. We have to be able to see where the tree ends up.'

'Yes, that's better,' the gardener murmurs.

'Also a piece of home baked cake? Hard workers should eat well.'

Hadeking nods.

'Gentlemen, you will be careful? I'm going to Jenneke.'

Marieke van Boxbergen is dressed in equestrian clothing in the doorway.

'Don't you have to eat something first? Hunger will make you faint and you will fall from the horse's back.'

'I'm going to drink coffee at Madeleine. She always makes delicious cake. We will enjoy ourselves to the full.'

'Well, just take care. The sand paths have probably been frozen.'

'I will.'

'Jenneke is the horse,' Landgraaf explains redundantly.

Half an hour later, Landgraaf and Hadeking walk across the lawn to the edge of the forest. The beech is about thirty meters into the forest.

'I've been looking,' the gardener says. 'I think we can drop the tree that way.' He points towards the lawn. 'The only thing that can happen is that one of the branches touches the two currant trees. And that the crown makes holes in the lawn, but that can be restored.'

The uncertainty with which the gardener sat at the kitchen table has completely disappeared. This is his domain.

'When the tree is lying, we saw the branches.'

'Sounds perfect,' Landgraaf says cheerfully. 'Tell me where to start sawing.'

Hadeking draws an imaginary line on the thick trunk with his finger.

'Here the first cut, slanting upwards. Then from top to bottom.'

'A v-shape.'

'Right, but it must be exactly in the right place. That determines the direction of the fall. Then we saw on the other side, slightly above the first cut.'

'May I?' Landgraaf asks eagerly. Hadeking hands him the big and heavy chainsaw.
'Go ahead,' he says and takes a step back.
Landgraaf points to the lever at the back of the chainsaw and looks quizzically.
'Just pull,' the gardener says.
'And now?' Landgraaf asks, holding on to the roaring chainsaw with both hands.
'Saw,' Hadeking answers dry.
Landgraaf uncertainly moves the saw to the tree. He is startled by the bang with which the rotating chain hits the tree.
'Slightly slower and hold the saw firmly,' Hadeking says.
Despite the freezing cold sweat breaks out all over his body. The saw is heavier than expected and does not sink into the tree like a hot knife in the butter. In addition, the saw pulls obliquely, so that the cut does not become horizontal.
'Keep it straight,' Hadeking says harshly. 'Make the saw do the work.'
Landgraaf looks at his gardener in despair.
'Will I show it?'
Landgraaf nods.
'I don't understand,' he sighed. 'It can not be that difficult, can't it?'
Hadeking takes over the saw and lets the engine roar once. He puts the saw five centimeters below Landgraaf's cut. The owner of the estate looks curiously if the gardener acts differently from the way he did it. It's hard to see. It seems as if the experienced man also has trouble letting the saw do what he wants. Nevertheless, the saw slowly but surely disappears into the tree.
'Are you okay?' Landgraaf asks.
'Tired,' Hadeking puffs and pulls the saw up and down a bit. It is clear that it is not working the way he wants.

Again Hadeking makes a pulling movement and then something happens that Guido will later often reevaluate in his mind. From nothing he sees the screeching saw coming. Before he has been able to respond, he feels a grinding pain in his upper leg. In a flash he tries to understand what has happened. It seemed as if Hadeking slipped away from the frozen tree stump against which he braced himself. With both hands he grabs the wound and feels the warm blood flowing over his hands. Hadeking has laid down the chainsaw, takes off his coat and ties one of the sleeves around Landgraaf's thigh very quickly. Then he also pulls out his blouse and wraps it tightly over the wound. Landgraaf screams out of pain.
'We have to call a doctor,' Hadeking says. 'Can you stand?'
Landgraaf nods with a pale face. The gardener puts Landgraaf's arm around his shoulder and, step by step, they limp to the house.
'Is it going?' Hadeking asks as Landgraaf sits on a chair in the kitchen.
'I think it's not that bad,' he replies. He once cut himself very deeply with a knife and then he didn't have any feeling at all. The wound was so deep that the nerves were cut. It also barely bled. Now the wound is hurting terribly and bleeding violently. Despite the pain, he realizes that it is a favorable sign.
'The doctor will be here in five minutes,' Hadeking says after he called.

'It's not too bad, after all,' the doctor says after taking care of the wound.. 'You were very lucky. It is only a superficial flesh wound that causes a lot pain, but will be largely cured within a week. Half an inch deeper and the damage had been enormous.'
The doctor looks at Geert Hadeking.
'How did that happen for God's sake?' He asks sternly. 'Why does Mr. Landgraaf not wear safety trousers, why did he stand so close to you, and why did you wave that saw in the first place?'
The gardener is looking very unhappy.
'That should never have happened,' he stammered. 'I, I slipped, I think.'
'It was also me,' Landgraaf says. 'Of course I should not have been there, but I was too curious. And too eager. This is work for professionals, without being distracted by amateurs.'
'Hmm,' the doctor murmurs. 'One or two days of rest is sufficient, then you can start moving again. If it remains painful, you should call.'
The doctor disappears through the kitchen door.
'Well, Geert. That was our first joint job. We had earned something better. You can go home and take a day off tomorrow. I like to talk to you before Christmas about the plans for next year. Are you coming by the day after tomorrow?'
Hadeking nods but still looks repentant.
'Once again. I'm so sorry. This should not have happened,' he says.
'Never mind, Geert. I am still alive. I'll walk around again in tow days, and never forget, you can't make an omelet without breaking the egg.'

When Hadeking leaves the estate with his twenty-five-year-old Renault 4, he almost collides with the Volkswagen Touareg from Marieke van Boxbergen. Just in time he can give a tug at the wheel so that the cars do not touch each other. He does not see that Marieke is behind the wheel with tears in her eyes.

‘Guido, we’re leaving here.’

Landgraaf looks startled and sees his wife with red eyes in the doorway.

‘It’s terrible. The people here do not want us,’ she says with a lump in her throat. Then she sees the bandage around the bare leg of her husband. ‘What happened to you?’

‘Accident with a chainsaw. Damage is not too bad, just a superficial wound.’

Marieke van Boxbergen plunges down on a kitchen chair and looks at her man with dismay.

‘Guido, what’s going on?’

‘Nothing special with me, it was just an accident,’ he says. Then he sees the sand on his wife’s clothes and the tear in her pants. ‘What happened?’

Tears roll down Marieke’s cheeks. Landgraaf wants to get up to comfort her. A fierce pain shoots through his leg.

‘There were boys in the woods,’ Marieke snorts. ‘They had dressed up and suddenly jumped out of the bushes. Jenneke was shocked and started to prance.’

‘Did you drop off?’

‘No, I got her back under control and turned around. The boys came after us, screaming loudly.’

She starts to cry again.

‘And then suddenly there was a rope on the road,’ she sobs. ‘I saw it too late and Jenneke could not stop. She ran up against the rope and scrambled again. Then I fell off.’

‘Jesus,’ Landgraaf says. ‘You could have been dead. I immediately call the police. Now it has been enough.’

Marieke wipes the tears from her cheeks with her sleeve. Black stripes remain.

‘Why don’t we go back to Bloemendaal? We were happy there after all.’

‘Never,’ Landgraaf says firmly. ‘The one who thinks he can drive me away does not know me. If people want war, they get it their way. And when I go, I go because I want to go. Those rotten boys will regret this very much.’

14 Wednesday, December 20, 12.30

‘An attack, you say?’

That’s what Ellen hears when she is about to step into Jozef’s room. Jozef has noticed that she is standing in the doorway and presses a button on the telephone so Ellen can listen to the conversation via the loudspeaker.

‘And how is she doing now?’ he asks. Ellen concludes that it concerns Marieke van Boxbergen.

‘Fortunately no more than a few bruises and some scratches. It could have been much worse. This may not happen again.’

‘Can we come right away?’

Joseph looks at Ellen. She nods.

‘That would be nice. Your colleague has been here before, I understood.’

‘You can expect us in fifteen minutes.’

Jozef puts the phone down.

‘Landgraaf,’ he says to Ellen.

‘Did something happen to his wife?’

‘Dressed boys stretched a rope over the road where she came by with her horse.’

‘What?’

‘Yes, it is true. The horse was startled by the rope and started rearing when suddenly four boys jumped out of the bushes. That’s why she fell off the horse.’

‘That is almost an attempt at murder,’ Ellen says shocked.

‘Can you come with me?’

‘I have to eat something.’

‘You know what? After our visit to Landgraaf we will have lunch at ‘t Hosselt. The owner of ‘t Hosselt always used to be well informed. I have not been there for a while.’

Lankbergen is engraved on both sandstone pillars of the entrance gate. Ellen has not noticed that the last time she was here. The ornate letters are green weathered. The iron gate is open. Jozef drives in with his Peugeot 404. A few bars of the fence are damaged and slightly bent.

Last week Ellen searched the internet for information about Guido Landgraaf. The results were not spectacular. Most articles spoke of a competent CEO. The merger of the various energy companies into the mega company

ZONNU was generally considered a good step. The great dissonance in the predominantly favorable reports was the criticism of his benefits. He was one of the first directors who said that the salary of the director of a public company should be as high as that of a director of a private company. In a period of four years his salary rose from just below 200.000 to over 900.000 per year. The commotion vanished when directors of hospitals, housing corporations and public television broadcasters followed the road he paved. It was only after his retirement as CEO of ZONNU that the violence of the press had erupted because of the value of his shares.

Jozef parks his antique Peugeot between the BMW X5 and the Volkswagen Touareg in the parking lot next to the house. A woman comes down the stairs from the platform. She welcomes Ellen and introduces herself to Jozef.

‘Van Boxbergen?’ he asks. ‘So you have your ancestral roots in the neighborhood.’

‘True, actually I was born and raised nearby myself.’

Ellen hears a small hitch in her voice.

‘My husband injured himself with a chainsaw,’ she says.

‘A chainsaw?’

‘He took it rather lightly. He could have easily cut his leg in half.’

‘It has not been a morning of great joy and happiness.’

The smile of Marieke van Boxbergen is not convincing.

‘We’re going to the kitchen. It’s nice and warm there.’

‘Come in,’ the man at the kitchen table says with a heavy voice. ‘The doctor ordered me not to move. An accident with a chainsaw.’

He points to his upper leg.

‘That could have ended worse,’ Jozef says and shakes the man’s hand. ‘Jozef Laros, police Deventer. This is Ellen van Dorth, my colleague.’

The man’s hand feels warm and dry. It is a powerful, firm handshake, but certainly not too hard. Would this be the secret to a successful career? A perfect handshake. The seated man immediately has a reassuring effect on her. Ellen studies his face. No distinctive features. Gray-blue eyes, a somewhat big nose, a slight chin and a regularly well-maintained set of teeth. Confident and friendly.

‘Thank you for coming so quickly. Sit down.’ He points to two chairs at the kitchen table. ‘Would you like something to drink? Or maybe eat? It’s lunchtime after all.’

‘I love coffee,’ Jozef says, with an oblique eye to the chrome espresso machine.

‘And madam?’

‘I also like coffee.’

Landgraaf looks questioningly at his wife, apologizing at the same time.

‘The coffee is normally my territory,’ he explains.

‘Espresso? Cappuccino?’ Marieke van Boxbergen asks.

To Ellen’s surprise Jozef chooses the cappuccino. He usually drinks his coffee black.

‘Where will we start?’ Jozef asks when the wife of Guido Landgraaf has also joined them.

‘With what happened,’ Landgraaf replies immediately.

‘Okay, what did happen exactly?’

‘Maybe you could tell them,’ Landgraaf says to his wife.

Marieke van Boxbergen briefly describes how she was attacked in the forest.

‘So it was four people?’ Jozef asks when the woman seems to have finished her story.

‘As far as I could see. Maybe there were more hidden in the bushes.’

‘What were they dressed like?’

Marieke van Boxbergen has to swallow for the first time.

‘Like pigs,’ she says in a broken voice. She obviously tries not to cry. ‘All four of them had a pig mask. One of the four also had a pink robe on. The others wore blue overalls.’

‘And their shoes?’

‘They were walking on clogs.’

A silence falls.

‘So the horse reared and you fell off.’

The woman nods.

‘And the boys?’

‘They ran away, laughing.’

‘Did they say anything?’

Marieke van Boxbergen silently stares at the full cup that is on her table. She has not drunk it yet.

‘Probably. But I can not remember what they were talking about.’

‘By the way, are you sure that they were boys?’

‘Not a hundred percent of course. I have not seen their faces.’
‘And the rope?’ Did the boys take that?
‘No, uh ... I think they left it.’
‘Where? Attached to the trees?’ Ellen asks.
‘Eh, no. Two boys held the rope. When they jumped, it fell to the ground.’
‘Let’s go to the place. Do you agree?’
Marieke van Boxbergen nods. Nobody says anything and this time the silence feels awkward.
‘And’, Landgraaf breaks the silence, ‘what are you going to do?’
‘Well, what could we do?’
Ellen sighs internally. She can not understand why Jozef thinks it necessary to express his dissatisfaction with the withholding of information by Landgraaf in this way.
‘You are the police, not me.’
Jozef smiles.
‘The police know very little by themselves and can only function thanks to information they receive from others. Why did not you tell us what happened in recent months?’
Ellen looks at Landgraaf’s reaction. He does not shrink and looks at Jozef quietly.
‘I understand what you’re saying. I think what has happened before is incomparable. I can not imagine that there is a connection between a few banners and the attack on my wife.’
‘No connection? How can you be so sure about that?’ Jozef asks. A mixture of ridicule and annoyance sounds in his voice. ‘I do see some similarity between dead pigs on your driveway and boys with a pig mask.’
‘Indeed. In my view, that is a clear indication.’
Now Ellen hears a trace of irritation in Landgraaf’s voice.
‘What do you mean?’
‘Most people use symbolism and words from their own world of experience. Imagine a policeman who has allowed the perpetrator of a crime to escape.’
Landgraaf looks at Jozef insistently.
‘If that policeman likes to watch birds in his spare time, he will say that the bird has flown. But if he likes fishing, he will say that the perpetrator escaped through the net.’
‘That in itself might not be an entirely unimaginable theory. So you think we are dealing with pig farmers now?’ Jozef asks. ‘Or sons of pig farmers, rowdy rural youths.’
Ellen eagerly awaits a verbal outburst of Jozef. She knows Jozef well enough to know that Landgraaf’s dominant, stinging tone touches an open nerve. However, Jozef doesn’t react as she expected.
‘We will include your suggestion in our research,’ he answers affably.
‘Good, can you tell me what you are going to do now?’ Guido Landgraaf asks without a glance or blush.
‘No, we must first analyze all information. Then we draw up a number of hypotheses about the possible ground for the events. We then examine them, and continue to do so until we know who did it,’ Jozef replies.
‘That seems like a solid approach,’ Guido Landgraaf says.
Ellen feels that she has landed in a farce. Do the men play a game? She looks at Marieke van Boxbergen with an oblique eye and sees that she also does not understand anything about the performance that takes place before her eyes.
‘Shall we drive to the scene of the accident?’ Jozef asks cheerfully. He turns towards Guido Landgraaf. ‘We will keep you informed,’ he says. ‘I hope your leg will recover rapidly.’ Guido Landgraaf nods and smiles politely.

15 Wednesday, December 20 13.45

Jozef and Ellen drive through the bare beech forest to the inn ‘t Hosselt. In the back of the car is the rope the four costumed boys used to frighten the horse Jenneke.
‘I will ask Piet van Gestel to investigate the location,’ Jozef says when he parks his car. ‘Who knows we may still find a piece of clothing, or a cigarette butt. I have a strong feeling that we are not finished with this yet. To be honest it really worries me.’
Jozef exactly expresses Ellen’s thoughts. She can not imagine the harassments merely being some silly game of rowdy rural youth.
In the restaurant it is even busier than Ellen had expected on the basis of the number of cars in the parking lot. At least half of the forty tables is occupied, mostly by men in suits. The man behind the bar looks up and seems to be frightened. Nevertheless, he steps from behind the bar to welcome Jozef and Ellen.
‘Laros and, uh ...’ he says.
‘Van Dorth,’ Ellen adds.
‘What brings the two of you to my restaurant? Not a crime. I presume?’
‘Hello Derk, how are you?’
‘As you can see,’ the barman replies and looks around. ‘Busy.’

'We only dropped by for lunch. Or is it too late for lunch?'

The tension on the face of Derk van der Broek immediately fades away.

'Our philosophy has not changed since we last met. Guests are welcome from nine in the morning until midnight.'

'And you are still loyal to your post.'

'I can't think of doing anything else. What table do you prefer? Close to the fire or somewhat chillier?'

Ellen points to the table in front of the window.

'Fine, what do you want to drink?'

'Do you have bock?' Jozef asks.

'Which brand do you prefer?'

'I'll be happy that you tell me.'

'And madam?'

Ellen hesitates. Having lunch in a restaurant while she is at work, which Jozef regularly does, still feels strange.

Drinking beer or wine is one step further.

'I'm going for the bock as well,' she concludes.

'Do you have any urgent matters this afternoon?' Jozef asks when Derk puts two glasses of beer in front of them.

Ellen shakes her head. Since nothing new has come up during the past week, she has been looking forward to a quiet end of the year. Hopefully the Landgraaf case will not queer the pitch.

'Lady and lord, the card,' says Derk van der Broek with a smile. 'This week I can especially recommend the pheasant on a bed of sauerkraut with mashed potatoes.'

'Seems perfect to me,' says Jozef without looking at the card.

'To me as well,' Ellen says.

'Two pheasants, great choice,' the barman says. His slightly exaggerated smile of delight shows that he's still somewhat uncertain about the visit of the police couple.

'Eh, Derk,' Jozef says when the barman has taken a few steps. 'Do you have a few minutes in the next hour?'

Derk van der Broek freezes with a shock.

'It depends on the crowds,' he replies curtly. Nothing has been left of the smile on his face.

'What's the matter with you today?' Ellen asks when Derk van der Broek is outside hearing distance.

'What do you mean?'

'First Guido Landgraaf and now poor Derk van der Broek. Do you have any reason to fight with them? Or do you use them to vent some undefined displeasure on them?'

'I just ask them something.'

'That can be done in a different way.'

'Hmm,' Jozef mumbles and drinks his glass of beer in one go. 'Maybe I need a vacation. That Landgraaf has fallen badly on me, and right now I haven't got a clue where to get the energy to turn it for the better.'

'I agree that it is incomprehensible that he has thrown away those banners.'

'It's not even about that. From everything the man says and does, it turns out that he is completely loose of what happens outside his own world. Types like Landgraaf are the modern feudal rulers who undermine the entire society with their greed and self-overestimation.'

Ellen laughs.

'Long live the revolution.'

'Just laugh about it. As a police officer you also belong to the oppressed. Landgraaf is probably drinking an expensive whisky now, while we are solving his problem.'

'At this very moment I have little to complain about, beer, food and a good conversation. What more do we need?'

Derk van der Broek puts two steaming plates on the table. He looks at Jozef..

'What is it about?' he asks.

'Guido Landgraaf.'

'The guy who bought Lankbergen. He was here last week and the week before. I can already consider him a valued guest.'

'Do you know anything about him?'

'He is rich. At our expense, I have been told.'

Jozef grins at Ellen.

'You see, Derk and I are completely in line. What else do you know, Derk?'

'Little to nothing.'

Ellen can not prevent herself from smiling. Even from a great distance, she would have seen the subtle change in his facial expression and posture, obviously showing that Derk van der Broek does not speak the truth.

'What do you know?' Jozef asks in a dry tone.

Derk looks around.

'Maybe I heard some rumours last week. About a group of people who do not like him.'

'Why not?'

'People say he does not belong here, as you can probably imagine. In reality, of course, it is all about the money.'

'Who is in that group?'

'I don't know. The people who told me did not know either. Maybe it is the neighbors who are still angry that the estate is no longer freely accessible, or the farmers who want to pay less rent, yet another was talking about youngsters from Deventer who were bored.'

'So you actually have no idea.'

'At most, I have my own opinion.'

'Surprise me.'

'It's not people from the immediate vicinity or the village. I know those people. They would never make their objections known this way. Do unto others as you would they should do unto you.'

'That is an interesting view. So you think it's the work of outsiders?'

'I'd a bet on that. Do you want a dessert?'

'For me an espresso, please.'

'And a cappuccino,' says Ellen.

It has been three o'clock when Jozef and Ellen walk through the long corridor of the police station.

'Are you expecting me to do anything?' Ellen asks

Jozef's gaze shows a trace of annoyance. He sighs.

'It's our fate that we cannot say that we don't feel like it.'

'What's your problem?' Ellen asks annoyed. 'Just the fact that Landgraaf has raised so much money?'

'No, I am particularly perturbed by the fact that he did not go to the police before.'

'Why don't you try to see that positively? He first tried to solve it himself. Isn't just that what politicians demand the citizen to do?'

'As far as I am concerned, we do the following,' Jozef says. 'Can you make an overview of what we are dealing with? And maybe you can go with Piet van Gestel to the place of the attack at the end of the day. Tomorrow morning we will discuss whether we are going to spend our Christmas days solving mister Greed's problems.' Ellen swallows a cynical comment on misplaced jealousy. It looks as if Jozef really means it.

16 Wednesday 20 December 17.00

Robert Devenijns drives the A1 at high speed. Between Barneveld and Apeldoorn it is quiet on the road and that gives him the opportunity to accelerate to maximum speed. A satisfied smile appears on his face when he sees the 1 on the digital display being replaced by a 2. It is not often that he touches two hundred kilometers per hour in the Netherlands. Cursing out loud he pushes hard on the brakes when a Passat with a few children in the back seat swerves to the left to overtake a truck more than a hundred meters ahead. Robert could have overtaken the Passat three times.

'Such bastards have to taken off their driving license, not the people who drive too fast,' he grumbles.

Robert lights up a cigarette. A sign that he is tense, what does not often occur. He has been in the business for 30 years now and has developed a flawless instinct for danger. Despite the lack of strong muscles, superior reflexes or an extremely steady hand he has always done his job without any significant damage. His strength is knowing where and when he should or should not be somewhere.

Now, however, he has allowed himself to ignore his intuition and not to resist against a tempting offer. He has no more than an address in the vicinity of Deventer and a name: Guido Landgraaf, the man of fifty million. It is not the name that makes him insecure. It's the reward that the man mentioned. He started with fifty thousand Euros and ended up with one hundred and fifty. Robert has never earned that much with one job. Fortunately, he had the presence of mind to say he was not a contract killer. 'If so, I would have offered you no more than ten thousand Euros,' Landgraaf replied calmly. He did not want to tell more on the phone. Robert has no idea why he is driving in twilight through the forests of the Veluwe.

17 Thursday 21 December 7:00

'You go first?' Ellen asks Norman.

'No, I prefer enjoying the warm bed a little longer.'

'Don't you have to go out today?'

'No, I work in the office. Finish some loose ends.'

Ellen jumps out of bed and quickly makes her way to the shower. It has frozen hard last night and the temperature in the bedroom is not far above the freezing point.

'I'm not at home tonight,' she says as she dresses.

'Do you have to work?'

'I'm having dinner with Max. He's coming to Deventer.'

Norman looks surprised.

'Max? I thought he lived somewhere in France.'

'He got an assignment in Amsterdam and he is going to study some geological phenomenon all over the world.

Next week he is already leaving for Brazil.'

'Some people have arranged things well.'

'Certainly geologists. For them there is little to do in the Netherlands and so they often go abroad.'

'Where are you going to eat?'

'I made reservations at Architecture.'

She wants to add: that was our favorite restaurant.

'Nice,' Norman says neutrally.

Does Ellen hear an undertone in his voice? No, Norman is never jealous, he always says. Can he see that she is really looking forward to meeting Max? It is more than an appointment with an old friend or good acquaintance. A month ago, in Amsterdam, she wondered why she had shared the bed with Max for so long. From the first moment of their reunion she felt his attraction. Maybe she should not have invited him to come to Deventer. It was always good between them, and eating in Architecture invokes beautiful memories. She watches Norman throw off the duvet. Norman is in many ways the opposite of Max. And yet there must also be similarities. Otherwise she would never have fallen in love with Norman.

While cycling to the police station she can not get rid of the nagging feeling that she was not completely honest with Norman. When Ellen enters Jozef's room she immediately sees that he is good-humored.

'Have you slept well?' he asks cheerfully.

'I fell asleep counting euro coins that emerged one by one from the mouth of a horse.'

'Or was it the backside of a donkey?'

'Donkey?'

'People like Landgraaf still see their company as a donkey's Gold-Ass? If you let the employees bite on a straw, money will automatically come out.'

Although the tenor of Jozef's words is the same as yesterday, the tone is significantly different. The bitter undertone is gone.

'How did you sail with Piet?'

'He thought it was too dark yesterday afternoon. We will go this morning.'

Jozef scratches his head.

'I've been thinking,' he says thoughtfully. 'As far as I'm concerned, you take on this job independently. I think Brian has time to help you. What do you think?'

It takes a while before the meaning of Jozef's words sinks in. Why she? Why alone? And Jozef? She looks at her senior colleague who taught her so much sees a broad grin on his face. Or is he joking?

'What do you mean?' she asks uncertainly.

'As I say it. You take first position in this case. There comes a time when I have to let go of you as a mentor. Just like a parent who sees his child running away without side wheels for the first time.'

An hour later, Ellen is fully aware that for the first time in her career she is in charge of an investigation. It is true that it's not a murder case, but that doesn't mean it's less complicated. To her surprise Brian acted as if it were the most normal thing in the world that she asked him to help in a study of which she is in charge. He first had to deal with a few administrative matters and he will be entirely at her disposal after lunch.

Ellen stares at the blank A0 paper on the table. What should she write down? It is clear what happened. At first the entrance gate and the dead pigs on the driveway, then the banners and finally the attack on Marieke van Boxbergen by boys with pig masks on their heads. But what now? That's what it's about. The pressure to think and decide what to do is now fully on her.

MOTIVE, she writes. LANDGRAAF HAS A LOT OF MONEY. LANDGRAAF COMES FROM OUTSIDE. Twat else? WANTONNESS FOR FUN. That is also possible. In that case it is not about Landgraaf at all. The longer she thinks, the less she can feel the motivations of the perpetrators.

ACTIONS. What can they do? Later on she will have a closer look at the location of the attack with Piet. They can go to Guido Landgraaf again. But that will not yield anything. He has already said he has no idea who is behind it.

According to Marieke van Boxbergen, there were four boys in their twenties. Although the boys wore masks, she was quite sure about their age. Would that be an entrance? The number of problematic youth in Deventer is not infinite. It is known where some groups gather. Could she contact people who know groups in which potential perpetrators end? GROUPS YOUNG PEOPLE, she writes.

Another entrance to the case is of course Landgraaf. Jozef has depicted a one-sided image of the man: a rapier who has enriched himself scandalously at the expense of society. Ellen wonders how many people think that way. It strikes her that newspaper articles about exorbitant salaries do not lead to massive actions or fierce political debates. Can it be that Landgraaf is the target of the actions, but not because of his money? And in fact, the person Marieke van Boxbergen also qualifies as a target. What do they know about her? Almost nothing. Only her family name suggests that the origins of her family are in the immediate vicinity of the Lankbergen estate. GUIDO LANDGRAAF and MARIEKE VAN BOXBERGEN.

Looking at the large sheet of paper she decides that there is enough to talk about with Brian in her role of research leader. Piet will pick her up in an hour. So she has time to handle some private stuff. First she has to call Norman. The day before yesterday they had more or less expressed the intention to take a break between Christmas and New Year and to do something together. She would like to keep that promise, but Norman must do the same. Experience has taught her that Norman can be assigned by a principal client on the 24th of December to deliver a report on the 2nd of January. She enters his 06 number on her mobile.

‘Norman van der Molen,’ his familiar voice sounds. Ellen is pleased to feel her stomach pleasantly glowing. When will she be ready for living together, she wonders in a fraction of a second.

‘Busy?’ she asks.

‘I’m about to enter a meeting. Anything wrong?’

‘Not at all. Just a question. Is there any chance that you have to work after Christmas?’

‘You do?’

‘I haven’t decided yet, but Jozef just appointed me leader of an investigation.’

Norman starts to laugh.

‘That sounds like serious business. Which case?’

‘It’s about those harassments on the Landgraaf’s estate.’

‘I presume it means that you are working next week.’

‘Not necessarily, but I will not get bored here.’

‘I get it. Shall I call you back at half past one? Then I know more.’

‘Perfect. In any case, as far as I’m concerned there is no need to keep those days free at all costs.’

‘I already got that message. You will hear from me. I love you.’

‘So do I.’

Piet parks the car in front of the wooden barrier. They have to walk a hundred meters to the spot where Marieke van Boxbergen was attacked. It is cold and foggy. Ellen pulls the zipper of her coat all the way up.

‘Here we found the rope,’ she says. ‘The boys who held it must have been there.’

She points at the bird-cherry on either side of the dirt road. Piet looks around.

‘How many boys were there? Four?’

‘That’s what she said.’

Piet bends forward and picks up something. A white string.

‘A bright white, not weathered piece of elastic twenty centimeters in length,’ he says.

‘Probably from a mask.’

‘Looks like it. What do we have here?’

Piet slides aside some sand with his foot. A piece of pink cloth appears. He puts it in a plastic bag.

‘Probably torn off because someone got up,’ Piet says.

‘Marieke van Boxbergen said that one of the boys wore a pink robe.’

‘Another confirmation that the woman’s story is right.’

Looking ahead, Piet walks down the path. A little further he stops and pushes two bushes aside. He bends over and picks up two Heineken cans.

‘No rust, no green deposits,’ he says.

‘It has not been left by a thirsty nature lover on a hot summer day, I guess.’

‘Certainly not.’

Ellen should have seen those things too. Does Piet have better eyes, or does he look differently? Or does he know what to expect? It would be nice if she will also find something. Piet scavengers through the bushes.

‘Ellen!’ Piet calls a few minutes later. He holds up a plastic bag. The bag contains remnants of a yellow powder.

‘That’s probably not a curry,’ she says.

‘I guess amphetamine.’

‘Beer and amphetamine?’

‘Good stuff for fucked-up boys.’

Piet looks at Ellen.

'I have to go somewhere else,' he says. 'Any objection to go back? Or do you want to look further?'

'We are not finished here yet, I think.'

'Tomorrow I will send two colleagues. Agreed?'

Ellen nods. Did Jozef tell Piet that she is in charge of the investigation? Who's making the decisions right now, she wonders.

'What do you think?' she asks when they enter Deventer.

'There's something strange going on. Boys, beer, amphetamines, vandalism, jokes, that is in itself a recognizable image. However, in particular the focus of the actions does not fit into that picture. The harassments are organized.'

'That is to say, by someone.'

'Exactly, and for me that would be a reason not to underestimate the situation. Why would this have been the last action?'

Piet confirms Ellen's concerns about the case. The person who has initiated these actions must have a purpose. And one thing is for sure, that goal has not been achieved yet.

There is a note on Ellen's computer. It is from Brian. He is back at the desk at three o'clock. That means that Ellen still has two hours. That should be enough to do most of the Christmas shopping. Food, a gift for her parents where they go for Christmas, a present for an old friend who lives next door to her parents and a nice Christmas gift for Norman. She also intends to buy a Christmas tree this year. In recent years, she didn't do that due to lack of time and lack of enthusiasm of her friends. This year she will not let anything come between her and her desire to have a real, richly decorated tree in the house. Therefore she not only has to buy a tree, but also lights, garlands and colored balls. Hopefully, all that stuff will be on sale just shortly before Christmas.

18 Friday, December 22, 4 pm

'Well, that's it for now,' Ellen says to her colleague Brian. 'Let's disconnect and get ready for Christmas. Do you have any plans?'

She knows his parents died a couple of years ago. And he has no girlfriend with whom to spend the dark days at the end of the year.

'At Christmas Eve I will, as usual, be together with my friend Monteverdi listening to his divine madrigals and *Vespro della Beata Vergine*.'

'Contemplating the meaning of life?'

'You should listen to his music for half a day, without distraction. Then you will understand that contemplating the meaning of life is a waste of time.'

Ellen smiles.

'You're still there, that's good.'

It's the Brabant accent of Piet van Gestel.

'Certainly, we wanted to finish the overview of available information before Christmas,' Ellen replies.

'I spoke to Jozef and he made it clear that he had nothing to do with it anymore.'

Ellen thinks she hears a trace of disapproval in Piet's voice.

'That's right,' she says. 'Apparently he does not consider the risk of something going wrong very big.'

Piet frowns his eyebrows.

'No doubt that I would entrust you with the case. In my view you have proven that you keep an overview and do not panic quickly.'

'Are these the most important competences to conduct an investigation?'

'Uh, of course you also have to be a bit smart, and a little social, and structured, and communicative, and much more of course. But I still think overview and calmness the most important.'

'And what is your view on the risky part?'

Now his face darkens. He shakes his head.

'We have indications that the boys with the pig masks belong to a group of Go Ahead Eagles hooligans.'

'What?'

'My men found a Go Ahead lighter a few hundred meters further down the road.'

'A few hundred meters away?'

'At a place with recent car tracks.'

'It is not a very strong proof. A Go Ahead lighter is available in many Deventer houses. Not necessarily property of the resident, but left behind by guests at a birthday party.'

'True, it is an indication that confirms a feeling I had. The yellow powder is indeed amphetamine. I immediately had to think of hooligans. Jozef probably had my suggestion swept off the table right away, but you are not Jozef.'

Ellen hears an undertone in Piet's voice that she can not address easily. Is it possible that he is troubled by changed relationship between them?

Brian has listened in silence all this time, but suddenly he raises his voice.

'If those guys came by car, they apparently knew exactly where Marieke van Boxbergen came by on her horse.' A dead silence fell. All three of them needed some time to think about the implications.

'It indeed looks like the boys knew about day, time and route. Is it possible that they have been posting for days on end?' Piet says.

'It is possible, but in my view not very likely,' Brian says.

'So somebody must have told the boys when Marieke would come along,' Ellen says. 'Please correct me if I'm jumping to conclusions too fast.'

'That can be found out,' Piet says while looking at his watch. 'Are we ready?' he asks, suddenly in a hurry. 'If so, I am heading for the toyshop to buy some Christmas presents. Everything I do today I don't have to do tomorrow.'

Ellen nods understandingly. She knows that Piet has four children between one and seven years old.

'One more thing though. We were talking about the risks. Your face speaks volumes,' she says.

'Don't you get it?'

Ellen shakes her head.

'Have you followed a little what has happened in recent years?'

'Probably not enough.'

'Did you get anything from the massive and violent riots during the Go Ahead-Ajax so called friendly match some years ago?'

'I can remember that.'

'After Go Ahead-Ajax it went wrong successively against Zwolle, once again against Zwolle for the cup and against FC Den Bosch.'

'Please forgive me playing the dumb blonde, but what do these riots have to do with this investigation?'

Piet looks at her in disbelief.

'We are talking about the Go Ahead Eagles, the red-yellow pride of the city. Go Ahead is sacred. Who does not have the best for the club is against them. For the government of the city, dealing with the local FC is always a tricky business. A mayor who forbids a match because of security reasons will have to endure torrents of criticism. And that certainly applies to Deventer.'

'In this case we are not dealing here with the mayor and a match, but with Guido Landgraaf and a few incidents,' Ellen says, slightly annoyed by the condescending tone with which Piet addresses her. Her intervention doesn't impress Piet one bit.

'The relationship between the city and the club is a shaky balance and nobody is waiting for those few incidents, as you call them. Moreover, the municipal board and Go Ahead have joined forces to halt further growth of the group of hooligans. What I have seen of it, looks promising to me. The approach is aimed at individual, positive influence on the largest part of the group and exclusion of the few rotten apples. Trust is the key word. The boys it concerns must feel that there is trust. Negative stigmatization can disturb the positive vibe.'

Ellen looks at Piet. She is not used to a discourse from his mouth. Normally he is always short on statements, often too short from her point of view. He strictly confines himself to the facts that he is supposed to examine. According to him, interpretation of the facts does not belong to his work. Others may do that.

'That's a clear statement,' Ellen says. 'And thus?'

'Be careful, Ellen. This case can become a hornet's nest. If I were you, I would keep Jozef informed at any time. Even though he has given you the honor to lead this investigation. Nevertheless, I sincerely wish you all a nice Christmas. I am off.'

'You too, and thank you.'

Ellen looks at the paper on her desk. Piet's words still reverberate. Take care, he said. The tone in which he said that Jozef had given her the honor was unmistakably ironic. Did Piet actually say that Jozef consciously saddled her with this assignment? Is Jozef afraid to grasp the nettle? She will think about this the next days.

She writes two things on the big sheet: INFORMATION ROUTE AND TIME MARIEKE, MANEGE? Her first thought went out to the riding school. Only people from the equestrian center know exactly when someone leaves. Or Marieke van Boxbergen must have a fixed schedule, always the same route on the same day at the same time. She can only tell that herself. Maybe she will visit her this weekend, as well as the riding school. Despite Piet's warning, she feels a strong urge to continue with this investigation, her first own case.

'What do you think, Brian?'

'To be honest, like you I didn't have clue of what Piet was saying about Go Ahead. But I think he's right. You should inform Jozef.'

'And what about the hypothesis that Go Ahead supporters are involved?'

'It is clear that we have to confirm this before suggesting things.'

‘Any idea how?’

Brian rides his chair to his desk and sits down at his computer.

‘Look,’ he says a moment later. ‘Go Ahead is playing tonight at home against Eindhoven. I think I can go there.’

‘Don’t you need a club card?’

Brian looks at the screen again.

‘If I read correctly, everyone can buy a ticket for risk-free matches.’

‘Are you saying you’re going to the match tonight?’

‘Why not? Piet will be surprised to hear I was in the Home of the Eagles?’

Ellen must laugh at the image of the neat Brian between wild football supporters.

‘Please be careful not to end up in the section of the hard core enemy supporters. Are you at the office next week?’

‘Yes, I have no more vacation days.’

‘Then we’ll meet again on Wednesday.’

19 Friday, December 22, 17:00

Robert Devenijns walks to his local pub on the corner of the Spiegelgracht and the Leidse Dwarsstraat. For two days he thought about Landgraaf’s assignment. It is a tough job. First he has to find out who is aiming at Landgraaf. Then he has to treat this aggressor in such a way that his client will no longer be bothered. A complicating factor is that the police also took up the case, limiting its room for maneuver. Thanks to his experience as a policeman, however, he knows how to work around the police.

At the age of eighteen he started working at the Amsterdam police force. Although his boss thought he had talent and predicted him a good future, Robert quit after five years. Jobs he aspired to were out of his range because of his lack of training and education. He rented a basement of a building in the Amsterdam centre and established himself as a private detective. What he had hoped for happened, he was given one assignment after another to prove alleged adultery. For days he followed people and photographed everything and everyone with whom the person in question had contact.

He got a name and could slowly increase his rates. This also changed the nature of his assignments. More and more they came from companies in the financial world. Usually the purpose of his assignment was to obtain money or information that his client was entitled to. To achieve that goal, two things always had to happen: first a deep dive into the facts and then a decisive approach. Clients were satisfied and judged that his combination of thinking and doing made him particularly suitable for his work.

The bartender welcomes him and taps a beer.

‘Busy?’ he asks.

‘Busy doing nothing, thinking a bit, that’s it.’

‘And somebody is paying you for hanging around.’

‘Exactly.’

However, there’s not much to think about, since he doesn’t have any information. Therefore has thought more about the lack of information than about the assignment itself. Why did Landgraaf not want to tell him anything? He pretended it to be a complete mystery to him. He brushed aside the questions about possible enemies, as if he wasn’t aware of any enemy at all. But he should have, because he surely has had numerous business conflicts. Is Landgraaf naïve? Or does he withhold information? That is the question that bothers Robert Devenijns. He must take into account that he is used by Landgraaf in a game that is larger than his assignment. But if so, what is the relevance for him? In itself, the assignment is clear. Tomorrow the thought of doubt have to be over. Then he will leave for Deventer. There he will find himself a place to stay for a long time in the vicinity of Landgraaf’s estate. Then he will wait until something happens again. As long as Landgraaf is silent, that’s the only way to discover something.

20 Friday, December 22, 20.00

John Brooks is scared, terrified. It seems like it gets worse every year. And the days around Christmas are usually the worst. The IT-company where he works closes this year for the first time since the establishment between Christmas and New Year. Employees are welcome again on January 2nd. He will be on his own for ten long days.

His girlfriend left him two years ago. Her unexpected, clinical statement that their relationship has cost more energy than it has yielded, hit him like a sledgehammer blow. In the following months he fully became aware that she’s always been his footing. Her presence, her warm body, her enthusiastic stories made sure that the fear never completely caught him. Every time he was awakened by the images of burning cars or blackened bodies at night, she took hold of his hand and calmed him down. During the day she made jokes to pull him out of his ominous thoughts about the horrifying fate that awaited him when they found him.

Fear rules his life since she left. His work as a computer programmer is the only thing left to dispel the fear, but it is much less effective than the presence of his beloved girlfriend. She was there every day, the work has weekends and holidays. She protected him by rest, the work does it by busyness. He has always had problems sleeping at night, but lately they have become bigger and bigger. No matter how long he waits to go to bed, it always takes more than an hour before falling asleep. Usually he wakes up again at three o'clock. His girlfriend's arm stopped him from getting up. Now he gets mad when he stays in the bed. Therefore he has taught himself to get up immediately when he wakes up. Then he gets dressed and wanders through the city, as long as it takes to calm down, no matter the weather.

There is only one way to temporarily entirely eradicate the fear: by making music. Only when he plays, the world disappears, then there is nothing but the tones that he produces. Tones from the time that life was beautiful and safe. On the waves of his music he can reach that world, as soon as the silence falls he is expelled again. When he is afraid he can do nothing but play, play for hours, surrender to melodies that move him away from reality.

He plays since his mother told him that his father was dead. There were tears in her eyes, but she did not cry. He was seven then and did not cry either. He walked quietly to the closet which, on pain of being locked up in the peat-loft, had always been prohibited territory. Now he opened the right door and pulled on the middle drawer. He picked up the four flutes carefully and, without looking at his mother, took them to his room. That evening he played his first song. A month later his mother spoke to him for the first time. She said that he had inherited the talent from his father. That was all she ever said about his music. He never knew what she thought about it when he was practicing in his room. She never offered to look for a teacher, he never asked for it. Years later he secretly went to O'Malleys Bar. Every Monday evening the best musicians from the region gathered to play together. When he was fifteen years old he took his flutes with him for the first time. A year later he had outgrown the level of O'Malleys Bar and created a furor outside his village. He received offers to come and play with well-known bands from Westport, Castlebar and even Galway, the Holy City for every musician. At the age of seventeen he was voted best flute player of County Mayo.

Tonight he will retreat to the cellar that he converted ten years ago to a room that is not only comfortable, but above all one hundred percent soundproof. The insulation material, attached to the walls in thick layers, absorbs the sounds produced in the cellar completely. From the beginning it has been made clear to him that there is only one thing that could betray him, his exceptional talent as a flute player. *'Make sure you never play again and if that is not possible, make sure nobody will ever hear you,'* was the urgent advice from the man who had brought him safely to Amsterdam. He had followed this instruction, with the exception of a two years period. Falling in love with a beautiful dancer had made him reckless, he even joined an Amsterdam folk band with which he performed more than ten times.

Now it's easy to blame himself having performed on stage. He is sure that those performances made them get on his trail. It's not that they know he lives in Deventer, but for them there's no doubt that he is still alive and that he most likely lives in the Netherlands. A few years ago he read in some newspaper that a new group had emerged from the ashes of the old organization. His computer knowledge helped him to hack some computers from his former companions. It made clear that little had changed in fifteen years. The new group also consisted of passionate idealists who were willing to kill and die for their cause and young recruits were still trained at remote places in the west of Ireland. The whole system made an astonishingly amateurish impression. In his time they talked about intercepting letters, tapping phones and falsifying passports. Now ignorant people were talking about hacking computers, intercepting email and the infinite possibilities of internet. Meanwhile no one had thought about the security of their own computers.

The mails he read left no ambiguity about the intentions of the new group. Of course, the liberation of Northern Ireland was the ultimate goal. The English oppressor must be dispersed forcefully. He recognizes the words, the rhetoric. From these signals John deduces that not the new generation, but the old guard is the driving force behind the resurrection. These are people who know him, people who will never forgive him.

The inevitable happened half a year ago. His old name was in a file. In addition, Amsterdam was mentioned as a possible place of residence, the city where he actually lived for the first four years. Who did they have that information from? Only a few people knew of his disappearance. Officially he had fallen overboard during a flight attempt. On a stormy afternoon in October, the English Coast Guard scooped his dinghy a few miles off the coast of Wales. According to the Coast Guard report, he ignored their stop sign and headed for the open sea. There his boat was seized by a wave. His body was never found. Through the internet, he read his own obituary many years later. The announcement talked about a tragic accident caused by youthful hubris.

Nevertheless, people now know that he is not dead, but has moved to Amsterdam. Fortunately, nobody seems to be aware of his new identity and whereabouts. However, that is a matter of time. A person always leaves traces. They'll find him, that's for sure.

He walks to the kitchen and pulls up the hatch in the kitchen cupboard. Under the hatch is a staircase that leads to his cellar. There he will play until his lungs and fingers are exhausted. For a few hours he will be relieved of the fear that they will find him and punish him in a horrible way for his betrayal.

21 Saturday, December 23 9:00

Ellen opens her eyes and looks into Norman's smiling face.

'How's our investigation leader?' he asks. 'Did you dream of a wild chase? Or a difficult questioning? What you did was perhaps sleeping, but certainly not resting.'

While Norman's words slowly dawn on her she tries to remember what her dream was about. Slowly the images return. She has to laugh.

'I was indeed being chased, but not by thieves.'

'Could you escape?'

'Maybe I did not want to escape. It seemed like a nice guy.'

She crawls against Norman and does not tell him that Max was there too. Both men did their very best to please her as much as possible. The excitement from the dream now fully returns. The slow movements of Norman's hands over her body stoke the fire even further. She willingly surrenders to his caresses.

To her surprise, Norman rejects her offer to get fresh bread from the bakery. Yesterday he bought four bake-off baguettes and a large piece of brie. Fifteen minutes later he serves warm rolls with melted brie dripping on the plate and two cups of coffee. Christmas couldn't have started better.

'Was it fun at Architecture? What time you came home?'

'I tried not to wake you up. You were sleeping so sweet.'

'Did Max not have to take the train back to Amsterdam?'

'He came by car and went to his parents in Lochem.'

Will she tell Norman that they went to café De Heks after they left Architecture and stayed there for more than three hours? In fact, they walked to De Heks arm in arm, as they had done so often. In the course of the evening, Ellen it became clearer than ever before what Max meant to her. Max is chaotic, intuitive and unrestrained. His silliness and unorthodox view of the world is completely alien to her, but therefore refreshing and inspiring. Just as before, Max's stories about his geological investigations caused a slight doubt as to whether she had made the right choice to become a detective. This never happens when Norman talks about his work as an organizational consultant and project manager. Why would she tell Norman? She is happy with him and it does not feel right to burden him with a comparison between him and Max. Norman looks at her and apparently feels that she does not want to tell anything about it.

'Do you have a holiday?' he asks. 'Or do you have to figure out some things before Christmas?'

'I would like to talk to Marieke van Boxbergen and pay a visit to her riding school.'

'Sounds interesting. Can I come along? I would like to see how you do that.'

'What?'

'Surprised? It's not that weird, is it?'

Ellen does not have an immediate answer. It sounds logical, but it creates an uncomfortable feeling.

'Eh, no, practically it could be done. But it is my job. Would you take me to a client to show the way you work?'

'Why not?'

'How do you explain my presence to your client? I cannot imagine that your client is delighted to find out that you brought your girlfriend, just for fun.'

'Hm, maybe you're right. But I thought you usually work in couples.'

Norman's question evokes resentment. Does he really think that he can take the position of a colleague without any knowledge? How does he actually imagine the situation? Suppose Marieke van Boxbergen asks them to identify themselves. That can cause major problems. Do not get angry, she tells herself. Norman simply asked an innocent question, motivated by interest in her work.

'I do not think it's such a good idea,' she says. 'You never know what's going to happen. Maybe Marieke van Boxbergen pulls a gun. I appreciate your interest in my work, but it would be unwise to come along.'

'Unfortunately.'

Norman looks disappointed. He had clearly made a different assessment.

'Then I will support you by preparing an exquisite meal tonight. Is that allowed?'

'That would be a major contribution to the public authority in the city. The mayor will be grateful to you,' Ellen answers cheerfully and ignores the slightly cynical undertone in Norman's question.

Ellen is startled by the sound of her phone. Who is calling on Saturday at ten o'clock? To her mother she has made clear long ago that she usually gets up early in the weekend, but not always.

It appears to be Brian. His excited voice and rapid breathing indicate that something is wrong.

'I'm sorry to call you on Saturday, but there's something I'd like to share with you.'

'We, uh, were already awake and have already had breakfast.'

Ellen still feels a little hesitant to talk openly about Norman. At the beginning of their collaboration, she suspected Brian to be in love with her. And maybe he still is. That, however, is an unfounded suspicion. Brian has never shown anything in this direction and seems to have no problems with his bachelor status.

'Can I just drop by? Or do we meet at the office?'

'You make me curious.'

'I was at Go Ahead last night.'

'Did they win?'

'Thanks to an undeserved penalty, that could even see a layman like me. Then they scored again in the last minute when Eindhoven were sick of missing an easy opportunity to equal the score. But you never guess what I've seen.'

'Probably not.'

'A supporter with a pig mask.'

'Shit,' is all she can say while taking stock of the situation. 'But that can also be a coincidence. Such masks are not unique.'

'Even so, you can imagine what I thought when I got the pig mask in sight.'

'Did you have binoculars?'

'Other people must have thought I was a real fan, who wanted to see every passing movement in detail.'

'Ha, ha, they never had imagined that you were searching the tribunes for suspicious individuals. What did you do when you suddenly saw a pig's head? Did you walk up to it?'

'No, that is not easy in a stadium. Therefore I kept a close eye on the person with my binoculars. At one point he took off his mask and I could see his face. That is plastered in my brain now.'

Silence falls. Why did Brian call, Ellen asks herself. Did he want to inform her? Does he expect her to inform Jozef? Or does he expects her to say what he has to do. Suddenly she understands why Jozef returns such a question by asking: what do you suggest? Otherwise he is responsible for everything others do.

'And then?' she asks. 'Did you follow the boy after the match?'

'That's what I had in mind,' Brian replies. 'After the final whistle I ran to the exit, but I did not see the boy anymore. And didn't feel like searching haphazardly in groups where he could belong to. I didn't want to get mixed up with types that you prefer to avoid, especially after a lost game. Fortunately, the atmosphere was excellent this time.'

Ellen tries to imagine how Brian stood there, among the football supporters.

'Did you also have a red-yellow scarf?' she asks.

'I should have done that. Now I had the feeling that everyone was watching me and wondered what that guy was doing there. They could smoke from a distance that I had nothing to do with football.'

'Then a proper scarf would not have helped either.'

'Ha, probably not. Anyway, you didn't get new information?'

'No.'

Ellen thinks.

'I can not properly assess the risks and therefore I would like to talk about it with Jozef or Gerard Maas, if necessary. Piet has convinced me that this case is politically sensitive and that is not exactly my specialty. Can you live with it to wait till after Christmas?'

'No problem. I understand your doubts.'

It is amazing how confident Brian seems to be. In the normal constellation, with Jozef as the man in charge, he is often awaiting. Now he has taken action himself and forces her to take the initiative. She does not know how to interpret that. Is it her merit that Brian takes more space to show his qualities, or is it her lack of decisiveness and superiority? Or does it have nothing to do with her, but all the more with Jozef? Anyway, the change is striking. Then it comes to her mind that she plans to visit Marieke van Boxborgen this afternoon. It is obvious that Norman can not join her, but going alone is not a good idea either.

'Do you have time this afternoon?' she asks.

'I have.'

Brian does not respond immediately when she tells what she's up to.

'Is that a good idea? What are you going to do with the information?' he asks. 'Suppose that the owner of the equestrian centre knows who asked him about the plans of Marieke van Boxbergen. What are you going to do?'

Ellen sighs annoyed. She feels Brian has a point. As long as they are not sure whether they are doing the right things, they can not actually take any formal steps. 'You're right. Let's give way to Christmas. After all, it's not urgent.'

'I did not say that. Who knows, those people are now trying to come up with something new. Christmas, when everyone is supposed to sit peacefully at home, is perfectly suited to thoroughly disturb someone's peace of mind. If I wanted to harass Landgraaf or his wife, I would not allow the Christmas opportunity to pass.'

Ellen sighs again. What does Brian want from her? Is this an indirect way of letting her know that he disagrees with the division of roles?

'So, what is your proposal?' she asks. 'Should we continue, or should we let the case rest for a few days?'

'I would try to contact Gerard or Jozef this afternoon. Listen to their advice.'

Brian is right. If she does not dare to take a decision herself, she must have it taken by her boss. But should she bother them on the Saturday before Christmas?

'I know what we are going to do: nothing, for the time being. I will try to get to Jozef. If that leads to a new insight, I'll let you know. Is that a good idea?'

'Seems fine to me.'

'That was a long conversation,' says Norman when Ellen has put the phone down.

She summarizes her dilemma.

'I would call Jozef right away,' Norman says firmly. 'He is still in charge, even though he has given you responsibility.'

'Can you imagine that I am not overflowing with enthusiasm to call him on Saturday about a matter that he has handed over to me?'

'You can also wait until Wednesday.'

'No, it's better to do it now,' says Ellen and immediately grabs the phone.

Five minutes later she puts down the phone, relieved.

'At Christmas Eve we are invited to have dinner at Jozef and Margot's place,' Ellen says. Jozef thought it wise that she had called and shared her feeling that it was a complex situation. He proposed to combine the useful with the pleasant and therefore he offered to prepare a nice meal. 'Do you still want to participate in the investigation? Because eating with Joseph almost always means working.'

'I'm already looking forward to it. Jozef had cooked very well last time.'

'Do not hesitate to express these compliments in his presence. They are well spent on his cooking efforts.'

'Do you have to call Brian, so he does not have to be in a standby mode all weekend?'

'You are sharp today. Another good idea. But then the weekend can really start as far as I am concerned.'

22 Sunday, December 24th, 7:00 PM

It is already freezing a few degrees and in the course of the night it will get even colder. Robert Devenijns would have liked to have lit a cigarette, but that is not possible. The lighting of the smoldering tobacco or the smell of cigarette smoke could betray his presence. He tries to keep himself warm by moving his muscles without moving. He knows that it will be a hard night and that the chance of success is small.

His client has no idea that his house is now being watched. That's how he works. When he had just started as a private detective he sometimes allowed himself to give in to the curiosity of a client and even to operate together with the client. He quickly found out he was mistaken. The involvement of the client prevented him from objectively assessing facts and from responding quickly and flexibly to unexpected situations. Unlike many other clients, Guido Landgraaf did not question his approach at all.

It was no big deal entering the estate unnoticed. On the east side he discovered a hole in the fence, probably made by the people who had hung up the banners. For Robert it is incomprehensible that Landgraaf has not yet closed that gap. This way he makes the life of unwanted guests very easy. It is just as strange that Landgraaf has no dogs. Every farmer has a watchdog to frighten foreign visitors and warn the boss.

He lies in a shallow pit between the trees and buried himself under a pile of leaves. It is a perfect hiding place. From the pit he has a clear view of the house, the driveway and the large lawn in front of the house. In addition, the leaves protect him from the worst cold. Now he has settled the most difficult part of the evening begins. He must set body and mind to wait for hours. For that he uses an Eastern meditation technique he has taught himself from a book. The technique consists of two steps. First he has to distance himself from his body. The connections between body and mind have to be blocked, making him insensitive to physical stimuli. Being in this state his mind must be brought into a state of limited consciousness, somewhere between dreaming and perception. Because he dreams in a lucid way, he is able to influence his dream and make the dream to follow the path he desires. Therefore dreaming often is therefore a pleasant sensation that can last for hours. Meanwhile, the waking part of his brain registers passively what is happening around him. The moment the situation calls for

action, his mind stops dreaming and instantly returns to the here and now. He can't explain how it works. He does know however that the ability to be sitting quietly for hours and waiting patiently is a quality that comes in handy in his work. Because of his extraordinary patience he doesn't depend on lucky chance to get facts he needs. He always succeeds.

The sound of a creaking branch acts like an alarm clock in the morning. He is instantly awake. In less than a second his muscles are in tension and his senses work at full strength. The sound of rustling leaves, snapping twigs and soft whispers quickly comes closer. It seems to be a group of three or four men. They came in the same way as he entered the estate. Robert looks at his watch, it's a quarter to eight.

As the group gets closer, the sounds become softer. The whisper has also ceased. Then the sounds of feet on the frozen woodland spread. The group has been split up. One person walks towards Robert's shelter. Robert remains motionless and sees a figure sneaking through the trees to the lawn. The shadow seems to lift a large object. Robert can not possibly see what it is. The man stands still about twenty meters from his pit. The other people in the group seem to have found a place as well, because the sounds of feet have stopped.

Robert sees the man bend over and make quiet movements with his arms. The man digs a hole. Robert catches a light scent. Silently he breathes in as deeply as possible through his nose. Petrol, or another fuel. No, no petrol, rather meth or alcohol. Robert is startled by the thought that something has to be set on fire. What if they will set the house on fire...? No, in that case they would not dig a hole. The man has finished digging and lifts the object he has taken with him. Robert can not see what it is. It is elongated and the man puts it upright in the hole. The spirit smell is now unmistakable.

To Robert's surprise, the man walks away. Then it looks as if that the same thing is done by the other figures. Robert doubts. Should he leave his pit find out? Of course he is anxious to know what they are doing exactly, but for him that is not the most interesting part. He rather wants to know who they are. And the only way to find out is by following them. He analyzes the situation at the speed of light. The elongated object will soon burn. Since he has not seen anything that indicates the placement of an ignition mechanism, someone will come back to light the object. That must happen this night, otherwise the object will be discovered the next morning. The best thing is to stay down.

He does not last long until the rustling of leaves reveals the return of the group. They stay at the edge of the forest and whisper. One shadow detaches himself from the group and walks to the middle of the lawn. He also digs a hole. When he raises and beckons his arm, the rest of the group starts to move again. Robert now has five people in sight. This is the time to leave his hiding place. As quietly as possible he removes himself from the house, towards the hole in the fence. He is confident that the group will not hear him. He is, however, on his qui-vive because of the possible presence of a sixth person. If he wants to follow the group after they have finished their job at the estate, he has to choose the right strategy. Without breathing he listens for almost a minute. He hears no sounds that indicate the presence of someone else than the men that are probably still on the lawn. He gently puts his head through the hole in the fence. To the left at quite a distance a bright spot appears, but immediately disappears again. A cigarette. Robert runs away from the opening and follows the fence in the opposite direction for about hundred meters. There he cuts a new hole in the fence and squeezes through it. His car is further away, hidden in the woods. He is almost certain that the men will drive past his car when drive back to where they came from. They can also go the other way, but that road does not lead anywhere. He swiftly crosses the road and hides in the bushes.

Five minutes later he is alarmed by the sound of breaking glass, followed by excited male voices. At that moment a car starts. Robert sees car lights at the spot where he saw the cigarette light up before. The car drives towards the hole in the fence. The men come out laughing and get in the car. He moves closer and writes down registration number of the big American station wagon, a light green Chevrolet. He runs to his own car and, without turning on his lights, he drives in the same direction as the Chevrolet. Landgraaf can be satisfied.

23 Sunday, December 24, 22:00

Ellen sinks into Jozef's burgundy leather sofa. Norman walks to the big closet and takes a look at the collection of CDs. 'Play whatever you want,' it sounds from the open kitchen. Ellen does not know the music that Norman has chosen. It is an American singer with only a guitar as accompaniment. '*For the sake of the song*', she hears the man sing.

'That's before your time,' Jozef says while entering the room with a full tray. 'The late great Townes of Zandt.' 'Never heard of it,' Ellen replies.

'Tragically succumbed to women and drink, or vice versa. An Aurum with coffee?'

Ellen nods enthusiastically. She used to eat at Jozef's place more often and knows his favorite Italian orange liqueur. '*Lots of booze and lots of rambling. It is easier than just waiting around for that.*' She listens silently to

the fragile voice. *'I tried to kill some people and hopped on the train, it seemed easier than waitin 'around to die.'*

'He is our little sunshine,' Ellen says.

'Should I play something more cheerful?' Norman asks.

'No, it's beautiful.'

Ellen is startled by the sound of the phone that is right next to her. Margot comes running from the kitchen and picks up the phone.

'Jozef, it's for you,' she says. 'Someone from the office.'

'Laros speaking. What do you say? At Lankbergen? Around the house?'

Ellen is startled. Lankbergen? 'We'll go there,' she hears Joseph say.

'Work to be done, I'm afraid,' he says to Ellen, with the phone still in his hand. 'Several objects have been set on fire at Lankbergen.'

'What kind of objects? The house, a shed?'

'The agent did not understand the gentleman who had called, probably Landgraaf. She thought, however, that he mentioned a cross or several crosses.'

'Cross?'

'Let's take a look right away.'

Ellen looks at Norman. Jozef frees her from the dilemma.

'Norman will come along. As a driver he has a useful role.'

Norman grins satisfied.

Ten minutes later they drive over the driveway of the Lankbergen estate. Suddenly Norman brakes at full force. Ellen, who is sitting in the back seat, leaps forward and bumps her head against Jozef's chair. When she looks up she gasps. In the middle of the large lawn is a huge cross. Parts of it are still burning, others are glowing or smoldering. Across the lawn she sees other crosses, somewhat smaller. She counts five, two of which are still burning a little. The other three smolder and smoke. Jozef gestures Norman to leave the car there and gets out. He walks to the big cross. Ellen follows him. The stench is unbearable. It explains why the crosses are still burning. They are smeared with a plastic substance. Ellen puts a hand to her mouth and nose.

The remnants of a human figure hang from the cross. For a moment she's in shock. Is it a real person? To her relief, it appears to be a smoldering skeleton of wood. Parts of it is covered with blackened material. There is also black material on the ground.

'Letters,' she says to Joseph. The smoke takes her breath away.

'We need a torch.'

At that moment they hear a voice behind them.

'Are you coming this way?' It is Guido Landgraaf. 'The substances that you breathe are pure poison.'

They follow the man into the house.

'Thanks for coming so quickly, on Christmas Eve. Do you want coffee?'

'Please, to absorb the poison.'

Ellen nods that she also wants coffee.

'Where is your wife?' Jozef asks when they sit at the kitchen table.

'She's watching television in the study.'

'You seem fairly calm. Or are you keeping up the appearance?'

'I'm used to something.'

'And your wife?'

'It seems that the bullying, because that's how I still see it, loosens a force that is unknown to me. After the attack on her horse the first thing she said was that she wanted to move back to Bloemendaal. Now she immediately said that those bastards would never get her down. She is more militant now than I am and is watching a film at ease.'

The former director's words don't affect Ellen. She can not imagine that the woman is sitting quietly in front of the television.

'Okay,' Jozef says. 'Let's start at the beginning. When did you notice something was wrong?'

'At five past ten a stone was thrown through the window of the living room. Happily weren't there at that moment.'

'Where were you?'

'I was here, in the kitchen. My favorite place in the house. I was reading last week's newspapers.'

'And your wife?'

'She was in the study room.'

'What happened next?'

'I heard my wife screaming and had to decide in a split second whether I would go to her or go after the miscreants. I chose to stay with my wife. That is why I can not tell you anything about the perpetrators. There must have been more than one.'

Jozef waits in silence until the man continues to talk.

'When my wife had come to her senses, together we went outside. You can imagine what we saw.'

'A hellish situation. Six burning crosses, as far as we could see.'

'Indeed. Flames in all colors, a scorching heat and an unimaginable stench.'

'Have you seen more than burning crosses?'

'You mean the figure on the big cross? I have indeed seen that. Tasteless, if you ask me.'

Ellen is amazed by the tranquility of Landgraaf. It really does not seem to touch him.

'And the letters on the ground?'

'Were they letters? It was so hot that I could come near enough to see.'

'What happened next? Did you call to the police?'

'Not immediately. I first walked into the forest.'

'And?'

'Nothing. No trace of the wretches who have committed these cowardly acts. I only did hear a car driving away.'

'Do you have any idea how they got the estate?'

'Probably through the same hole they made for hanging the banners.'

'Didn't you have it repaired yet?'

'I gave Geert Hadeking the order to arrange it. Probably he has not done it.'

'If it is light we will investigate the place.'

'Shall I get a torch? I wonder what the letters in front of the cross say.'

Ellen is fascinated to see how Guido Landgraaf automatically takes over control. It doesn't seem to bother Jozef.

LANDGRAAF MUST HANG is written in large letters. The second line is less legible. They conclude it should be: AND HIS LADY AS WELL. Jozef, Ellen and Landgraaf stare silently at the burnt letters.

'Well,' Landgraaf says. 'Somebody must hate me badly.'

Jozef looks at him.

'Is that true?' he finally asks.

The question seems to embarrass Landgraaf.

'What else should it be?'

For the first time there is some doubt in his voice.

'I can think of many reasons. Moreover, it is clearly not only about you, but also about your wife. Maybe you can take your time to think about it.'

Ellen recognizes the tone of Joseph voice. It is his way to express his annoyance at the low communicativeness of Guido Landgraaf. At that moment she hears the sound of a car. Norman, she thinks terrified. Where did he go? She looks around and sees the bordeaux Peugeot of Joseph standing in the parking lot next to the manor house. Norman waves with a smile on his face. Ellen had completely forgotten him. At least she could have asked him to wait inside.

'That will be the glazier,' says Guido Landgraaf. 'I called immediately. Of course they did not want to come, but a doubling of the hourly wage changed their minds.' He smiles at it. 'Do you mind me to help the men get started. I think you saw what you had to see. If I were you, I would celebrate Christmas Eve.'

Ellen braces herself for a sharp reaction from Jozef.

'I think that's good,' he says kindly. 'Tomorrow morning a few people come to examine the garden. You leave everything like it is, do you?'

'As is only natural. The crime scene is sacred ground for the police.'

Guido Landgraaf thanks them for coming so fast. His hand feels dry as desert sand when they shake hands.

'Are not you cold, Norman?' Joseph asks when he gets in the car. 'Ellen, you could have called in your friend. If he caught a cold, it's your fault.'

'He is strong and can handle a bit of cold,' Ellen replies and bends forward to give Norman a kiss. 'You have surprised me enormously, by the way.'

'What do you mean?' Jozef asks.

'Normally, less is needed to elicit an arsenal of incisive and hateful remarks.'

Jozef is laughing.

'It's almost Christmas, the feast of peace. I only get annoyed by people with whom I have some compassion. In fact, annoyance can also be seen as a positive emotion. In a way, you still care about the person you are annoyed about. He or she is clearly worth the energy of the emotion. Unfortunately this man is not eligible. He does not do anything to me.'

It is a typical Jozef analysis, but Ellen doubts whether it is true.

'Where will your driver drive you?' Norman asks.

'As far as I am concerned, we have earned a good drink. I suggest we continue our interrupted gathering for a while.'

'I'm in,' says Ellen. 'And tomorrow? Will I ask Piet van Gestel to examine the place?'

'Can I use your phone?' Jozef asks. 'Then I call Piet myself. He will certainly not be happy to leave his family on Christmas Day, but it's his job to arrange someone else.'

The conversation is smooth.

'No problem,' says Jozef, giving back the phone to Ellen. 'Kick the old body on his tail, Norman. The drinks are waiting.'

25 Monday 25 December 2.00 hours

'I have to take a piss,' Harry Beerenkamp says and sways out of the room. Rob wonders how he can leave the house without a fight or losing his face. He is exhausted, the sharp, stabbing pain in his arm and his tibia is killing him and he does not feel comfortable at all. The euphoria of a few hours ago has completely vanished.

Thanks to his technical insight, the operation on the estate was perfect. He had constructed the crosses and had found the right material to have them burning for a long time. Moreover, he himself had taken the initiative to take photos. He will send them to the newspaper tomorrow. Harry loved the idea. A bit of publicity would certainly help to chase off Landgraaf. Afterwards Harry had invited everyone to his home and together they finished a crate of beer.

At twelve o'clock his pals went home. Harry asked him to stay for a while. He had no choice. Harry pulled a new crate of beer from the kitchen and drank at a killer pace. The conversation, which had started about football, degenerated into a confused monologue. Harry randomly lectured about everything that, in his opinion, was wrong in today's society. If he came to power he would fire all foreigners, civil servants, lawyers, directors, politicians, hockey players, korfbal players, gays, foresters, journalists, ballet dancers and ugly women. In the meantime Rob started to worry. What was Harry up to?

'Do you know this?' Harry asks when he returns to the room. His visit to the toilet seems to have sobered him. He shows him a tube with yellow pills. Rob is startled. Does Harry expect him to do something for which he needs those pills?

'This will get you as randy as an old goat,' he adds. He opens Rob a new bottle of beer and gives him two pills. He also swallows two. Rob cannot do anything but to follow his example.

'Those pills work fast, so let's go right away,' Harry says compellingly. Rob doubts whether he should be relieved or worried. The few times he has been to the whores the past year did not give him the satisfaction he had hoped for. On the other hand, the idea of once again holding a woman of flesh and blood excites him. A little later they walk past the windows where the women try their best to lure them inside. It is quiet. Perhaps they are seen as the last opportunity to further increase the income of that evening.

'I take that brown slut,' Harry says when they have walked up and down three times. Rob's doubts have completely disappeared. Whether through the pills, or the sight of the naked women, he is indeed as horny as Harry had predicted.

'I'm going for the blonde one, down there.'

'Blonde? Pale, you mean. Those Russian women come straight from Siberia. Take one from the Dominican Republic, which, like the climate where they come from, are warm and humid.'

'I like a challenge. I'll turn that girl so hot that the ice from the North Pole melts,' replies Rob.

For the first time that evening, a smile appears on Harry's face instead of grim. That makes Rob feel happy.

Maybe this night will still be festive after all, he thinks massively relieved. He rushes to the tall blond woman in red lingerie.

When Rob comes out twenty minutes later, Harry is waiting for him, grinning broadly.

'Jesus, man. What did you do with that ice cream? Did you have to lick for so long until she was thawed? I am frozen now. Come, let's eat a shoarmah.'

Rob laughs. Harry does not have to know that he was finished after five minutes, but paid the woman 100 euros extra to stay fifteen minutes longer. Her efforts to entertain him were a nice bonus. He has now got a huge appetite and doesn't mind eating a sandwich of shoarmah with Harry at all.

As they cross the Brink in silence, Rob's doubts return. Is the evening almost over or does it in fact still have to start? In the shoarmah restaurant Harry meets a friend with whom he starts a noisy conversation about a deal with two cars. Even before Rob has got his first sandwich, Harry already orders a second one for both of them.

'You have to eat well,' he says.

It's past three o'clock when they close the door of the shoarmah restaurant.

'What are we going to do now?' Harry asks.

'Actually, I have to go home. Tomorrow my mother is at the door early.'

'So it is even more important that you have slept a bit. I also feel like sleeping desperately. That negressin has completely exhausted me. Jesus, that woman was savage.'

'Mine too.'

It does not sound very convincing, Rob realizes. He has to sustain just a little longer, he tells himself.

'Are you still feeling good?' Harry asks.

'Fine, never felt better actually.'

'Beautiful. Then you will soon be able to show what you are worth.'

The incidental remark of Harry arrives as a sledgehammer. Rob's stomach pulls together.

'Eh, what am I worth?' Is the rhetorical question.

'You've disappointed me a few times in recent months. I wonder if I still want to have you with it.'

'There, I couldn't help it, Harry. After The Hague I spent a week in the hospital. With my, um, arm,' Rob stammers.

'We all have an arm, Rob. Can you see that guy?' Harry points in the direction of a café in the corner of the square. Rob sees what Harry means: a boy walking towards the Wilhelmina fountain with unsteady steps. 'As a man born and raised in Deventer, I see it as my duty to prevent that bastard from fumbling into our fountain.'

Harry's assignment is clear. Rob has to knock down that boy. Nervously, he looks around. The square isn't empty at all. That means there is also police around, no doubt about that. Moreover, he wonders how drunk the boy is. With his arm in plaster, too much opposition is fatal. He thinks feverishly.

'Not here, Harry,' he grumbles weakly. 'I, I dare, but there are too many people.'

Harry spits on the floor.

'Should I do it?' he says fiercely.

'No,' replies Rob, getting ready to walk to the boy. At that moment a group of more than ten people come from the café. 'Jan, are you pissed?' one calls to the wandering boy. The others laugh.

'Let's go that way,' Rob says and points towards the Bergkwartier, the mediaeval quarter of the town.

Harry shrugs and follows Rob. Silently they now walk into the Bergstraat. At the Bergkerkplein Harry suddenly stops.

'Last chance', he says and points to a man coming from the Walstraat.

Rob wants to say something, but chokes and starts to cough.

'Why this man?' he asks eventually.

'Because that man is unlucky, for nothing else.'

An evil grimace appears on Harry's face. Now he can either make it or break it, Rob knows.

'Okay,' he says.

Tensioned Rob waits until the not too big, skinny man has passed. That should not be a problem, despite his arm.

He walks behind the figure and whistles between his teeth. The man stops and looks around.

'Do you have a light?' Rob asks. The man shakes his head and turns around again without saying anything.

'Hey, I asked you something?'

The man does not respond. Rob catches up with the man and pulls him to his shoulder. The man frees himself.

Rob overtakes the man, stands before him and grabs the man's upper arm.

'Follow me,' he says. 'I think you understood me very well. If you don't go along, you'll get a knife between your ribs.'

Rob pushes the man ahead of him, into the path next to the Bergkerk. No one will see or hear them behind the church. The man no longer resists. The defenseless gaze of the man and his bent shoulders evoke a feeling of pity. He will knock down the man with one blow in the stomach and then he will pretend as if he is kicking him on all sides. If the man is smart, he plays his role convincingly and makes sounds like dying. Hopefully, Harry will settle for knowing that the man is dead to the world behind the church.

25 Monday 25 December 6.00 hours

'Huh?'

Drowsy Ellen turns around and bumps her nose against Norman's shoulder. Somewhere in the distance sounds the driving rhythm of The Prodigy, a ringtone that Norman put on her mobile. She tumbles off the bed and grabs in the pile of clothes on the chair next to the mirror.

'Ellen.'

'Good morning, Jozef on the line. Slept well?'

'Short, what time is it?'

'Six o'clock.'

'Did something happen?'

Ellen realizes that this is a stupid question.

'A body has been found. Behind the Bergkerk.'

'Know who it is?'

'A twenty years old boy. Piet van Gestel is there. He did not know him.'

Twenty years? Ellen immediately feels the tension in her stomach. Is it realistic to assume that the dead boy is somehow related to her research? Not really, she tries to convince herself.

'I'm coming,' she says.

'Shall we walk there? I'll wait in front of your house.'

'Fine.'

The T-shirt she puts on still stinks of the burning smell of last night. She takes the pile of clothes and puts them on the landing.

'What's going on?' Norman asks half-asleep.

'A body. A boy, behind the Bergkerk. I turn on the light for a moment, so I can see what cloth I'm getting out of the closet.'

Norman is fully awake now and leaves bed enthusiastically.

'I'll make you a glass of fresh orange juice and a few sandwiches.'

'You're a sweetheart.'

Five minutes later Ellen and Jozef walk silently through the dark and quiet Papenstraat. Ellen has the feeling that her footsteps awake the whole neighborhood. Via the Botermarkt, Kleine Poot, Grote Poot and the Assenstraat they walk to the Brink. The large square has also become extinct. All pubs are dark and have their doors closed. Only at the shoarmah café the lights are still on. They cross the Brink diagonally and walk up through the Maansteeg and Bergstraat. At the end the illuminated Bergkerk rises.

There are three police cars on the Bergkerkplein. In several houses around the Bergkerk light is burning and half dressed people stand shivering in front of their house or in the doorway. Already a few people have come from other parts of the town and have gathered in front of barrier tape that has been used to close the garden behind the Bergkerk.

'Good morning, Laros. Do you know who it is?'

It is the voice of Frans Wielaarts, the journalist of the Deventer Newspaper.

'Jesus, Frans, you already here? Do you know it is Christmas Day?'

The relationship between Jozef and the regional crime reporter is two folded. Personally, they like each other and meet regularly in the breakfast café Averroës. On the other hand, Frans' journalistic standard is not considered high by Jozef. 'He lacks the one and only crucial quality of a journalist, curiosity. Moreover, he is bone idle.'

Every time they meet professionally, Jozef can refrain from giving Frans a sneer.

'That's a bad answer to my question,' the journalist replies.

'The answer is no.'

Jozef keeps the barrier tape up for Ellen. Piet is approaching them.

'No blood, this time.'

'Send my regards to the murderer. Or is it suicide? It is the dark days before Christmas.'

'I don't think so, even though I'm not sure. On the side of the victim's head there is a stain that indicates a hard blow. Furthermore, it's hard to see anything. Doctor's job.'

'Has Herzog been called?'

'He will be here any minute. Probably not in a good mood.'

'Like most of us, I assume. I had a different idea of Christmas morning a few hours ago.'

'A couple of hours?'

'Just like Ellen. We felt that we had earned a drink after our visit to the Landgraaf estate.'

Piet shakes his head. For him it is incomprehensible to go drinking for fun with colleagues after midnight. He keeps work and private life strictly separated.

'The body is behind the church.'

'Who found it?'

'Someone who took out his dog before he went to work.'

'Work?'

'There are people for whom Christmas is the busiest day of the year. This man is a cook. We therefore let him go. He can be reached by telephone.'

Ellen follows Jozef and Piet. Despite Piet's reassuring words, she feels the tension of seeing a corpse. She wonders if she will ever get used to that part of her job.

The body lies on the back. The boy has a friendly face. He has a surprised expression. His right arm is bandaged.

There are no traces of violence, no blood, no scratches, no torn clothes. Only a red stain on the side of the head.

Yet position of the body is unnatural. To Ellen it seems unlikely the boy has collapsed spontaneously and died.

'A good morning to you all, on this serene Christmas morning.'

It is Walter Herzog, the doctor. His words make Ellen realize that it is windless and pleasantly cold. Just below zero degrees and dry. Herzog does not wait for an answer and kneels next to the dead body.

'I found this in one of the pockets of his coat,' says Piet. With a look at the bystanders, he drops his voice volume and shows a wallet. 'It's Rob Meier, twenty-two, born in Deventer, address Dreef 433.'

'A flat in Borgele,' Ellen says.

Piet nods and continues.

'The wallet contains three hundred Euros in fifty-euro bills. The perpetrator did not care about the money.'

'Presuming the boy was murdered,' Jozef says.

'Sure, but Herzog will conclude that the boy is beaten to death, believe me. Have you seen what the body is like? That is not the result of an overdose or another gentle way of getting into a coma.'

'We'll wait for Herzog to judge.'

'In addition, that boy had a cheap digital camera with him.'

'We will find out if any picture is taken recently.'

Jozef looks round.

'What about your people, Piet?'

'Four men will be present at the office at seven. Is it still necessary go to Landgraaf to have a look at those burnt crosses?'

Jozef thinks for a moment.

'Yes, although we can also use everyone here, I want us to go there too. Moreover, we need more people. I'm sorry for everyone, but I want a communal Christmas breakfast at eight o'clock at the office. And I am only satisfied when we have at least twenty people.'

'I will arrange that,' says Piet cheerfully. Ellen can not escape the impression that Piet does not mind working today.

'Gentlemen, can I have your attention?' says Herzog. He is still on his knees near the boy's body. Ellen has experienced that Herzog likes to explain his findings in a clear way. The three of them gather around the corpse. 'Death occurred about half past four in the morning, plus or minus half an hour. Cause of death, probably a blow to the head, perhaps in combination with a slap in the heart region. I think there is a tear in the skull, at the location of the right temple. I have found one rib broken. Furthermore, no traces of physical violence. Blood tests must show whether there is drug use. Any questions?'

'Those blows, have they been handed out with a weapon?' Jozef asks.

'To be honest, I don't know. Anyway, the weapon, a stick, baseball bat or the like has left no trace. Even the prints in the skin do not indicate a regularly formed object.'

'Or a fist?'

'That could be possible, or an object with similar properties.'

Ellen has to laugh to herself at the formulation of Herzog.

'Is that possible? Slaying somebody in one or two blows with your bare hands?'

'An experienced kickboxer can kill you in one blow. It's only a matter of hitting hard enough at the right spot.'

'And that happened in this case?'

'I'm inclined to say so. Going one step further, I even dare to claim that this boy has been beaten to death by a professional, a person who has learned how to kill a person with his bare hands.'

'Couldn't be more clear, Walter. Thanks for the explanation and your quick arrival,' says Jozef. 'Ellen, come on, we'll go to the office, prepare ourselves an excellent coffee and make a sound plan.'

26 Monday 25 December 7.00 hours

Robert Devenijns grins when he leaves the A1 and enters Deventer. He feels confident about his case and wants to finish this strange assignment. He has never earned that much money so quickly. Things never ran as smooth as in this case. He had expected to spend three months tracking down the subject. One evening was enough to trace the culprit. It is a man called H. Beerenkamp.

From now on nothing can severely go wrong, thanks to the skill of eliminating subjects he has acquired over the years. With aggressive types like Beerenkamp the only proper approach is to show that every boss has a boss. He is going to do that now. The only risk in this situation is that the man is so full of drugs that his behavior is completely unpredictable. No doubt that his experience will help him to minimize the risk.

He is driving flawlessly to the street where he last night saw the boys entering their leader's house, the residence of the red-haired Beerenkamp. He parks his car a bit further down the road, only to prevent anyone from remembering having seen his car here. To be on the safe side, he presses a false mustache and beard to his face and puts on a wig. From the inner pocket of the leather jacket that he bought last week at the Waterlooplein, he grabs a pair of large, black spectacles. He smiles as he looks at himself in the rearview mirror.

Confidently he walks past the parked cars in the direction of Beerenkamp's house. In the meantime he is studying the locks of the front doors. A piece of cake, he knows exactly which passkey he will need later on. At

number eighteen he steps toward the front door and without any hesitation he puts the right key in the lock. Two seconds later he's in. Colleagues ask him if he is ever afraid during such operations. Suppose someone catches him in the act. His answer is simple. Firstly, the chance of being caught is extremely small, secondly, the chance that someone who catches him is able to do anything at all is even smaller and thirdly, he has disappeared before that person has actually done something.

In the living room it smells like smoke and beer. The floor is covered with Grolsch bottles. Robert Devenijns takes three mini-bombs out of his bag and sets the time switch on every bomb to thirty minutes. He puts the first bomb under the television, the second in the refrigerator and the third under the three-seater sofa, which is by far the most beautiful piece of furniture in the room.

Then he walks slowly upstairs. Cracking the stairs does not disturb him. Yet he holds his pistol in his hand. The loud snoring shows him the way. The door to the bedroom where the snoring comes from is open. Robert smiles when he sees the red-haired man lying on his back. There is no one beside him, which makes it even easier. He can now carry out his plan without a hitch. From his bag he grabs the first rope and ties it to the leg of the bed at the head. The other rope he attaches to the leg at the other side of the bed. He then pulls the rope under the leg of the sleeping man and manufactures a loop that he tightens around his ankle. He does the same with the man's head. Now he takes the last attribute, a set of handcuffs. The way he clicks the first handcuff around the right wrist of the man shows he has an old hand at it.

Now he's on to the most exciting part. He has to do two things simultaneously, chain the left wrist, at which the man will most likely wake up, and prevent him from screaming. That's why he puts a pillow next to the man. He flexes his muscles and grasps both of the man's hands. Before he feels any resistance, the left hand is attached to the right. He quickly presses the pillow on the man's face. Instantly the man is starting to move wildly.

"One peep and you're done," says Robert, slowly releasing the pillow. It remains silent. Robert now completely removes the pillow. The man looks at Robert bewildered. Then he sees the gun that is aimed at his head. The astonishment turns into dismay. For one second Robert is afraid that the man loses consciousness. That is why he is, despite his experience, taken by surprise at the brutal outburst of the man. Fortunately, the loop around the neck does its job. Just as abruptly as the man tries to raise himself, he is beaten back in his pillow. He grabs his neck with both his hands.

'If you stay calm, nothing happens,' says Robert.

'I suffocate,' the man says with a beep.

'Take it easy, hands on the belly, then I will loosen the loop.'

Meekly the man obeys. As soon as Robert reaches out to the loop around the man's neck, he sees the two handcuffed hands coming up towards his head. He is too late to avoid them and both fists hit him on the cheek. He loses his balance and falls against the closet. The man on the bed turns around and tries to get up again. Again the loop around the neck of the man works effectively. The man collapses back on his bed. Robert knows he has to control the man quickly. The next time the ropes won't hold.

Robert takes the stiletto from the side pocket of his bag and plants the knife without hesitation in the man's upper arm. It causes the man to roar like a Grizzly bear in agony. Robert quickly pushes the pillow back onto the man's head and pulls the knife out of the arm. He removes the pillow again and now pricks the knife into the man's neck. His head now has turned blue. Robert calmly loosens the loop around the neck for the second time.

'What do you want?' the man groans.

'That you never show up on Landgraaf's estate again. I do not ask for more.'

The painful expression of the man makes way for surprise.

'What, what do you say? Is that why?'

'That's what it's about. If you try that one again, you will not survive.'

'No problem man, it was just a joke. Jesus, couldn't you have arranged that in another way?'

Robert shakes his head. This time he is bargained for another attack of the man, whom he has now assessed as totally unpredictable. He looks at his watch, five minutes before the bombs go off. He takes the knife from the man's neck and puts it on his forehead. In a smooth motion, he cuts a few millimeters deep into the skin. Before the man can utter a cry, there is a bleeding cross above his nose.

'That will be a beautiful scar in the form of a cross. A nice reminder of a nice evening.'

Robert quickly takes a few photos of the moaning man on the bed and turns around. Now he has to leave Deventer as soon as possible. Swiftly he jumps down the stairs, leaves the house and runs to his car.

Five minutes later, he drives the A1 at a speed of one hundred and fifty kilometers per hour. He takes the A50 towards Zwolle. At the Vaassen exit he leaves the highway and drives to the forest. Day is dawning when he puts his car at a parking lot for walkers. He pulls the mustache and beard from his face, puts off his wig and puts the glasses back into the inside pocket of his leather jacket. He stuffs the mustache, beard and wig into a garbage bag with green waste. He deposits this bag in the trash bin next to the sign indicating the walking routes.

He puts on his walking shoes at the back of the car, replaces his leather jacket for a Northfacejack and swings the purple rucksack on his back. It contains his Christmas breakfast, four soft rolls with cheese, two chocolate rolls,

an expensive thermos filled with the best Italian coffee and two oranges. Soon, when he has come to rest by walking, he will enjoy it at ease. Life is favorable to him, he says to the trees that surround him.

27 Monday 25 December 7.45 hours

It takes Harry Beerenkamp less than a minute to release the loops around his head and his ankle. He gets up cautiously. For a second he threatens to faint from the pain in his upper arm and sits down on the edge of the bed. Blood drops fall on the floor in front of him. Curiously, he no longer feels the cut in his forehead. He raises his hands and feels his face. There is blood everywhere. He does not dare to touch the wound.

Despite the pain, he does not feel bad. It is not the first time that he can hardly get out of bed because of many painful injuries. Many a fight with hostile supporter groups has resulted in severe wounds. It is even part of the kick, the pain afterwards. That sweetens the taste of a victory. In this fight however, there was no victory. It wasn't even a fight. But that is only a temporary situation. The bastard who let him in for this will regret being born. He stumbles down. The moment he opens the door to the living room, he's blown away by a deafening bang, followed by the clink of glass. The explosion seems to have occurred in the kitchen. Harry almost sinks through his legs from the fright. With both hands resting against the wall he shuffles towards the kitchen. At that moment there are two more explosions. While turning his head he sees couch being lifted half a meter and falling apart when it hits the ground. At the same time pieces and shards of his television fly through the room. He holds his hands in front of his head in anticipation of another explosion. Nothing happens anymore. Dead silence covers the remains of his favorite belongings.

Whining Harry overlooks the chaos. He falls to his knees. Then he remembers what happened last night. Has this been done by the same man? He tries to retrieve the images. Rob Meier spoke to the man, dressed in black. The man was easily led by Rob to the lawn behind the Bergkerk. Harry followed them so he could see what Rob was going to do. The man seemed to wait patiently for Rob's first blow. At the moment Rob swung his arm, not the man, but Rob fell to the ground. Things went too fast to see what really happened. Two seconds later he realized that he had heard two slaps. Apparently the man had knocked Rob down with two lightning blows. Harry ran back to the Brink as fast as he could.

He begins to shake. Where is the man who has just hurt him? He looks around in terror. Then he hears a hard banging on the back door. He also hears a distant voice.

'What is going on?'

It's the neighbor, Fons. Moaning Harry stumbles to the door. The neighbor puts his hands to his mouth when he sees Harry.

'Harry, what happened? You're completely covered with blood. My god, Harry? Why are you chained? You have not ...? '

'Nothing happened,' says Harry, as firmly as possible. 'Can you cut those handcuffs?'

'Sure, of course, Harry. Wait, I'll get the scissors.'

Fons earns some extra money with a trade in stolen bicycles and is very adept at cutting bicycle locks. Moments later, he got rid of Harry from the pinching iron around his wrists. Someone is ringing at the doorbell.

'Fons, please say that everything is under control. Whoever it is, tell him I've been messing with Korean firework of two hundred grams a piece.'

'Harry, have you seen yourself in the mirror?' Fons asks worried when he is back.

Harry shakes his head. He feels at his upper arm. It really hurts. He suffered a knife stab once before, then the wound had to be disinfected and sutured. He does not feel like that now. They will ask too many questions in the hospital.

He walks to the bathroom. Although he knows there's blood everywhere, he is still startled by himself. What must Fons have thought when he saw him? His whole face is covered with dark red, half-dried blood. The forehead is a battlefield. He takes a washcloth from the closet and cautiously dabs the wound with his left hand. His right arm is getting worse.

'May I come up?' Fons asks from the bottom of the stairs.

'You've already seen the worst. Maybe you can help a little bit.'

'These are nasty wounds, you have to get them treated in some way. Maybe they can be sutured,' says Fons. 'By the way, it looks like a cross.'

Harry don't know where to put himself. Probably he will soon have a scar in the shape of a cross on his head. If so, he will add a few notches himself.'

'What actually happened, Harry? How did those cuffs get around your wrists? Or is it better not to ask?'

'I wish I knew. All of a sudden, the bastard was standing next to my bed, pointing a gun at me. When I moved a little, he put a knife in my arm. Then he chained me and tied me to the bed. Fortunately, I managed to break free. Unfortunately, I was just too late to prevent the bastard from dropping the bombs. My bank, the television and the fridge, all down the drain.'

‘But why Harry? Why does someone do a thing like that?’
 ‘No idea Fons. When I get that ass I break his neck. That’s for sure.’
 ‘Maybe that person came from Zwolle. You really gave those bastards hell last year.’
 ‘They’re still talking about the thrashing we gave them, I heard. If the coward who did this to me indeed came from Zwolle, five dead people will be left behind on the battlefield next time, I will personally take care of that.’
 ‘You’re right, Harry. Those fucking losers.’
 Harry looks in the mirror and thinks.
 ‘Hey Fons, do you think your wife can clean the house, the floor, the mess? You understand, don’t you? I can not do anything with that arm.’
 ‘Harry, you know Joke. She doesn’t like to be ordered.’
 ‘Come on, Fons. Don’t you see that I’m injured and in a serious condition?’
 ‘Okay, Harry, I’ll try to persuade her.’
 ‘I knew I could count on you, Fons.’

28 Monday 25 December 9.00

‘Huh, huh,’ Jozef sighs as all agents and technical detectives have disappeared. ‘I think we’re doing the right things. What about you?’
 Ellen nods. Three teams were formed, to investigate the Lankbergen estate, to investigate the crime scene behind the Bergkerk and, most important, to make inquiries in the area surrounding the crime scene.
 ‘Now the hardest job. Tell someone about the death of the boy. Have you checked the address yet?’
 ‘Dreef 433, according to his driving license,’ Ellen replies. ‘The address belongs to a Mrs. J.S. Meier. Probably his mother. According to our data, the boy himself currently lives in the Boecholtstraat. Apparently he got his driver’s license when he was still living on the Dreef.’
 ‘Let’s go right away. At half past ten we have consultations with Gerard Maas and the information officer.’
 ‘Is there a press conference? On Christmas day?’
 ‘Frans Wielaart will be there anyhow. Do you have the boy’s camera? Can we take a look at it?’
 Ellen takes the camera from her desk, takes out the card and inserts the small card into the appropriate slot of the computer. They are waiting impatiently until images appear on the screen.
 ‘Look,’ Jozef whispers as the first photos become visible. Ellen cannot say a word. Open-mouthed looks at a series of photos of burning crosses. Some of the photo’s clearly show the house where they have been the previous night. Ellen tries to overlook the consequences. The boy took pictures of the burning crosses on the Lankbergen estate at about ten o’clock last night and was beaten to death behind the Bergkerk about five hours later. What did he do those five hours? That is the most important question.
 ‘Come on, we have to go. Edith is waiting for us. She comes along to assist the woman if necessary.’

The door is opened by a woman in bathrobe. Her blond hair is tousled and her face has a red color. Blinking with her eyes, she looks questioningly at Jozef and Ellen.
 ‘Good morning, Jozef Laros from the Deventer police. These are my colleagues Ellen van Dorth and Edith Rouwenhorst.’
 The face of the woman darkens, without showing fear.
 ‘Is it about that boy of mine?’
 ‘Who is there?’ a man is calling.
 ‘Police.’
 ‘Can we come in?’ Jozef asks.
 The woman takes a step back and keeps the door open.
 ‘To the left, there is the living room.’
 A man, in t-shirt and sweatpants, comes out of another room. Without saying anything he joins them.
 ‘Let me introduce myself,’ says the woman. ‘Sonja IJsseldijk.’
 No Meier, Ellen thinks. The man still doesn’t say anything.
 ‘Are you family of Rob Meier?’
 ‘I am his mother. Rob has the surname of his father, who died ten years ago. Car accident.’
 ‘Is this your son?’
 Jozef shows her the photo from the driving license. She nods and looks uncertainly at Jozef. Nervously, she scratches a wound on her hand.
 ‘This morning we found your son. He is dead.’
 Ellen’s stomach pulls together. Her heart pounds against her temple. The silence in the neat living room with an artificial Christmas tree on a side table is oppressive.
 ‘What do you mean, dead?’ the man breaks the silence.
 ‘He was found behind the Bergkerk. We are investigating the cause of death.’

Again a blanket of silence descends. Ellen looks at the blond woman. She stares blankly at the ground. The man moves towards her and embraces her. Ellen's thoughts wander to the burning crosses. The absurd image, the stench, the smoke and the big white house in the background. From nowhere sounds are added to the images. It is the gloomy music of the Swans, Max's favorite band.

'I have warned him so many times,' the woman says with a trembling voice.

'What for?' Jozef asks after a while.

'He had the wrong friends. It had to go wrong. Last month he suddenly walked in with bandage around his arm.

"An accident," he said. But I did not believe him.'

'How did he know those friends?'

'Most of them he met at school, other at the football. Already at a young age he was obsessed with Go Ahead Eagles. At the age of six he was allowed to join his father to the stadium and they never missed a match. After the death of his father, at the age of twelve, he went there himself. One day he came home with a black eye and a bruised rib. They had fought with supporters of the opponent. It was not their fault, he said. Last year he was banned from the stadium. I don't know what he had done, but no punishment could have been worse.'

'Do you know any names of his friends?'

'Timo Kersman, his closest friend. They met at primary school. Arend was another name he sometimes mentioned.'

Suddenly the woman begins to cry.

'Death,' she sobs. 'My boy, I warned him so often.'

The crying turns into a groan. Suddenly she gets up and sets up a cry. The man pulls her down and wraps his arms around her.

'It's better that you leave,' he says.

'We will. You can always call. Edith will contact you again today.'

Edith hands her card to the man.

'Terrible,' says Jozef as they leave the parking lot of the flat. 'You never get used to these kinds of conversations. And you always do it wrong.'

'What is wrong? You are the messenger of bad news and in the meantime you try to gather some information,' Ellen says.

'The latter is of minor importance.'

'Anyway, we have a name, Timo Kersman. I'll call Brian. He must see that boy today. Maybe he recognizes him from the football match.'

'Agreed.'

29 Monday 25 December 10.00

Jozef enters the room where Ellen tells Brian, who has just arrived, what happened that morning.

'I called Gerard Maas,' Jozef says. 'He thinks we should arrange some press information as quickly as possible. Nice job for our communication assistant. I'll call her now. Did you find out the address of Timo Kersman? I want to go there straight away.'

Ellen taps the name into the computer while Jozef leaves the room.

'Bingo, there is only one Kersman, and he lives on Campertgaarde 12, in the district of Platvoet.'

'I know the area, all single-family homes,' says Brian. 'Probably Timo lives with his parents.'

'So that's settled with the communication lady. She will write an official communiqué,' says Jozef coming back in again. 'Ellen, let's go right away. Brian, do you want to start a dossier about Landgraaf? I want to know everything about him. Even if it is Christmas Day, call anyone who may have information. Even if it turns out that Landgraaf regularly meets with the Prime Minister.'

The curtains are closed at Campertgaarde 12. Lights are on and through the narrow gap between the curtains Ellen sees someone moving. Jozef rings the doorbell. No reaction. Jozef rings again impatiently. A man, about fifty years old, dressed in a bathrobe, opens.

'It's Christmas,' he says angrily.

'Jozef Laros, police Deventer. We are looking for Timo Kersman, does he live here?'

'Yes, what do you need him for?'

'Is he at home?'

'Yes, what did he do?'

'We want to ask him.'

Cursing the man walks up the stairs.

'We take him to the office,' Jozef whispers. 'In here, he can not talk freely.'

Ellen nods. The man comes down the stairs without a boy.

'He is still asleep and he doesn't feel well. Can you come back this afternoon?' he asks.

'I'm afraid the police isn't a salesman who wants to sell stuff. It is rather urgent. Do I have to walk upstairs to get him out of bed? Hangover or no hangover, that is not very relevant to us.'

Again the man trudges upstairs. After an incomprehensible altercation, the boy comes down, dressed in a faded T-shirt and a worn pair of jeans. He looks pale and has bags under his eyes. He blinks against the daylight that comes through the front door. Jozef holds out his hand to introduce himself, but the boy does not seem to notice the hand or deliberately ignores it.

'Are you Timo Kersman?' Jozef asks.

The boy nods.

'We want to ask you a number of questions and we preferably do that at the police office. Do you mind joining us?'

'About what?'

'Your friend Rob Meier was found early this morning. Death.'

The boy's face stiffens. The last bit of color disappears now.

'Why is he dead?' he stammers.

'Probably beaten to death.'

'By who?'

'That's what we want to find out.'

The boy stands still and stares at the ground.

'I understand that it is a shock. Still, I want to ask you to come along now.'

Slowly the boy walks to the living room and comes back with his shoes on. He grabs a denim jacket from the coat rack.

'What is happening Timo?' his father asks anxiously. 'Do you have anything to do with this?'

'I know nothing, honestly,' the boy replies and walks humbly behind Jozef.

'Do you want coffee, or anything to eat? You probably haven't had breakfast yet,' Joseph asks the boy, who has not said a word since he left his father in confusion in the doorway.

'Coffee please, with milk and sugar,' he murmurs, without looking up.

Ellen walks to the coffee machine in the corner of Jozef's room and pours a mug. Meanwhile, she calls Brian.

'He's here,' she whispers. 'Just drop by and nod as you recognize the boy.'

'Okay, let's begin,' Jozef says. 'How do you know Rob Meier?'

'From primary school and the football club. We played on the same team since we were six years old.'

'Still played together?'

'Rob had to stop two years ago. Due to a rotten knee.'

'What else?'

For the first time the boy looks at Jozef. His gaze radiates more confidence.

'Just friends.'

'Did you often see each other?'

The boy reflects.

'Every weekend, Go Ahead and going for a drink.'

'Did Rob also go to Go Ahead?'

'He got a stadium ban a year ago. Unfairly. He was disappointed.'

'Where did Rob stay during the match?'

'At someone's home, or in the pub. After the game we met outside the stadium.'

'Looking for supporters of the opponent, I presume.'

'Not always. But sometimes there was a fight, yes. You therefore brought me here?'

Jozef ignores the question. The door of the room opens. Brian is standing in the doorway. With a short nod he confirms that Timo is the boy he saw in the stadium.

'Did you see or talk to Rob last night?'

Now the boy closes his eyes. It takes a few seconds before he nods.

'We went to the pub and drank a few beers. I went home at noon. You can ask my parents. They saw me coming home.'

'So, after midnight, you didn't see Rob again?'

The boy shakes his head convincingly.

'And before midnight you drank nothing but a few beers?'

'That's what I said.'

'Which pub?'

'Various. I can't remember which ones.'

'Maybe not all of them. But it shouldn't be too hard to name one?'

'De Boemel.'
 'Can someone confirm that?'
 The boy looks questioning.
 'Has anyone seen you there?' Jozef asks.
 'I don't know.'
 'Was it only the two of you?'
 The boy's head turns red.
 'Yes,' he replies weakly.
 'Good, then we're ready for the time being.'
 A relieved smile appears on the boy's face.
 'I have to keep you here until we have verified whether your alibi is correct. Until then, you are potentially suspect of the murder of your friend Rob.'
 The boy first turns red and then goes pale.
 'What, what do you mean? I have nothing to do with it.'
 'That's indeed what you told us. We would, however, not do our job well if we believed you without verifying your story.'
 Jozef picks up the phone. A few seconds later a uniformed agent enters the room.
 'Take him away,' he says sternly.
 Ellen looks at him in surprise when the boy has left the room. Why does Jozef choose this strategy? He had enough information to raise the pressure.
 'I want to make sure he is really going to tell everything,' Jozef explains. 'I could have easily got him to confess that he was there when they scared the living daylight out of Marieke van Boxbergen and her horse. The same applies to the cross act last night. But that's not what it's about. He is only an innocent hanger on. It is also true that he was home around midnight. The question is why he is lying.'
 'He is probably afraid that he is penalized for involvement in those jokes at Lankbergen.'
 'Then he had forgotten his best friend is murdered.'
 'Maybe he is afraid that his parents will find out what he has been up to?'
 'I don't believe that. He has crucial information. My goal is that he speaks nothing but the truth. I guess being in the cell for a few hours will be helpful, for us as well as for him.'
 'Will I call his parents to inform them and verify if he was indeed home at midnight?'
 'That would be fine. Please also call Brian, and Piet and tell them we have a wrap-up at twelve o'clock.'
 'I will also arrange some sandwiches.'
 'Good of you to mention the food. I'll get my friend Thomas to open his café Averroes.'

30 Monday 25 December 12.00

Harry Beerenkamp sits on his ruined couch and squints at the very small TV that he was allowed to borrow from his neighbor Fons. In vain he zaps along all the channels looking for images of some football match. Since England is the only country where they play football at Christmas, he sticks to the BBC. The content of the program eludes him. In his mind he sees the images of that morning again and again. Every time he tries to recall his attacker's face, but in vain. A dark man with a full mustache and beard and thick black hair. He also had an old-fashioned pair of glasses. Was it a Turkish man? That doesn't seem likely, although he cannot explain why. He is probably the only one who has seen the man. If he cannot recall his face, the chance that he will ever find him is less than zero. Even if he met the man in the streets during the day, he probably would not recognize him. Suddenly he remembers Rob. How did he get home? That man struck him down in one blow. Harry only could rush to leave. Too bad for Rob. On the other hand, he can not feel sorry for him. Rob just does not have it. He hides when it comes to it. He always waits what's going to happen. Only when the situation is clear, he joins the fight. By itself Rob is a pretty decent fighter, but the game they play requires more than skills, it's also about mentality. A boy like Rob can just let you down when things are getting too hot for him. Therefore he will let Rob know that he no longer belongs to the club.

He looks at the clock. Twelve o'clock. It can take hours before the first match starts. He zaps back to a Dutch channel and presses the button for the teletext. His eye is immediately caught by the third line: Boy beaten to death in Deventer. It frightens the life out of him. Quivering he reads the few lines.

In the center of Deventer, a twenty-two-year-old man was beaten to death last night. The man was found this morning at six o'clock behind the Bergkerk. The police have started a large-scale investigation. No witnesses have yet reported.

That's about Rob. He did not survive that man's blow. Harryt is about to panic. Quickly he gets on his feet and utters a cry because of the stabbing pain in his arm. It is not hard to imagine what is going to happen. The police is investigating the case. They will ask everyone in the center if they have seen Rob that night. Harry knows those studies. Sooner or later they will find out that Rob has been seen in the company of Harry Beerenkamp. In

the unlikely event they don't know him spontaneously, one look at the police system will pitchfork him as prime suspect. Due to his voluminous record of violent crimes, albeit all without fatal consequences, police will doubtless ring at his doorbell. Therefore he has to leave as soon as possible. Otherwise he will certainly end up in a police cell, where things will get worse. Those bastards at the police will saddle him for killing Rob. Who will believe him when he claims he was just a spectator? Given his reputation, it is very unlikely that he would have fled. It would have made more sense if he had helped his mate.

And that is actually true. Why did he run? Was he afraid of the man who knocked Rob down? Or did he not want to pull Rob out of the fire? Did he see his verdict on Rob confirmed in his beating? He can't get rid of the idea that the man who killed Rob is the same as the man who has visited him. Yet that's hard to imagine. Tonight's man who beat Rob was not big and pretty thin. The man who gave him hell was big and did not look like a sportsman at all. But even that could have been faked, with some extra layers of clothing and a pillow on the belly.

All in a sudden a new perspective emerges. The man that probably killed Rob was walking through the Bergkwartier in the middle of the night. That means he lives somewhere in the neighborhood. Harry realizes that revenge is no longer the only reason to find his attacker. If that man killed Rob he is his only decisive alibi. To prevent himself from being charged with murder, he must find the thin man.

Fighting off the pain, he walks upstairs and puts some clothes into a worn-out weekend bag. When he closes the door behind him, he wonders how to get away without anyone seeing him leaving. His giant Chevrolet is an eye-catcher, so using that car makes it impossible to stay in Deventer. Walking on the other hand is not an option. Therefore he gets into the car and drives as fast as possible to the A1-highway. When he passes the Akzo factory he decides to go to Amsterdam.

31 Monday 25 December 12.30

'Thomas, that was excellent again,' Jozef says.

Thomas Adriaan van Rijckevorsel, the owner of the Spanish breakfast café Averroës, is grinning behind the bar. 'Muy bien,' says Ellen, who often uses conversations with Thomas to keep her knowledge of Spanish up to standard.

'Quiereis más café?'

'Sí, gracias,' answers Ellen on behalf of Jozef and Brian. 'Para mi con leche, por favor.'

'Piet would be here at half past one?' Jozef asks.

'That's what he said. He wanted to go to Lankbergen first.'

'Lankbergen?'

At that moment the heavy door of the café swings open.

'Hello Piet, want a tortilla sandwich?' asks Jozef.

'You know that I normally prefer to eat the sandwiches my wife prepared, but she still slept this morning. That's why I exceptionally like to make use of your offer.'

'You had to go to Lankbergen first?'

'Yes, the boys wanted to show me something.'

'And?'

'They have done a good job. The first thing they did was examining these crosses. The only they could conclude was that the crosses had been made by someone with at least a little understanding of materials. Alas nothing else, no traces or anything. Subsequently they came across something strange while combing out the surrounding forested area. There was a hole excavated, half a meter deep, and in that hole they found a handkerchief. The bottom of the hole was covered with a layer of leaves. It looked like someone had been hiding there.'

'Why? A hole with leaves is not very special in a forest.'

'The leaves were flattened and broken. Besides you can not find clean handkerchiefs everywhere.'

Jozef frowns his brows.

'Maybe someone watched the mansion,' he says.

'Or someone has been looking from the forest at the spectacle of the burning crosses,' says Piet. 'A neighbor who lives a few hundred meters away saw two cars at about ten o'clock. The first one was a big American car, the second a blackish car of an unknown brand, carrying no lights at all. Why would anyone drive without a light on a moonless night?'

'Hmm, you mean that someone observed the spectacle and then followed the perpetrators.'

'That is indeed what I think,' confirms Piet.

'We will ask Timo Kersman.'

'So,' Piet says thoughtfully. 'If I understand correctly, a group of boys is targeting Landgraaf or his wife, and one of those guys has been beaten to death tonight. Is there any connection?'

'That is the big question indeed. Have you discovered anything this morning in the vicinity of the Bergkerk?'

Piet shakes his head.

'No traces and not a single sole who has seen Rob Meier. However, Herzog has prepared his preliminary analysis. There are no traces of violence other than the blow on his head and the heart region. Besides, the boy had had sexual intercourse shortly before. According to him, that same evening or night.'

'Assuming that Timo Kersman and Rob Meier didn't have a sexual relationship, at least one other person saw Rob that night. What else do we have?'

'This afternoon the city will come back to life. Then we should be able to find someone who saw the boy last night.'

'I hope so,' says Jozef. 'Brian, what about Landgraaf? What can you tell us about Mr. Vulture?'

'Information is abundantly abound. Of course that man has been in the news a lot, has spoken a lot at conferences and has had many honorary posts. Google delivers hundreds of results.'

'We are naturally looking for conflict situations.'

'I'm afraid you do not find them on the internet,' says Brian firmly. 'When we look for conflicts, we have to approach people who have worked with him or know him personally. I have been able to draw up a reasonably complete CV.'

Brian pulls out an A4.

'Landgraaf was born in 1946 in Bolsward. He studied economics in Groningen and Paris. He then worked at two banks, first the Friesland Bank, then the Rabobank.'

Brian looks at his paper.

'In 1988 he made the switch to the energy sector as director of the Municipal Energy Company Amsterdam. Two years later he became director of the Energy Company Western Netherlands, which was created after the merger of a number of municipal companies. He did that until '95. The four years thereafter forms a gap in the timeline. Somewhere I read that he studied in San Francisco at Stanford University for a while.'

'No mention of a reason why he stopped as director of the energy company?'

Brian shakes his head.

'In 1999 he suddenly returned and was appointed CEO of the Energy Company Northwestern Netherlands, the ENWN.'

'First he is a director, later CEO. That's called progress,' Jozef laughs.

'At the ENWN he immediately started preparing his Opus Magnum, the formation of one large national energy company. He needed six years to achieve that. In 2005 ZONNU was established.'

'And he could credit fifty million to his own account.'

'He only got that when he retired.'

Brian hands Joseph and Ellen his overview.

'An impressive CV,' says Ellen.

'Do you think?' asks Jozef.

'Steadily to the top, that's what most people call a successful career.'

'Unfortunately he now had to deal with burning crosses in his garden.'

'That can easily happen to you too. For example, by a criminal who spent 10 years behind bars due to your solid police work.'

'At least the villain has a good reason.'

'Sure, Jozef. Is such a CV completely indifferent to you?'

'Should I be impressed?'

'Not necessarily, but I can image it evokes a feeling that you did not make the most of your career, for example.' Ellen cannot avoid laughing at Joseph's astonished face.

'I have to admit that my curriculum is very brief. Education: high school, employer: police, position: detective, dot. And it won't grow anymore, I'm afraid.'

'Has there been a time when you had the ambition to move up in the hierarchy of the police force?'

'That is a tricky question. Probably, even I had ambitions of that kind when I was young and unspoiled. The question is when I have come to realize that such ambitions are unreal and unrealistic for me.'

'What do you mean by unreal? For many people, the ambition to climb the stairs of their organization is their main motive for going to work in the morning.'

'Do you really think?'

'I know it's valid for many of my friends. And that is what you read in magazines.'

'Maybe it has to do with age. And you? What do you want to achieve? You told me once that fell short on expectations of your parents when you quit studying economics and went to the police academy.'

'They have always respected my choice.'

'Fair enough. Fact is that you once started a study which potentially would have given you the opportunity to build up the same c.v. as Guido Auke Landgraaf.'

Touché, Ellen silently notes. That was indeed what she thought when she looked at Brian's A4 paper.

'I have to admit that my father's job certainly contributed to my initial choice to study business economics. He is a real business man and had a loathing for everything related to the civil service.'

'He still has a high position at an oil company?'

'Almost correct. He is a manager at DSM.'

'Yet you have already blocked that road before you started it. When did you see it was a dead end?'

Ellen has thought about that question very often. Nobody understood that, despite her good results, she decided to go to the police halfway through her studies. She could never give an unambiguous explanation.

'It was not that black and white. Yet I made the choice.'

'And now? Do you do career planning? That is necessary nowadays, right? We must develop ourselves, standstill is decline, grow or go. Do you hear? I could be that manager.'

'I'm not focused on any career. When I started here I decided to never be disheartened by rut and boredom. If that requires making a career, I will not evade climbing the ladder. Luckily, for the time being I am happy on the present rung.'

At the beginning of our collaboration, I already said that my mentorship offers an auspicious career perspective. Everyone I have ever trained has passed me in rank.'

'And does that bother you?'

'Do I make that impression?'

Ellen shakes her head smiling. She is jealous of the way Jozef effortlessly combines work, private life and hobbies. As if everything fits together naturally. If something is wringing beneath the surface, this is not the moment when Jozef will reveal his deepest feelings.

'All of this in response to Guido Landgraaf's curriculum,' she says. 'On the basis of which we can search for a conflict that has gotten out of hand.'

Jozef and Brian nod.

'Brian, would you like to dig a little deeper in the life of Landgraaf in the coming days?'

'That's fine with me, but why shouldn't we ask the man himself?'

'We have tried that once. For some reason unknown to us, he absolutely feels no need to be cooperative. He has repeatedly stressed the point that it was inevitable in his work to disappoint people. That is he had to say about it.'

'But yesterday he immediately called the police himself?' asks Piet

'My impression is that he still sees our involvement as an inevitable nuisance.'

Ellen doubts whether she should speak out what she thinks. She knows that at the beginning of an investigation, Jozef only wants to focus on collecting facts and does not want his eyes to be clouded by assumptions.

'Do you think he is capable of taking the law into his own hands?' she asks nonetheless.

'You mean he ordered someone to follow the boys and finish one?'

'That sounds crud. But that's indeed what I was thinking about.'

Jozef is silent.

'I know that such a hypothesis is not in line with your way of research,' Ellen continues looking at Jozef.

'That's true. But I also know how difficult it is to keep that up. Nevertheless, I want us to focus on the facts in the coming days, and leave hypotheses in the closet.'

Ellen realizes that Jozef is taking over command. At this moment it feels like a relief.

'Clearly, boss,' she says cheerfully.

'Will we release our friend Timo Kersman from his suffering? Thomas, thank you for the hospitable welcome.'

'Muchas gracias por los bocadillos y el café,' says Ellen.

'De nada,' Thomas replies grinning.

32 Monday 25 December 14.00 hours

The boy is in a terrible state when the agent brings him in. He is pale and looks at Jozef and Ellen with fear in his eyes.

'Sit down,' Jozef says sternly. He shows no compassion. 'Forget what has been said this morning. We start all over again. You are going to tell us exactly what you did yesterday. From the first moment that you've seen Rob to the last. Is that clear?'

The boy nods weakly and looks at the tabletop.

'Start at the beginning. When did you see Rob for the first time and where?'

'We came together at four o'clock to prepare an action. A number of crosses had to be put in the garden of the Lankbergen estate. Rob had constructed the crosses and explained to us what to do. He is very handy.'

'Where did that meeting happen?'

The boy's face turns red.

'That, uh, I cannot say,' he stammered, seemingly surprised by Jozef's question. Ellen realizes that the boy probably thinks that their involvement in the burning crosses is hot news. Jozef hits the table with his flat hand. Ellen is shocked.

'We made another deal,' he says.

'I cannot. He's gonna kill me.'

'Who's gonna kill you?'

The boy looks upset, as if he can start crying at any time.

'You must promise that you tell nobody I have told you.'

'We promise nothing,' says Joseph firmly. 'No more wailing now. I have no sympathy for tough guys who almost chase a poor woman to death by scaring her horse with pig masks on their heads, and placing burning crosses in someone's garden. My patience is over.'

Jozef's words sweep away the last patches of firm ground from under the boy's feet. He collapses a little further and the tension disappears from his face.

'Harry Beerenkamp,' he murmurs.

'Who?'

'Harry Beerenkamp, who arranges everything.'

'What is everything?'

'We had to help him taking in the new owner of the estate.'

'Did he say why?'

'No, we just had to help. First that gate and the dead pig. Then the banners, then the horse and yesterday the crosses.'

'And followed the orders without asking.'

The boy nods. Color slowly comes back in his face.

'Now I want to hear the whole story,' says Jozef.

Stuttering, but consistent, Timo Kersman tells what has happened.

'Thanks,' says Jozef. 'So, if I understand correctly, you went home at midnight and Rob stayed with Harry. Is that right?'

'Yes. My parents can confirm that I came home by half past one.'

'Why did Rob stay?'

'Uh, that's a bit difficult to explain.'

'Try it. We are quite used to complicated stories.'

'Eh, we like to ... We regularly fight with supporters of opponents.'

'Opponents of Go Ahead, I assume.'

'Yes, we are real fans. And Harry is the leader of our group. Rob disappointed him a few times and that still had to be rectified.'

'Rectified?'

'Harry only wants people he can rely on entirely.'

'And has the confidence been restored last night?'

'Usually it has. In this case I don't know. I wasn't there.'

'Did you experience the restoration of confidence yourself?'

'Never. But I have heard that Harry once challenged someone to jump with him from the Wilhelminabrug into the river in the middle of winter.'

Jozef looks at Ellen.

'That guy is crazy. Jumping from that bridge is life-threatening.'

'Harry is nuts.'

'You don't look like stupid. Why are you doing that?'

'I sometimes wonder myself. They are my friends, aren't they? Certainly Rob. I already know him from primary school.'

Suddenly the boy bursts into tears. Soft crying turns into uncontrolled sobbing. Ellen stands up to get the box of tissues.

'Do you want coffee?' asks Jozef when the boy got hold on his emotions again.

The boy nods. Joseph walks to the coffee machine in the corner of the room and pours a mug.

'Let's see,' Jozef says. 'We know the address of Harry Beerenkamp, we got the names of the other boys. Ellen, have we forgotten something?'

Jozef looks at Timo Kersman, on whose face a painful expression appears.

'Can we help you? Will you manage with your parents?'

'That will work out. I'm only afraid of Harry. If he finds out what I've told you, I'm dead. Believe me, please.'

'He won't hear that from us. As far as I am concerned you can go home. Will someone bring you?'

'Thanks, I rather walk.'

Ellen logs in at Jozef's computer.

'Look. This is Harry Beerenkamp,' she says excitedly. 'Six convictions, ten charges. All violence.'

'That does not surprise me. Still, I don't understand anything about boys like Timo.'

'Why do they allow themselves to be manipulated in this way?' Ellen sighs.

'Pure terror. Types like Beerenkamp always find boys who let themselves be terrorized by him. How old is Beerenkamp?'

'Thirtyeight.'

'You see, he has worn out a lot of guys. Most of them quit when they are twenty-five years old. Then Harry goes in search of fresh blood again.'

'What does this mean? Are we going there?'

'That's for sure.'

'Is he suspicious? Is he dangerous?'

'Both. We arrest him on suspicion of manslaughter. Timo's story is sufficient to do so.'

The telephone rings.

'Laros.'

'...'

'Excellent job, Piet. We also heard the name another way. We arrest him,' Jozef says and puts the phone down.

'That was Piet. Rob Meier has been seen with Harry Beerenkamp in a shoarmah at the Brink yesterday about half past three. I have to arrange an arrest team immediately.'

33 Monday 25 December 16.30 hours

The quarter where Harry Beerenkamp lives is on the nomination to be demolished and then rebuilt. The houses are small and often poorly maintained. Due to topsy-turvy block tiles it's dangerous to walk for elderly people. At Harry Beerenkamp's house the paint is peeling from the window frames and a leaky rain pipe has caused a green trail on the wall. The living room is dark. There is also no light elsewhere in the house. Jozef sends a number of men through the passage behind the row of houses. With his nose pressed against the window of the living room he tries to discover a sign of life. He shrugs his shoulders to indicate that he does not see anyone. He is calling. No reaction. He calls again. Again no response. He kneels in front of the door and calls through the opened letter flap: 'Mr. Beerenkamp, police. We know that you are at home. Please open the door!' Nothing happens. He beckons a uniformed and armed agent. The agent rumbles with some tools at the lock and within a few seconds the door opens. Four agents enter the home and quickly and systematically search all the rooms.

'He is not here,' is the conclusion.

Ellen has watched the operation and now notices that the curtain of the neighboring house moves. When she turns her head, the curtain hangs straight again.

'The neighbors,' she says to Jozef. He gestures two agents to follow him and calls at the house on the right. It is immediately opened by a man in tracksuit.

'Police,' says Jozef. 'We are looking for Harry Beerenkamp. Do you know where it is?'

The man shakes his head.

'Did you see him today?'

The man hesitates.

'Take him away,' says Jozef to the two agents. 'Put him in the car.'

Before the man can say anything, the policemen grab the man by the arm and put him in the detention vehicle. Ellen looks at the spectacle with increasing astonishment. The actions of Jozef are against all rules. If the man lodges a complaint against the police's actions, this can cause major problems. She could understand that he was putting Timo Kersman under pressure by a form of intimidation. In this case it is a probably ignorant neighbor, an outsider, who merely did not immediately answer Jozef's question.

She follows Jozef into the house of Harry Beerenkamp. At first sight there is nothing special to see.

'What are you doing, you idiots?' shouts a woman from the outside. 'What does my husband have to do with this?'

Jozef walks towards her.

'Laros. Police Deventer. We are looking for Harry Beerenkamp. Do you know where he is?'

'He has cleared off. Afraid of the guy who took him out this morning.'

'What guy?'

'You shouldn't ask me. Maybe Fons knows. I only cleaned up the mess in Harry's house. Some lunatic dropped a few bombs. I worked like hell to tidy the place.'

Now Ellen notices a big hole in the middle of the new looking couch. There are two pieces of black plastic at the table leg.

'It was my husband, not me.'

Jozef now walks to the arrest car and opens the door. He shakes the man's hand.

'Laros.'

'Fons, Fons Straver.'

'I understand something happened here this morning. Can you tell us more?'

'I've never experienced anything like this before,' the man starts. If there is any resentment to Jozef, he doesn't show anything. 'We were still sleeping. Suddenly a gigantic bang and breaking of glass. We sat right up and thought the house was collapsing. I jumped out of bed and walked downstairs. Then two more explosions followed. In panic I crept under the kitchen table. When the noise stopped, I walked through the garden to Harry's house. I looked through the window of his back door and was shocked. Harry walked around, screaming like a madman, his head covered with blood. Do you know Harry?'

Jozef shakes his head.

'He's not afraid of the devil himself. But now someone had invaded his house, tied him to his bed and worked him with a knife, first his arm, then his forehead.'

'Forehead?' asks Ellen in amazement.

'Believe it or not, but it looked like a cross. God, I hear myself talking. Completely nuts. And he didn't understand anything. Oh yes, he also had cuffs around his wrists. I cut them loose.'

'Cut through?' asks Joseph and raises an eyebrow. 'You don't simply cut those buoys.'

'Matter of good tools,' the man says. 'Anyway, you can imagine how I stood there watching. Never seen such havoc. My wife spent hours cleaning the place.'

Ellen tries not to start laughing. It looks like a Monty Python sketch.

'Harry sent me outside and told me to tell everyone that he had been messing around with illegal fireworks.'

Jozef gives Ellen an amused look.

'So someone tied him?'

'Yes, and threatened hi, with a gun.'

'Did Harry know who and why?'

'I do not think so. He suspected it was someone from Zwoller who wanted to take revenge.'

'I'll assume the FC.'

'Yes, Harry likes to be at the forefront if the honor of our FC is at stake. Especially when Zwolle comes to visit.'

'But you did not believe that.'

The man shakes his head.

'You should have seen him and the house. That was not done by a simple Zwolle hooligan. To take Harry in this way you must not only have guts, you also need quite a bit of fighting abilities. One should not argue with Harry.'

'You are his neighbor. Are not you afraid of him?'

'Harry is normally a great guy. He's not a bad neighbor at all.'

Until you do something he does not like, Ellen thinks. The few words of the neighbor sketch the image of an aggressive psychopath. Unscrupulous, power-hungry and violent.

'And that cross on his forehead?'

'I saw it when I had cleaned the wounds a bit. I don't think he liked it when I said it. But he did not respond to it.'

'And you're sure it was a cross?'

'It looked like it a lot. Right in the middle of his forehead. I offered to take him to the hospital, but he didn't want to. To calm him down a bit I lent him my TV. Harry gets mad when he can not watch football and then he walks through the house all the time to release the tension. These houses are quite noisy, you know.'

Jozef nods.

'And now he is gone. Did you know that?'

'Gone?' The neighbor looks around. 'I do not see his car either, a big Chevrolet.'

Jozef looks questioningly at Ellen. She shakes her head. She can not think of any more questions.

'Then we are done for the moment,' he says. He thanks Fons Straver for the cooperation and tells the leader of the arrest team to go home.

'Do you mind to go on?' Jozef asks when they are in the car.

'No, as far as I'm concerned, we're going to eat something and we'll put everything together this evening.'

'Fine, will I ask Margot to prepare something? Maybe also for Norman. That poor boy is alone at home all Christmas.'

'He can handle that very well. But he will certainly appreciate it to join us.'

'Well, then I would like to visit Guido Landgraaf tonight.'

'Landgraaf?'

'The man that cut the cross on Beerenkamp's head didn't do that accidentally.'

'You mean it has something to do with the crosses in Landgraaf's garden?'

'I don't believe the religion of coincidence.'

'So you think Landgraaf sent someone to punish Harry Beerenkamp?'

Jozef nods.

'And maybe Rob Meier, too,' she continues. Her words cause a jolt, because they are no less than an accusation of murder.

'If he is somehow responsible for the death of the boy he can change his estate into a first class cell.'
Ellen has the impression there is a bitter grin at Jozef's face.
'I'm going to ask Piet if he can release someone from his Christmas dinner to turn the Beerenkamp house upside down tonight. See if that yields anything.'

34 Monday 25 December 19.30 hours

'That tasted great,' says Norman. 'A more than full Christmas dinner.'
'Hopefully it's a little redress for the disturbed Christmas,' Jozef says.
'I'll be happy to do it again, frittering away a day in return for such tasty snacks. I am curious about the composition of the fennel mousse that fitted perfectly to the pieces of baked fish.'
Ellen laughs.
'That is in vain. Jozef has never revealed anything of his secret recipes.'
'But that is no unwillingness. I just don't remember what I've done.'
'And those fried slices of mushroom, was it cep?' Norman insists.
'Yes, very easy to prepare.'
'Until you try it yourself,' says Ellen. 'Then suddenly the exact temperature of the oil appears to be of crucial importance.'
'Are you off the coming days?' Margot asks Norman.
'That was the plan until this morning. Now I think I will work anyway. I have a report to be finished.'
'What kind of work do you actually do?'
'I advise companies how to organize things.'
'Are they not capable thinking of that themselves?'
'I suppose they are. Yet there is always a reason why they don't succeed. That can be due to the director who is able to delegate tasks, or a team manager who sets out rules he ignores himself. As an outsider, I can reveal things more easily than an employee. Besides a lot of people find it hard to make clear agreements. You do that and I do this.'
'And when do you establish your own consultancy?'
Jozef comes in with the coffee.
'Margot can be very direct,' he says, laughing.
'Isn't it a legitimate question? I know many advisors who are happy to have themselves freed from the boss's yoke. And they make even more money.'
'Like many of my colleagues, I sometimes consider it.'
'Money is less relevant,' says Ellen. 'He earns nearly twice as much as me.'
'Don't exaggerate,' says Norman. 'Besides, I also have almost twice as much working experience than you.'
'That's true. I needed some time to discover my professional destiny.'
'I'm glad you took enough time to find your way,' says Jozef. 'Otherwise, I had to solve this case on my own. How about making an overview of everything we know and then visiting Landgraaf?'
'I'm ready,' says Ellen enthusiastically.
'As far as I'm concerned, Norman stays with it,' Jozef says. 'Who knows, he can give us good advice about the organization of our work and our cooperation.'
'Who knows,' Ellen says with a smile. 'Although I should dissuade my love partner from being my adviser at the same time. That's a recipe for problems.'
'Then you advise me,' says Joseph to Norman.

'You haven't got a flipchart here, by any chance?' asks Ellen.
'Listen, the overlap between private and work is not limitless. No office equipment in my house.'
'An empty piece of paper and a pen maybe?'
'I'll get something,' says Margot.
'I think we should focus on the connection between the events at Lankbergen, the murder of Rob Meier and Harry Beerenkamp,' says Ellen and draws a chart with four columns. In the upper squares she enters the names Guido Landgraaf, Marieke van Boxbergen, Rob Meier and Harry Beerenkamp.
'I rather put the names in the four corners of the sheet and then indicate with connecting lines what links there are,' says Norman. Ellen immediately feels a flurry of annoyance. That is exactly why she didn't want Norman to interfere. In order to avoid a marital discussion in the presence of Jozef, she turns the paper and does what Norman suggested. She writes down everything that comes to mind. Jozef and Norman observe what she's doing without saying anything.
'So, that's what I can think of,' she says after five minutes.
Jozef studies the overview.

‘As usual, it's perfect,’ he says. ‘To start with, I wonder about the relationship between Guido Landgraaf and Marieke van Boxbergen.’

Ellen can not hide that she is surprised by Jozef's question.

‘I have no special feeling about their marriage. He is a director who likes to arrange his affairs himself, even when talking about his wife,’ she says. ‘I am more interested in Beerenkamp. Is he acting on his own?’

‘Probably not,’ Norman says firmly and shakes his head.

‘What reason can Beerenkamp have to sabotage Landgraaf?’ Jozef answers. ‘I agree with Norman. To me, it seems unlikely that he is operating on his own.’

‘So you think there is someone who helps Beerenkamp or gives orders?’

Norman nods.

‘A number of people are absent: the one who has molested Beerenkamp, the one who followed the boys last night from the estate and the one who killed Rob Meier,’ says Ellen.

‘The person who followed the boys is probably the person who beat up Beerenkamp, and the last one could have been Beerenkamp himself,’ says Jozef. Norman nods again.

‘If you're right one unknown person remains,’ Ellen says, trying to suppress her annoyance about the solidarity between Joseph and Norman. ‘Moreover, it seems rather premature and above all contrary to the first Law of Laros to draw these conclusions.’

‘Laros's law?’ asks Norman.

‘Restrain yourself to the facts as long as possible, postpone the conclusions and interpretations as long as possible. All of this to prevent tunnel vision.’

Norman laughs.

‘A topical law.’

‘More a universal law,’ says Jozef. ‘And I have to agree with Ellen. Actually, we do not know anything. And then it is all the more dangerous to draw up hypotheses.’

Jozef's words don't take away Ellen's uncomfortable feeling about the constellation. The next time she will ask Norman, despite his positive intentions, to go home.

‘Briefly, it is too early to speculate about perpetrators. First we need more information,’ Jozef concludes. ‘And if there is one person who could supply us, that is Landgraaf. As far as I am concerned, we are going to pay him a visit. Hopefully he's home.’

Jozef dials Landgraaf's number and pushes the speaker button.

‘Good evening, Jozef Laros.’

‘Christ. Is it necessary to have this conversation?’

‘Sorry we're bothering you right now, but we'd like to speak with you.’

‘Now?’

‘Yes now.’

‘Is it possible to leave us in peace? It's Christmas, goddamned.’

‘We have been busy since six o'clock and don't do this for fun.’

‘Me neither, but all right. When are you coming?’

‘The sooner the better.’

‘Can I finish dinner?’

‘We can come a little later. I don't like to spoil a good meal.’

‘And we have friends...’

‘There must be a room in your house where we can talk undisturbed. Your friends don't have to be bothered.’

‘How much time do you need?’

‘It won't take more than an hour.’

‘One hour?’

‘I think you underestimate the seriousness of the situation. One of the boys who last night helped to put the crosses in your garden, was murdered a few hours later. Struck down.’

‘That's none of my business.’

‘We would like to discuss this more extensively with you. I'm afraid saying you have nothing to do with it, is not enough.’

‘Are you suggesting that I took revenge by killing one of the villains?’

‘I'm just a simple policeman who is doing his utmost to collect as much information as possible on Christmas Day.’

‘It's not my intention to offend you. You're welcome at any time.’

‘Then you can expect us something about nine.’

Jozef puts the phone down.

‘Arrogant bastard,’ he says. ‘Who wants coffee? We have more than an hour before Mr. Greed is ready to receive us.’

35 Monday 25 December 21:00

It is a cloudy night and the roads leading to the Lankbergen estate are deserted and pitch-dark. The headlights of Jozef's old Peugeot color the fields rushing past warm yellow.

‘Norman did not seem to mind that you had to work all day,’ Jozef says.

‘He has worked hard in recent weeks and was actually relieved that he did not need anything today.’

‘All the better.’

The entrance gate to the estate is open. Having an old hand at it, Jozef drives the curvy access road.

‘Your antique car really feels at home here,’ says Ellen.

‘I doubt it will be accepted by the congeners that presumably regard themselves as more equal.’

Jozef parks his car between a Mercedes GL 500 and a Land Rover. The third car is a BMW X6.

‘Beautiful toys for people with too much money,’ says Jozef.

‘I would like to have such a BMW.’

‘If you park it in front of your house, I will call the police to remove it.’

Guido Landgraaf is already waiting on the steps in front of the house.

‘Sorry for just now,’ he says. ‘You also do your work.’

‘It is nice that we are here now,’ says Jozef at a neutral tone.

‘Shall we sit down in the kitchen? There it is nice and warm and we have coffee, tea and possibly something else at hand.’

Jozef and Ellen walk behind Landgraaf.

‘So a boy who was here last night was killed. Have I understood that correctly?’ Landgraaf opens the conversation.

‘That's what I said on the telephone, but let's start at the beginning.’

‘Go ahead.’

‘First I want to go back to last night. Can you describe what exactly happened?’

‘That's easy. I sat with my wife in the living room, suddenly a stone flew through the window, of course we were shocked, I ran out and saw the burning crosses.’

‘And then? Did you call us right away?’

‘No, I first walked into the forest a bit. I thought I heard a car drive away in the distance. Then I went in and called you.’

‘I'm asking you this because we have the impression that besides the boys who placed and lit the crosses, someone else was present.’

Ellen observes the face of Guido Landgraaf. For an instant she thinks to notice a reflex of his eyebrow.

‘Why, someone else?’ she asks.

‘We had the impression. Maybe you have information that we don't have yet.’

‘I don't think I fully understand you.’

‘You have of course thought about the events that happened lately. You have always claimed not to understand anything at all. You said you had no idea who could be behind all these harassments.’

‘That's not quite right. I could think of a hundred people who hate me. For example, someone who thinks that his energy bill is too high, and blames me.’

‘That is indeed possible. Do you enjoy life in the Salland countryside?’

‘Is that a relevant question for your research?’

‘Every question is relevant. Every answer too.’

‘The answer is, yes. It is a beautiful place to live. And I am confident that the noise will stop.’

‘What's the basis of your confidence?’

‘Intuition.’

‘That is the most powerful weapon of a director nowadays, so it appears.’

‘Indeed it is. Rational thinking is often not sufficient. The world has become too complex. Still, someone has to make decisions and one person's decisions turn out to be better than the other person's. Maybe that difference is caused by intuition.’

‘And you are blessed with that?’

‘The few really big decisions that I took in my life turned out to be good.’

‘I think it's nice to be able to say so. I made some wrong decisions myself,’ says Jozef.

‘Can I offer you something? Coffee, tea, soft drinks, a drink?’

‘No thanks. We don't want to take more time than necessary. At three o'clock last night a young man was murdered in the center of Deventer, Rob Meier.’

Landgraaf does not respond to the name.
 'The boy had a bandaged arm,' Jozef says.
 'It doesn't ring a bell. How old was he?'
 'Early twenties.'
 'What a shame.'
 'Do you have children yourself?'
 Landgraaf shakes his head.
 'We doubted and thought for too long, until it was too late. I sometimes regret that. Marieke cares less.'
 A silence falls. Ellen knows that Jozef and Margot would have liked to have children.
 'Does the name Harry Beerenkamp sound familiar?' asks Jozef.
 'I have never heard that name either,' replies Landgraaf, shaking his head.
 'Beerenkamp was the leader of the group that bothered you.'
 'The name really doesn't ring any bell.'
 'This morning an unknown person tied Beerenkamp to his bed, stabbed and cut the man with a knife and destroyed part of his furniture with three bombs.'
 Guido Landgraaf doesn't show any sign of anxiety. Relaxed he looks at Jozef.
 'Shit happens,' he says.
 Jozef is silent. Wrinkles appear on his forehead.
 'Rob Meier had a digital camera with pictures of the burning crosses.'
 'Camera?'
 'You understand our surprise when we saw the photos.'
 'What do you want to know?' asks Landgraaf, unexpectedly strict.
 'Whether you have an idea what Rob Meier wanted to do with those photos.'
 'No.'
 'Have you previously received photos? For example from the banners.'
 'Then I would have shown them to you.'
 The gaze of Jozef betrays skepticism. He remains silent.
 'Can I conclude that you know who was responsible for the incidents at the estate in recent months?' Landgraaf asks.
 'We know the names of a number of people involved. Unfortunately, we need more information to complete the picture. I conclude that we cannot expect further help from you.'
 'I don't know Beerenkamp, I don't know Rob Meier, I have not left the house for the past twenty-four hours and I have always been convinced that it will stop automatically. I sincerely regret that Rob Meier had to end up in this terrible way.'
 'That is a clear statement. Then we leave it at this. Can we still celebrate a little Christmas.'
 'Fine, if you want to know more, you can always call.'
 'We certainly will.'
 'What do you think?' asks Jozef when they leave the estate.
 'That man has so many layers. I haven't got an idea where to find the core.'
 'That seems like wise words.'
 'What does he really think?'
 'It's hard to look through the cloud of hazy motives underlying his behaviour. My first thought, of course, is that he does not speak the truth. But for that he may well have a reason which is irrelevant to us. Professionally he is used to taking into account so many interests that the words he speaks out loud are only loosely connected to the underlying facts.'
 'That is fairly positive description. I rather think that everything he claims is subordinate to self-interest.'
 'Apart from your opinion about the man, do you think he has anything to do with the murder of Rob Meier? The most remarkable thing, by the way, was his profound belief that he would not be bothered anymore. What does he base that on? On his intuition?'
 'That's a keen observation,' Jozef says surprised. 'It enhances my feeling that he's withholding information. I bet a bottle of wine on that.'
 'I agree. However, at a higher stakes than a bottle of wine, I would not know what to do.'
 'We will see. Are you in tomorrow?'
 'Of course. At what time?'
 'Thomas offered to serve breakfast at eight o'clock at Averroes.'

36 Tuesday, December 26, 7.30 am

'I'm going to take a shower. Wanna join me in Averroes?' Ellen asks crawling her fingers through Norman's chest hair.

'I never say no to a good breakfast. Moreover, I am curious what your next steps will be.'

Ellen swallows once.

'That's what I wanted to talk about. I think it's fine if you come along to have breakfast together. But that's it, as far as I'm concerned.'

'Is that because of what happened last night?'

'Eh, actually. I think it's wise to separate work and relationships more clearly.'

'I really liked it yesterday. Didn't you? And after all I did not come to Landgraaf.'

Norman's words make Ellen doubt. Does she make a problem out of nothing?

'That is true. Yet at a certain point your contribution bothered me.'

'Did I say something wrong?'

Ellen shakes her head and thinks.

'I don't know exactly either. Anyway, it has something to do with the way I work with Jozef. As you have been able to see for yourself, we regularly have different opinions. In general, that works well. Arguing helps us to keep each other up to the mark.'

'Was I too much on Jozef's hand?'

'These are not my words,' Ellen says with a smile. 'But to be honest, that's what it comes down to. Because of your presence, I felt less free to respond to Jozef.'

'Why? You are the professionals, I am only a layman.'

'I guess it's mostly in myself.'

'But can I come along to have breakfast?'

'Of course,' says Ellen and kisses Norman.

Arm in arm they walk through the Noordenbergstraat to the breakfast cafe of Thomas Adriaan van Rijckevorsel. Their equally ascending footsteps resound against the multicolored facades of the historic buildings. Compared to the past few weeks, it is not cold. According to the KNMI, it will be a gloomy second Christmas day. Low hanging clouds and mist keep the sun far away. On the wide door of Averroës hangs a Christmas wreath with a single light in the middle.

'Good morning,' sounds the enthusiastic greeting by the mustachioed man behind the bar.

'What a service,' says Ellen. 'Are you doing that especially for us?'

'Yes and no. I started this cafe just to offer food and drinks at times like now, when all other cafés are closed. Last year I was also open on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Unfortunately, I was the only visitor both mornings, but that didn't spoil the fun. It's all about the idea.'

'Beautiful attitude,' says Norman.

At the moment Brian comes in.

'Brian, what a surprise,' says Ellen.

'I called Jozef last night and he said we were going to start here today.'

'So you're also sacrificing your Christmas?' asks Thomas from behind the bar. 'Hat off. What a devotion to duty.'

'It indeed feels a bit strange. For me, Christmas marks the real end of the year.'

'Cozy all together around the Christmas tree?'

'No, completely alone. That's why I'm not really looking forward to it. On the other hand, it's always been great. Just do nothing at all.'

'You don't do anything at all? You don't even read a book?'

'Not really. My program consists of a fixed music program. At Christmas Eve I listen to Monteverdi. On Christmas Day I play eight CDs in a row. Byrd, Bach, Händel, Gesualdo, Pergolesi, Rossini, Cherubini, Górecki and finally the Vier letzte Lieder from Strauss. Since I've been doing that for many years now, I even know what I'm going to eat and drink with every CD. Two boiled eggs, rusks and tea at Byrd. Coffee with three cream puffs at Bach. Two luxury chocolates and nougat at Händel, a sandwich with serrano ham and real cheddar at Gesualdo and so on.'

'Special,' says Ellen.

'This would have been the eleventh year.'

'I almost feel conscience-stricken.'

'It is my own choice. Moreover, it only works with inner peace. The awareness that colleagues are working on a case would distract me from the sacred conscience of being alone with the ultimate achievements of mankind.'

'That sound like Boxing Day prayer.'

It is Jozef standing in the doorway of the cafe.

'Hey, there is the boss,' says Thomas. 'Good heavens, what an example.'

'Of course I have a good reason to be a little late. I have tried in vain to lure Piet here. He was, however, adamant. He comes to the office at two o'clock. The most important work of his men is the search for witnesses

and that doesn't make any sense before twelve o'clock. The investigation of the crime scene didn't produce any results.'

'Shall I set a real breakfast table for you?' Thomas asks.

'I think that's great,' Jozef says. 'Norman, nice to have you here too. When are you applying for a job with us? We can always use smart people.'

'Who knows, when I'm tired of advising all those companies how to work more professional, better organized and more efficiently.'

'If you say so, I would not wait a day to switch jobs. But maybe you really like what you do.'

Norman laughs.

'Pretty much, indeed.'

'Okay, let's get to the point. What's up today?'

Jozef looks at Ellen. She immediately takes the floor.

'This is what will be done. Witness research in the surroundings of the Bergkerk including the ladies of easy virtue at the Bokkingshang and the cafés at the Brink, thorough examination of the Beerenkamp's house and also talk to neighbours and last but not least, take a closer look at Guido Landgraaf's antecedents. Did you get anything out of that yet, Brian?'

'From 1999, when he became CEO of the first Dutch energy giant ENWM, till now there is excessive information. After the establishment of ZONNU in 2005, the river of news and articles overflowed. He was in the papers almost every day. The period from 1995 till 1999 is a black hole. Internet does not provide a definite answer. Several sources indicate that he spent some time in San Francisco, trying to get a Master's degree in energy management at Stanford. Did that take four years?'

'He's the one to tell. And before 1995? I assume he also had some kind of executive job'

'Could be, but if so, the media didn't pay any attention to him or to what he did. I have not found anything from before 1995.'

'Is it useful to continue the investigation?'

'I think we should get names of people who used to work with him. And ask him to reveal his activities between '95 and '99.'

'So we have to go back to Landgraaf,' Ellen concludes.

'We also have Marieke van Boxbergen,' says Brian. 'It seems obvious to focus on Guido Landgraaf, but who tells us that his wife isn't the real target?'

'That is possible,' says Jozef. 'But those banners only mentioned Landgraaf, and not his wife. We shouldn't forget her, but let's focus on Landgraaf himself.'

'Okay, we'll take that. Then we have Beerenkamp and the other friends of Rob Meier. Somebody has to tell us where we can find Beerenkamp. Anyway, there must be a missing person notice, I think.'

Jozef agrees.

'Anything else?' asks Ellen.

Jozef shakes his head.

'Who does what?'

'As far as I'm concerned, Brian is still focusing on Landgraaf and his wife, for the time being only with the aid of the unsurpassed internet. Calling other people costs a disproportionate amount of effort.'

'That's fine,' says Brian.

'You bring in Rob Meier's friends,' says Jozef to Ellen. 'Meanwhile, you try to find out as many as possible about Beerenkamp. I will be with Piet. For now I think witness research the most important source of information. Everybody happy?'

Ellen nods, though she does not agree with Jozef. At best a witness will confirm that Rob Meier was beaten to death by Harry Beerenkamp. Then they have to find Harry Beerenkamp. So that's what she's going to do, no matter what Jozef said. Suddenly she is in a hurry to go to the office.

'Thomas, we are going to work,' says Jozef. 'You gave us the best possible start to this working day.'

'I'm glad to contribute in my way.'

'We meet at four o'clock? Same place?'

Everyone nods. Norman too

'What are you going to do?' Ellen asks Norman when they are outside.

'A Boxing Day according to Brian's tradition allures me.'

'With classical music? Then you have to borrow some CDs from him.'

'At first I will try it with my own music.'

'I feel little guilty about leaving you alone all day.'

'Then I shouldn't be sleeping with a detective.'

'Irregular working hours were in the small print. Now I'm going to the office quickly.'

She kisses him goodbye.

ACT. 2

37 Tuesday 26 December 16.30 hours

'Still need fresh coffee?' Jozef asks.

'Maybe I should take some speed,' Ellen says.

'Speed? Is it that bad?'

'I am tremendously inspired by Rob Meier's friends. If they feel tired, Harry Beerenkamp supplies them with some speed or other stuff.'

'Exactly what I thought. Beerenkamp is actually an ordinary dealer.'

'He got those guys by the nuts. They are all friends and therefore mortally afraid to get kicked out of the group by Beerenkamp.'

'Inexplicable,' Jozef sighs. 'I'll see if the drug colleagues have some leftovers to enhance your performance.'

'Coffee will do, thanks,' says Brian.

Jozef walks into the hallway to get water for coffee machine. Then Jozef's telephone rings. Ellen picks it.

'Landgraaf speaking, I understood Laros is at the office.'

Ellen is startled by the dark tone.

'I will call him,' she says.

'Jozef, it's for you, Landgraaf. It sounded urgent.'

Jozef picks up the phone

'Laros.'

Ellen looks anxiously at Jozef's reaction. He seems to be unsettled by the words of Landgraaf.

'I understand,' he says a few times.

'We will be there immediately,' he concludes.

Ellen gets frightened when Joseph does not immediately tell what is going on, but only stares outside in silence.

Brian also realizes that something is wrong and an oppressive silence covers the room like a blanket.

'Landgraaf found the body of his wife. According to him, she has been stabbed to death.'

'Damn, damn,' Ellen blurts out. Her stomach pulls together.

Jozef sighs.

'This is going to cause huge problems.'

Ellen immediately understands what he means. They have been aware of the incidents on the Lankbergen estate for a long time. The question will be asked whether the police have recognized the severity of the situation.

There's only one answer to that question: no, they completely misjudged the state of affairs. It is not without reason that Jozef takes full responsibility at this moment. The fact that Landgraaf himself has been extremely slack informing and engaging the police will not exonerate the police from having made the wrong decisions.

'Find Piet, probably he is still at the office. Tell him to get the whole machinery in motion and go there himself as quickly as possible. I will call Gerard Maas. He is probably stuck in some expensive restaurant and will not be happy. Then get your car and wait for me to drive to the Lankbergen estate.'

Jozef is waiting at the reception when Ellen arrives with her car.

'Put your car away,' he says. 'We join Gerard. He wanted to come along himself.'

'Because of Landgraaf?'

'Not unlikely, but primarily because of the risks. For him, this case can become the proverbial banana peel that sweeps away his ambitions in one blow.'

'Does he still have ambitions?'

'He does not express himself about his plans. He is seven or fifty-eight, so there is still a nice step ahead.'

'Anyway, he wants to ...'

She swallows her last words because Gerard Maas enters. He shakes hers and Jozef's hand.

'Nasty business,' he says. 'Are our people already there?'

'Piet just left.'

'Catch me up, please,' says Gerard, when he has started his Mercedes. Jozef looks at Ellen.

'For us it started early December. You had heard about bustle at the Lankbergen estate. Unknown people had molested the entrance gate, dead pigs were put on the drive to the house and banners were hung on some trees. Not Landgraaf himself, but his wife Marieke van Boxbergen has informed the police. A week later she was attacked on her horse by men in overalls and wearing pig masks. We had indications that the perpetrators were Go Ahead supporters. So Brian went to the stadium, where Go Ahead played Haarlem.'

'That was a terrible match. I was in the VIP stand.'

'I will tell him. To his surprise, he saw someone with a pig mask at the B-side. Yesterday we discovered that the boy with the pig mask was a friend of Rob Meier who was killed at Christmas Eve.'

'That is part one,' interrupts Jozef. 'All of that was Ellen's work. She realized, however, that the reference to our local FC was sensitive. That's why she called me on Saturday. I decided to take over. To celebrate the end of the

year I invited Ellen and her boyfriend at my place on Christmas Eve. We hadn't finished dinner, when part two started.'

Jozef looks at Ellen again.

'At ten o'clock, Landgraaf called. He wanted us to come right away. What we encountered looked like a scene from a surreal horror film. Around the house large crosses had been erected that burned or had burned. The stench was unbearable. Besides, windows of the living room were thrown in. Yesterday Piet's people went to investigate the place.'

Ellen takes a deep breath.

'Yesterday morning at six o'clock we were startled by the murder of the boy, Rob Meier. He had been beaten to death a few hours before by a trained fighter. The remarkable thing was that the boy had a camera with pictures of the burning crosses on Lankbergen.'

'Connection?' Gerard asks briefly.

'Unknown. The boy was spotted at two o'clock that night with a certain Harry Beerenkamp at a shoarmah at the Brink. Beerenkamp is a known to the police and carries a long list of violent crimes. The boy with the pig mask confirmed that Rob Meier was with Harry Beerenkamp that night.'

'And where is Beerenkamp now?'

'He had disappeared. After he had been molested in his own house this morning.'

'Revenge of Landgraaf?'

'That's a hypothesis. We have asked the Landgraaf himself, but the man is rather inscrutable. We are convinced that he knew more than he told us.'

'And his wife? What do we know about her?'

'Not much. She was born and raised in the area and probably she had got Landgraaf to buy Lankbergen. They had been together for a long time.'

Ellen recognizes the cars of Piet van Gestel and Walter Herzog. Piet is waiting for them on the platform.

'Stabbing,' he says. 'A lot of blood.'

'And Landgraaf?'

'Quiet. And controlled. No emotions.'

At that moment Guido Landgraaf himself comes out. His face indeed hardly shows any emotions. Gerard Maas shakes his hand and introduces himself. No condolence yet. Nothing has been determined yet.

'She is in the living room,' says Landgraaf. Ellen takes a deep breath and prepares mentally for the sight of the dead woman.

It is even worse than she imagined. The woman's body is strangely bent on the large leather couch. Her white blouse hangs in pieces around her torso. Red spots and holes everywhere. Her eyes are closed. This has probably been done by Landgraaf, Ellen observes sober-minded.

'Are you okay?' Gerard Maas asks Landgraaf, who watches his wife's battered body motionless. He is not responding. 'Let's go somewhere else,' says Gerard Maas compellingly. Landgraaf turns and walks to the kitchen, where Jozef and Ellen have already been a few times.

'Excuses, would you like to drink something? Coffee, tee?' he asks.

Gerard Maas shakes his head.

'Did you discover her?' he asks.

'Yes, when I got home. Half an hour ago. I immediately called Laros.'

'So, you were not at home?'

'I had an appointment in Nunspeet. But it was cancelled.'

Nobody says anything. Is this already the time to ask for this strange announcement? What does it mean? The thought of an unaccountable alibi is imminent.

'An appointment in Nunspeet? On Boxing Day?'

Guido Landgraaf sighs.

'With a journalist. At three o'clock in café De Vier Windstreken.'

'And I assume that was closed?'

Guido Landgraaf sighs again and nods.

'I could have thought that myself, of course.'

'And who did you have the appointment with?'

'With someone who wanted to write my biography.'

Again a fog of silence flows into the room.

'And who is that?' Gerard breaks the silence.

'I don't have a name.'

'No name?'

'No, when the man called to make an appointment, I didn't understand his name and I didn't bother to ask. I will find out when we meet, I thought.'

'So you drove down to Nunspeet to meet someone you didn't know, in vain?' Gerard summarizes the words of Landgraaf, who shows his agreement. 'You understand that I would like to hear more about that later. But maybe this is not the right time.'

Landgraaf agrees again.

'Are you going somewhere today?'

'I'll be staying here,' Landgraaf replies.

'Can we be of any help?'

Landgraaf shakes his head.

'I'm going to my study now, to call Marieke's family.'

For the first time, the voice of Landgraaf breaks and Ellen thinks she sees a tear in his eyes.

38 Wednesday 27 December 8.30 hours

Redheaded Ellen enters Jozef's room. The room is full of people. In addition to the familiar faces, there are two people she had never met before. She introduces herself. They are Joop and Geert, colleagues from Zwolle who have been added to Jozef's team as support.

'Does anyone who wants coffee have coffee?' asks Jozef. Nobody responds.

'Okay, let's start with the facts. Who starts? Herzog or Piet?'

The doctor raises his hand.

'I have more to do today,' he growls as usual. 'The stabs of which we have all seen the external effects are the only cause of death. The offender has made quite a mess of it. The stabs are randomly placed in the upper body of the woman. Probably the woman has fiercely resisted. Bruises can be seen on both arms. The perpetrator tried to hold her with one hand while pushing the knife into her chest with his other hand. He went on, according to me, until the woman no longer offered resistance. That was after twelve stabs. The knife, I think, was a relatively blunt home-garden-and-kitchen knife, not serrated. Anyway, it's not the weapon you expect a professional killer to use.'

Walter Herzog hawks a couple of times and takes a deep breath.

'Traces of blood and flakes of skin were under the victim's nails. They probably come from the perpetrator. So we have his DNA. The woman died between two and a half past three. More can not be reported for now.'

Jozef looks at the people sitting around the table. Ellen shivers as she tries to imagine the death agony of the woman.

'May I conclude that the perpetrator's size was above average?' she asks.

'More than that. The victim had a trained body and was not small at all. I would not succeed in restraining that woman and simultaneously stabbing her to death. The latter is no mean achievement in itself.'

'So, time of death between two and half past three, perpetrator a strong man, and an amateur,' summarizes Jozef.

'You understood me well. Is there any need for me to stay?'

'Eh, Walter, I would like a DNA profile from Guido Landgraaf. We are going there at ten o'clock this morning. Would you like to be present at about half past ten to take a sample?'

Ellen scares. The others also look at Jozef in astonishment.

'Eh, is that based on the story of his failed visit to Nunspeet?' asks Ellen.

'That story is certainly not true. Don't ask me how and why. No doubt Landgraaf will come up with a nice twist to that story. Until now he has not given me one reason why we should not see him as a suspect.'

Ellen has to admit that Jozef is right. Yet she cannot imagine that Landgraaf killed his own wife. What reason could he have had for that? On the other hand, what do they know about their relationship? Actually nothing. Even after the incident with the horse, the conversation was mainly about Landgraaf and the possible explanations for the bullying at the estate.

'I will be there,' says Walter Herzog.

'Piet, have you already found something?'

Piet shakes his head.

'Nope. There are no traces of breaking which indicates that the perpetrator has been admitted or has entered through an opened door. Traces in the living room are concentrated close to the couch on which the victim was found. The heavy coffee table has shifted a few centimeters, the couch itself too. There are black stripes on the carpet, probably from the perpetrator's shoes. The victim wore slippers. We didn't find any other traces in other parts of the house.'

'And outside?'

'That was an impossible task. Due to the hassle with those crosses cars have driven everywhere and many people have walked around. We will go there again with a big team and dogs. We comb out the entire estate and the surroundings.'

'Perfect,' says Jozef.

'So, now the thinking can begin,' says Jozef when Piet has left the room. 'Brian, what have you been up to?'

'Read much. A lot has been written about Landgraaf. From feminist women magazine Opzij to sports glossies, from the Financial Daily to the Bloemendaalse Courant.'

'Has he been benchmarked by the notorious feminist measuring rod?'

'How do you know?'

'Margot has been reading the Opzij since the foundation of the magazine.'

'He did not score that well. In itself he had no objections to women at the top, but he expressed outspokenly skeptical about ambitious women struggling in every possible direction to combine the care for the children with a successful career. In his opinion one cannot be a director from eight to six. You must always be available. If you suddenly get the opportunity to have an half hour conversation with a member of the European Commission in Brussels, you cannot decline the invitation because of taking care of the children.'

'Do they have children themselves?'

'No, neither do I, but even on me it dawned that his vision of working women was too simple,' says Brian.

Jozef is laughing.

'Any more interesting info, Brian?'

'Married in 1981. Met on a birthday of a common friend. Landgraaf then worked and lived in Heerenveen, but they moved to Utrecht, apparently for his wife's sake. Marieke van Boxbergen got a degree at social academy and then worked as a counselor at the Centre Alcohol and Drugs. What is striking in most articles about Landgraaf is that it rarely concerns Marieke van Boxbergen. She is always left out of the picture.'

'Just like we do,' Ellen adds. 'We also talk about Landgraaf and his possible enemies. Perhaps we are dealing here with a former client of Marieke, a crazy alcohol or drug addict.'

'Did she have a job in recent years? She is not that old, I guess.'

'She was only fifty-seven. I found an ad at some website in which she was mentioned as a representative of Herbalife in Bloemendaal, with a practice at home. Maybe she wanted to continue her practice here.'

'What exactly is her local background? The name Van Boxbergen cannot be found in the telephone directory.'

'Marieke was born and raised in Middel, a small village north of Deventer. Her parents have died. They lived in a small worker's house, at the end of a dead-end dirt road. Her father worked at the metal factory of Thomassen and Drijver in Deventer.'

'So, she is not used to much luxury at home.'

'Just like Landgraaf, by the way. He is the son of a Frisian cabbage farmer from Bolsward.'

'Landgraaf talked about the family of his wife.'

'She has two sisters.'

'We should talk to them,' Jozef concludes. 'More details?'

Everyone is silent.

'I want to go to Lankbergen as soon as possible. See what happens there and talk to Landgraaf. Furthermore, I propose the following. Ellen and Brian fully focus on charting the environment of Landgraaf and his wife. Start conversations with whomever you want. Don't be too careful.'

Jozef now looks at the two Zwolle colleagues.

'Joop and Geert already know what they are here for, for Harry Beerenkamp. The goal is to find him. Ellen was there yesterday and will help you on your way. Any questions?'

'As far as Rob Meier is concerned. Do we only focus on Harry Beerenkamp?' Joop asks.

'The witness investigation is still ongoing. For the time being, we have no other starting points. We could of course dig further into the life of that boy, but I think the key lies with Harry Beerenkamp.'

Ellen agrees.

'Okay, we meet here at five o'clock.'

Everyone agrees.

39 Wednesday, December 27, 11 am

Karst de Lange, technical detective, cursed the day he decided to join the police. For the third year on a row his Christmas has been busted. Two years ago a major burglary at an industrial plant, last year a school in the fire and now two murders. Most of his friends are obliged two weeks off and are now at home, playing with the children, watching television, sleeping late, baking lardy cake, buying fireworks. That's not in it for him. His leave has been withdrawn until further notice and he has been rummaging around for half a day in search for traces. And most likely his work is for free. Like many of his colleagues, he has a gigantic reservoir of overtime and the chief of police has said last month that everyone is obliged to spend all his days of leave this year. Overtime booked after December 1 will no longer be paid. Obviously, this resulted in a storm of protest, but so far the chief of police has not yet withdrawn his ukase. Of course, he considered refusing to come when Piet

called him yesterday, but that would only have raised the pressure on his colleagues who have to work twice as long. He intends looking seriously at another job next year.

Carefully he kicks the umpteenth heap of leaves from this day aside. He is suitable for work. With endless patience, he can search for a needle in a haystack for days. When others have since long relinquished courage, he continues unperturbed. Usually his patience is rewarded. Someone always leaves traces. That experience is his engine. Between the leaves he sees something that does not belong there. It is white. He bends over and gently wipes off some leaves. It is a piece of fabric that protrudes above the ground. From his bag he gets a scoop and with that he removes the soil around the piece of cloth. Bingo! The piece is the tip of a larger cloth. The cloth looks new and clean, a sign that it has not been there for long. With his mobile phone he calls Piet van Gestel, his boss, whose position he would like to take over in due course.

Piet arrives immediately, the notorious Jozef Laros in his wake. About Laros, the wildest stories go. He doesn't stick to any rule, often creates a huge mess and other investigators therefore think he is irresponsible. He seems to have arguments with Gerard Maas often and likes to have a drink. It is also whispered that he is very close with that new detective, Ellen van Dorth. They are regularly seen together in café The Witch or the Dikke van Dale. Piet always defends him. He doesn't deny Laros to be a queer fellow, but according to Piet there are few who equal him as detective.

'Show me Karst,' says Piet. 'What have you found?'

Piet and Laros bend over the dug out cloth. Piet puts on a latex glove.

'A knife,' he says. 'If things are going well, dogs will soon arrive. Just fence it.'

Laros points to the mansion and then the other way.

'This is the path along which those boys came to put down the crosses. Further ahead there's the hole in the fence.'

'Beerenkamp?'

Laros shrugs his shoulders. Meanwhile Karst de Lange drapes yellow ribbon around the trees.

'I want a smell test. See if that cloth can be linked to Guido Landgraaf,' says Laros.

'Are you serious?' Piet asks.

'I don't want to exclude anything.'

'I'll try to arrange it today.'

'If not, it has to be done tomorrow. Let's secure the cloth and what's in it properly. The OM is like death for mistakes.'

40 Wednesday, December 27 13.00

Robert Devenijns stands in front of the window of his apartment and looks out over the Vondelpark. The clear weather of recent weeks has given way to clouds and drizzle. He takes a sip of whiskey. Calling a customer to report that the assignment has been completed and making an appointment about the payment is annoying to him. Especially in this case. The sum he has agreed on is absurdly high. He can imagine that Landgraaf feels like being cheated when he has to admit that the assignment has already been completed successfully. His biggest annoyance is negotiating the price afterwards. A deal is a deal, that's how he acts. He will never complain afterwards that the job took more than he had estimated. That is the risk he takes. After the last sip he walks to the telephone and dials the 0570 number.

'Landgraaf.'

'Good afternoon, Mr. Landgraaf, it's me, Robert Devenijns.'

'Help me, Robert Devenijns?'

Robert is startled.

'Last week you ordered me to investigate who caused the inconvenience on your estate and put an end to it.'

'Ah, of course, Mr. Devenijns.'

It remains silent.

'Uh, I can inform you that the inconvenience has been remedied. I have found the perpetrators and can guarantee they will not bother you any more.'

Again Landgraaf keeps still. An unpleasant feeling overwhelms him.

'That is why I would like to conclude this assignment. If you wish, I can give you the name and address of the perpetrator and, if necessary, photos of the reckoning. Although not nice to look at, these photos should be sufficiently convincing.'

Now Robert has said everything and can only wait for a satisfying reply.

'Did you, by any chance, read the newspapers, Mr. Devenijns?'

Robert's stomach starts aching. It will not ...? He thinks feverishly. Has he missed something? Wasn't Harry Beerenkamp the brain after all? Should he have had someone else?

'I don't know what you're referring to,' he replies as calmly as possible.

'Yesterday afternoon my wife was killed, here in the house, in broad daylight. Someone stabbed her twelve times with an ordinary kitchen knife.'

Robert gasps for breath.

'But, but, uh, that has nothing to do with the people who have done the other things.'

Roberts doubts grow larger with every word. That Harry was mad as a March hare. Is it possible that he wanted revenge and could only think off ...?

'How can you be so sure?' Landgraaf asks.

'Um, I know that for sure. My method has never failed. I am very sorry that your wife is dead. Uh, yet I would like you to keep to our deal. We had agreed an amount of one and a half tons. Would you be so kind as to hand it over to me? Do you want a written invoice?'

'I'm afraid payment is out of order. You say that you have solved everything, and yet my wife has been killed. Moreover, I don't want to be held responsible in any way for the murder of that boy. You would solve a problem. If I had known that murder was one of your methods, I would never have asked you. I consider our arrangement to be dissolved.'

Before Robert Devenijns can reply Guido Landgraaf has broken off the connection.

'Which boy?' Devenijns mumbles. Confused he stares outside, with the telephone in his hand.

41 Wednesday, December 27 at 2 pm

For the third time, Jozef is knocking on the door of the room where Guido Landgraaf has withdrawn. This morning he was so upset by Jozef's urging request to have cheek slime taken by Walter Herzog that he could not answer questions. At twelve o'clock a sister of Marieke had arrived with her husband and Landgraaf considered their presence more important than answering Jozef's questions, what Joseph could understand. Now Landgraaf should be approachable again.

'Come in,' sounds the distant voice of Landgraaf.

More people have come. Jozef introduces himself and understands that the second sister of Marieke is there and a friend.

'You understand that I have to talk to the police for a while,' Landgraaf says to the dejected visitors. He takes Jozef to the kitchen.

'Coffee?' he asks. 'I have not had anything myself.'

'In that case, I will not turn it down,' Jozef replies. He watches Landgraaf carefully filling the chromed espresso filter.

'I urgently needed that,' Landgraaf sighs as he sits down and takes a sip of black coffee.

'These are always the strangest conversations,' Jozef begins. 'I do my job, investigate a murder case, and you have lost your wife. These are two worlds at two sides of a large crevice.'

'I understand your situation,' says Landgraaf noncommittally.

'All right, I want to go through what happened until the moment you found your wife's body on the couch in the living room. Do you agree?'

Landgraaf nods and thinks.

'As I said,' he begins, 'I had an appointment with a journalist. He wanted to write my biography and apparently he had hit the right note with me, because I was on my way to Nunspeet at half past one. At three o'clock we would meet in café De Viersprong.'

'I thought you said the Vierwinden.'

'Did I say that? No, I'm sure it was Viersprong. I looked up the address on the internet.'

'I see.'

'When I got there, I immediately saw that the café was closed. For the sake of certainty, I walked through the village to see if the journalist might have intended another café. So I drove back at three o'clock.'

'To get it straight, you're going to Nunspeet on Boxing Day to talk to a stranger who says he wants to write your biography.'

'If you put it that way, it sounds strange indeed. In my work, however, I have learned to quickly decide and selectively take information to me. Although I knew I had not understood the name of the man, I didn't feel like asking him to say his name again. In a split second, I made the decision to meet the man. I would hear his name later.'

'And what if another more important obligation would have come across. What then? You could not have called him and he would have been waiting for nothing.'

'I honestly hadn't thought about that at all. Antisocial, maybe.'

'So you drove back to Deventer.'

'When I got home I immediately saw that something was wrong. The back door was open. That would never happen to Marieke, she is very precise. I was shocked, of course, after the events of the past weeks.'

Landgraaf takes a deep breath and drinks the rest of his coffee in one gulp.

'I ran into the house, straight to the living room and saw what had happened. Then I called you.'

Jozef does not respond. He is now fully convinced that the story about the biography is not right. Having a conversation about a biography can wait a day. Moreover, every biographer would like to come to Lankbergen. He decides not to ask.

'It makes sense to relate events, the harassments, on the estate and the fate of your wife. Have you thought about that?'

'Of course. I blame myself for driving to Nunspeet. If I had not done that, my wife would have lived.'

Guido Landgraaf must swallow. Jozef has a tendency to believe what he says.

'Do you also mean you have underestimated what was going on?'

'No, for me it was extremely annoying and also threatening.'

'In spite of this, you brought in the police late and to be frankly, you were not exactly cooperative.'

'How do you mean?' the man replies unexpectedly fiercely.

'You haven't been generous with information. I could not avoid the impression that you would rather get rid of us.'

'Maybe you're right. That is the nature of the creature, I am afraid. I prefer to solve my problems myself.'

'Yet I ask you the question I asked before. Do you have any idea who might have done this? Or do you really have no enemies?'

'My answer is the same again. Of course I sometimes disappointed people, but to my knowledge I have no real enemies. At the beginning of my career, I learned that there is only one way to the top, and that is to treat people with respect. Sometimes hard, but always fair. It is not difficult to dismiss someone who is not suitable for his job. I always try to show that person that he is not in the right place and then help him to find a better place. When I was twenty-eight, I was responsible for a team, a group of people, for the first time. Partly due to my lack of experience many things went wrong. Yet I learned fast and after one year people accepted me and the team ran smoothly. So again, I don't think I have any enemies.'

'And your wife?'

'Marieke?'

Landgraaf shakes his head in surprise.

'No, everyone will confirm that. Helping people, that was her goal in life. That's why she went to the social academy, that's why she worked with addicts for years, that's why she helped people with their health in recent years. It is impossible that someone targets Marieke.'

A tear falls on the wooden tabletop. Guido Landgraaf hits it with his fist on top.

'Would you excuse me?' he asks.

Jozef nods.

'Let's just stop. I still have a number of questions, but they can also wait until tomorrow.'

Landgraaf does not show whether he has heard the last words of Joseph. Mechanically he shakes Jozef's hand and walks out of the room. Jozef takes his phone and calls Ellen.

'How is it going there?' he asks.

'Fine, I understand that the sisters of Marieke have arrived at Lankbergen. Have you already spoken to them?'

'No, just had a difficult conversation with Landgraaf. He seems genuinely shocked. Yet he does not tell the truth. Would you mind calling a number of big publishers to ask if they are working on a biography of Landgraaf?'

'I will. What else?'

'We found the murder weapon, buried in the forest, wrapped in a cloth. I'm having an odor test.'

'To find out if Landgraaf's scent is on it?'

'Yes. To be sure.'

'Our search for conflicts is not very successful. We have spoken to former colleagues and ex-competitors. In general they are positive about Landgraaf. Most of them think, of course, that he should not have cashed that fifty million, but in their view he did well.'

'Until it turns out that things were not right at all. All those celebrated top men sooner or later fall from their pedestals.'

'Maybe in a number of years ZONNU doesn't appear to be the powerful and stable company everyone expected it to be. But is that due to Landgraaf?'

'Not alone. Yet he projects the success to himself, both financially and emotionally. He is really happy with himself.'

'I know that touches the right chord with you. Our findings to date however don't refer to severe conflict situations.'

'Still, they must be there. I firmly believe that all of the hassle on the estate has only one goal, namely to get Landgraaf down. It will continue until he slinks off.'

'But why didn't that happen at the place where he first lived? In Bloemendaal?'

'Is that true? I didn't ask him. Maybe they were also being harassed over there. Who can say?'

'I will call the Bloemendaal police.'

42 Wednesday, December 27, 4 pm

The moment Ellen wants to call the number of the successor of Guido Landgraaf at ZONNU, there is a knock on the door. It's Joop and Geert, the Zwolle assistance. Now Ellen notices that they look almost identical. Short blonde hair, chubby blushing cheeks. They both wear jeans and a long blue raincoat.

'We found something!' one says excitedly. He hands Ellen a few A4 pages. They are printed mail messages.

From: Guido Landgraaf (guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com)
To: Harry
CC:
Topic:

As agreed the instructions.
Obstacle on the driveway of the estate. Dead pigs?
Damage to entrance gate.
Between November 1 and 5
Payment November 7.

From: Guido Landgraaf (guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com)
To: Harry
CC:
Topic:

Ten banners in garden.
With texts 'Guido Landgraaf get off! Motherfucker! Thief!'
Date November 18
Payment November 22

From: Harry
To: Guido Landgraaf
CC:
Topic:

Satisfied?
I want more money.
Propose 2000, deal?
Harry.

From: Guido Landgraaf (guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com)
To: Harry
CC:
Topic:

Scare my wife.
Goes riding every Thursday, end of the morning. Always the same route.
Ambush in the forest? Just think of something.
On December 14 or 21.
€ 2000 deal
Payment December 23.

From: Guido Landgraaf (guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com)
To: Harry
CC:
Topic:

Urgent!
Burning crosses in garden.

December 24, 22:00.
Christmas gift € 3000

Aghast and confused Ellen reads the emails again, and again. In vain she tries to comprehend the consequences.
'What is this?' she finally asks.

'We found it on the Beerenkamp computer. We assumed them to be interesting.'

Ellen enters the 06-number of Jozef.

'We got something peculiar. I just do not understand.'

'Can it wait until I am with you? I'm about to leave.'

'Okay.'

Brian has now also read the mails.

'Did Landgraaf fake the whole scene?' he asks.

'To be honest, it's hard not to jump to conclusions,' says Ellen. 'Any trace or information concerning Beerenkamp?' she asks Geert and Joop.

'His family comes from the eastern part of Drenthe. We asked the colleagues in Emmen if they would like to check a few addresses.

'What else?'

'Many closed doors. I think he scared the hell out of people in the neighborhood. With little help from us a man dared to tell that Beerenkamp once badly beat a twelve years old boy who kicked a football against his car.'

'Fits to his impressive criminal record.'

'His top year was 1996. Arrested eight times for excessive violence.'

'By then he was an active kick boxer, belonged to the Dutch top fighters.'

'Harry the Superkicker was his nickname.'

'He still trains at gyms. That is in fact his profession.'

'So the man knows how to hit hard.'

'You mean, that he was physically capable of killing Rob Meier?'

'No doubt about that.'

'That's interesting. While we wait for Jozef I make coffee before.'

'So, what's the big news?' Jozef asks as he enters the room.

'Read this,' Ellen replies and hands him the printed mails. Jozef makes no effort to hide his surprise.

'I smell coffee,' he says. 'I need it black as a moonless sky to be able to understand this.'

Ellen pours five mugs. While waiting for what Jozef is going to say, she tries to summarize the consequences of this information. Guido Landgraaf himself commissioned the pigs, the banners, the attack on his wife and the burning crosses. What does that mean? She is startled by her first thought. Landgraaf murdered his wife and he started all that fuss on the estate as a false scent. However utterly insane that may sound, everything points in that direction. The unlikely story of Landgraaf about his visit to Nunspeet as well.

'I guess we all think the same,' Jozef says. 'This afternoon we found the suspected murder weapon in the woods near his house. We do an odor test to see if it can be linked to him. In addition, a DNA profile is now being prepared. We compare that with the flakes of skin we found under the nails of his wife. We'll have clarity tomorrow.'

'And Rob Meier? Can we say anything more about him?' asks Ellen.

'There is no email in which Landgraaf asks Beerenkamp to kill Rob Meier,' says Brian.

'That's at least one thing I can understand. Why would Landgraaf have an interest in the death of Rob Meier?'

'That does not mean anything. Any logic is still hard to find in this case,' says Ellen.

'As far as Rob Meier is concerned, Piet van Gestel has not yet discovered anything that points in a different direction than Beerenkamp. He is the last one seen with Rob Meier.'

'Suppose Beerenkamp killed Rob Meier, why he did not take his camera with him? I do not understand that,' Brian says.

Jozef watches the clock. 'I think it's wise to stop for today, we all have to take some distance and digest the information. Now we are too deep in it.'

Ellen nods. She feels the same.

'Ellen, one more question,' Jozef says. 'Did you call any publishers?'

'You never guess what I heard,' she smiles. 'Two publishers said they had been approached by Guido Landgraaf. He had offered himself as a subject for a biography, to be written by a renowned author.'

Jozef and Brian also start laughing.

'What a pompous ass,' Jozef says. 'He conceitedly thinks a biography by a well-known writer will set the seal on his work. And, what did the publishers think?'

'They wondered whether the reader is anxiously waiting for self-written success stories. But they did not exclude the possibility that another publisher would go for it.'

‘Anyhow, your information proves that his story is not true. He said he was approached by a journalist. Now it turns out to be the other way around. I will confront him tomorrow. If he does not have a credible explanation, I fear that he will sleep in a cell tomorrow night.’

Jozef confirms without reservation what Ellen thinks. For the time being the odds are against Guido Landgraaf.

‘Why don’t we arrest him right away?’

All present nod in agreement. Jozef scratches his head.

‘That is a good question. Gerard Maas has assured me to operate cautiously. As soon as we take a formal step in the direction of Landgraaf, we are most likely faced with very expensive lawyers.’

‘Class justice,’ Geert snarls unexpectedly. Jozef ignores him.

‘I want Ellen to go to Landgraaf tomorrow. As far as I am concerned, Brian focuses on the relationship between Marieke van Boxbergen and Guido Landgraaf. Can we think of any motives for Landgraaf to kill his wife? Joop and Geert continue the search for Harry Beerenkamp. Any further questions?’

43 Wednesday, December 27, 9:00 pm

Robert Devenijns sits at the bar of his pub on the Vijzelgracht and orders a gin. After the disastrous conversation with Landgraaf, he needed an hour to recover from the shock. Then he drove down to the nature reserve of Het Twiske at Oostzaan, where he walked for two hours. For him, walking is the most effective way to see through and understand complex situations. While walking all pieces of information start to fall into place. When he came home at five o’clock, he saw what had happened and it was clear what he did not understand.

In essence there are two possibilities. The first is that he has completely misjudged the situation. For example that Beerenkamp was not the leader and now wrongfully walks around with a cross on his forehead. Or that Beerenkamp is even crazier than Robert could think of and driven out of revenge on the humiliation to Lankbergen and stabbed the wife of Landgraaf.

The longer he thinks about the possibility that he has made a mistake, the more unlikely it seems to him. Beerenkamp was clearly the leader of the group and the look in his eyes was not that of a psychopath. He is not crazy and therefore susceptible to Robert’s threat. It is out of the question that Beerenkamp has ignored his warning. No, Robert did not misjudge the situation, he is convinced of that.

That leaves only the second option: there is something very strange going on. Probably Beerenkamp and his boys have nothing to do with the murder of Landgraaf’s wife. Yet there must be a connection between their actions on the estate and the murder. Coincidence does not exist. It is only unclear which relationship that is. The only question that concerns Robert personally is how he gets his money. A deal is a deal. The carelessness with which Landgraaf put their agreement aside affected him deeply. Landgraaf’s behavior clashes with everything that Robert stands for.

His motivation is justice. The brutal approach of Beerenkamp also emanates from this. What Beerenkamp had done was unacceptable. The knife in his arm, the bombs in his house and the cross on his forehead is the justified price he has to pay for it. The same applies to Landgraaf. The millionaire has violated the Law of Devenijns, a deal is a deal. And Robert cannot leave that without consequences.

Yesterday he read on the internet that a boy of twenty-two was beaten to death in the center of the city on Christmas night. The boy had one arm in plaster. That must be the same boy he observed that evening in the garden of the Lankbergen estate. Coincidence does not exist.

Robert will move into the Gildehotel in Deventer. He wants to follow up on the developments and get as close as possible to Guido Landgraaf. He is convinced that there will be an opportunity to get his own back.

44 Thursday, December 28 7:00

Brian turns the key to his old Mercedes. The engine starts and throbs irregularly. In five minutes the engine is warm and runs smoothly, he knows. Jerkily he drives away from the parking lot in front of the flat where he lives. He moved from Nijmegen to Deventer four years ago and he had lived happily on the fourth floor of one of the many flats in the Rivierenwijk since. It seems that his flat will be demolished over a number of years, because the neighborhood has to be improved in many ways. He never noticed anything of the problems that have to be solved. He likes it with all those different people.

He turns onto the Amstellaan, towards the A1. His destination is Bloemendaal. Yesterday afternoon he suddenly got an idea to call the old neighbors of Guido Landgraaf and Marieke van Boxbergen. That hit the mark. They had lived next to each other for nearly twenty years, and in that time many things had happened in the mutual understanding. They could write a book about it. Brian had offered to pay a visit. They expect him around nine o’clock. If there are no traffic jams, Brian should be there on time.

In the afternoon Brian has an appointment with Hubert Dijkhuis. That name popped up in different places during Brian's search. Dijkhuis is a former fellow student of Landgraaf. After the study they were offered a job at the Frieslandbank at the same time. Apparently Landgraaf was pleased with the qualities of Dijkhuis, because in 1992 Landgraaf asked him to come and work with him as a financial manager. Dijkhuis has therefore worked closely with Guido Landgraaf in three different periods. When Brian called him yesterday afternoon, he immediately showed his willingness to tell a few things. Brian even thought he could hear a certain eagerness in his voice.

After a successful trip, even without delays at the A9, he turns left into the Zomerzorgelaan at a quarter to nine. Sports fields are located right of the road. Hockey club Bloemendaal he reads on the signs. A Dutch top club, he knows. He drives straight ahead into the Hoge Duin and Daalseweg. The road winds through the dunes. Beautiful houses are hidden in the forest. The house where he must be can not be seen from the road at all. He gets out of the car and calls at the entrance gate.

'Mr. Jansen?' it sounds through the intercom.

'At your service,' says Brian. The gate opens and Brian drives inside. After thirty meters the driveway makes a sharp turn to the left and a large white house appears, thatched and with red-brown window frames and shutters. A man of about sixty is standing outside and gesturing Brian to leave his car on the driveway.

'Welcome, you have made it on time, my name is David Monod de Froideville.'

'A familiar name,' says Brian.

'Not to many people,' the man replies. 'Come in. How long did it take you to drive from Deventer? Beautiful city by the way. I was there two years ago for a lecture at the college.'

'Two hours from door to door. Did you give the lecture yourself?'

'I did, about the role of Dutch multinationals in politics in developing countries. I have been wandering around the world for several companies for years, so I know what I'm talking about.'

'Interesting stuff, I think. The tension between the company's interest and the responsibility towards the local population. You read about it regularly in the newspaper.'

'Exactly, and unfortunately the newspapers of today are no longer the media of the nuanced considerations. By means of strong, tendentious opinions, the newspapers try to attract readers. Objectivity is often hard to find.'

Anyway, you didn't drive all the way to listen to this. You definitely feel like coffee.'

Brian nods.

'My wife would have been there too, but she has another meeting. She is the chairman of an association for the preservation of our cultural heritage and despite objections from all sides, the municipality of Haarlem yesterday decided to demolish a striking building, an old nursing home on the outskirts of the city, almost entirely. This morning, various parties will decide which steps will be taken to prevent this.'

They sit in a conservatory overlooking a lawn. In the distance Brian sees the skyline of Haarlem, with high flats and a few church towers. The sun is about to rise above the trees.

'Maybe you can explain the reason for your visit again,' the man says.

Brian gives a comprehensive summary of what has happened.

'You understand that we were in shock after you called. After all, we have long been neighbors.'

Brian nods. After he has taken the time to tell everything in full colour it's David Monod de Froideville's turn.

'What exactly do you want to know?' he asks to Brian's disappointment.

'Until yesterday, we were looking for someone who had reason to make life difficult for Guido Landgraaf. We still have that question. Unfortunately, another question has come up: who could have had a reason to kill Marieke van Boxbergen? For both questions, the relationship between Guido Landgraaf and his wife may also be important.'

'Are you suggesting that Guido Landgraaf is a suspect?'

This works out completely wrong, Brian thinks. The question smells of curiosity. He regrets having driven impulsively to Bloemendaal. Why would the man who lives here like a king help a simple detective from Deventer with a case he has nothing to do with? No, the man only accepted his offer out of nosiness, as an interesting intermezzo of the dark days between Christmas and New Year.

'In this kind of research, in essence everyone is suspect, even you, until the contrary is proven. Usually the number of search directions is limited due to circumstances. Unfortunately, that is not the case now. That is why we talk to a large number of people, with the aim to give us an idea of the circle of people close to Guido Landgraaf and Marieke van Boxbergen,' Brian answers as firmly as possible. 'Last night you gave the impression that you could help us. But maybe I misunderstood that,' he continues.

David Monod de Froideville starts to laugh. Brian looks at him uncertainly.

'Very good,' the man says. 'Your work requires a combination of purposiveness and psychological insight. You thought for a moment that I invited you out of curiosity, did not you?'

Brian can not prevent from blushing.

'I have negotiated with presidents, rebel leaders, activists, bankers. That has taught me to read other people's thoughts. Do not worry about it. So you want information about Guido Landgraaf and Marieke van Boxbergen. Let me first pour coffee once more, then I will tell what I know.'

One hour later, Brian scans his notes and cannot think of anything he may have forgotten to ask. Although it's necessary to verify the information of Monod de Froideville on certain points, he is certain that this visit dramatically alters the perception of the situation.

According to the former neighbor Guido Landgraaf and Marieke van Boxbergen came to live in Bloemendaal in 1987, half a year after David Monod de Froideville and his wife. Obviously they were, as newcomers, mutually attracted. During the first years they had a good relationship. David spent a lot of time abroad and David's wife sometimes visited him for a week. Often their children aged twelve and fourteen stayed with Guido and Marieke. Marieke was like a second mother to them. She would have liked to have children herself, but she had not been granted motherhood, due to a hormonal disorder. They talked honestly about it and seemed to accept it as a fact or life.

In the early nineties, David saw that Landgraaf had a hard time at work. He started working harder and health problems piled up. The decisive blow came in ninety-four. During a meeting with shareholders, the meltdown occurred. He was no longer able to talk or move and was taken away by ambulance. The diagnosis was an acute overload. After a few months it turned out that he could not resume his work on the short term and he was fired with a golden handshake.

Landgraaf came down to a deep existential crisis. In search of answers to the big questions of life, he ended up at Oibibio, which had just been founded by Ronald Jan Heijn. Center for personal growth, awareness and spirituality, it was called. Landgraaf got acquainted with an Icelandic named Abel Aldavisur, whom he embraced as his new spiritual leader. This Abel encouraged him to leave Marieke and to search for his Gaia: the mother who could give him offspring. According to Abel, a man without children had no right to exist. For lack of descendants, his soul would find no resting place and would be doomed to continue wandering till the end of days. Monod de Froideville didn't know what Landgraaf engaged himself in at that time. In any case, he lived for a time in a commune near San Francisco. Later he upgraded this period to a sabbatical at Stanford University. About three years later he came back and seemed to be reborn. He was energetic and ready for the second part of his life, he said. No doubt that he wanted to do that with Marieke at his side. Clearly that was not so obvious for her. She needed a few months to decide.

Although he was eventually allowed to come back, according to David, Marieke never completely forgave him. He even suggested that she probably preferred to be separated from him, if not she would have been forced to abandon her luxurious life. So she chose to stay with him, mainly for the sake of convenience. At that time Guido and Marieke had hardly any contact with the Monod de Froidevilles. Over time the relationship between Guido and Marieke seemed to have normalized and their contact with the neighbors was in some way restored, although it would never be as intense as it had been. Both of them worked hard as never before. Landgraaf spent more than a hundred hours a week working on the merger of energy companies. Marieke was busy with her health practice, which became increasingly popular. Which was not surprising given her social skills. The situation changed dramatically when Guido retired. He suddenly had fifty million on his bank account, no work and he therefore spent most of his time at home. That deprived Marieke of the freedom she had built up with her practice. Although it was obvious that Marieke and Landgraaf had to reinvent themselves, it took David by surprise when Guido came by to announce that they would move to an estate near Deventer.

He explained it had always been Marieke's wish to move to the east. The fifty million of Guido and their community of property offered her the negotiating position to achieve this. Knowing that she would take a fortune of twenty-five million from a divorce, she could easily threaten Guido to leave him if he would not agree to move to Deventer. So he did. Of course he pretended it to be a unique opportunity to the outside world. A new life in a new environment, away from the crowded Randstad. Only the sea he would probably miss.

They had disappeared quite silently. Landgraaf was under attack in the media and did not need a big farewell party with all kinds of VIPs. Marieke invited her loyal clients to have a drink. The day before they moved, the four of them had a drink and closed the twenty-year-long neighborhood.

Brian looks at his notes. The headline starts with Guido and Marieke being married in community of property. Marieke basically forced her husband to move. Landgraaf had been under the influence of Abel Aldavisur, his spiritual leader who encouraged him to leave his wife. What did he exactly do those years? Did he have children? That is a good question.

'Landgraaf came back from California reborn,' Brian says. 'According to his guru, the key to his recovery was the production of a descendant. Did he do that in the years he was absent?'

'We also asked ourselves that question. And also directly to him. But he did not want to say anything about it. I still wonder how he could be so frank about his first steps on the spiritual plane and his acquaintance with Abel Aldavisur, and at the same cover the years thereafter with a blanket of mystery. The only thing he once said was that it had been a mistake to work with Abel and that he regretted it. He had rigorously broken off with the man, whom he called a scammer. That's all he ever mentioned about that period.'

Child (ren)?, Brian writes. His heartbeat accelerates. If there is a child, and the mother of that child has read about fifty million, she may also want to be a part of it. Would Marieke van Boxbergen have been aware of this? 'Maybe you can tell a bit more about Marieke van Boxbergen? On the one hand, the stories evoke an image of a strong independent woman, on the other, she seems to have been standing in the shadow of her husband all of her life.'

'That is indeed an interesting thought. She was an exceptionally capable woman. On paper she was a seller of health products, in practice she was much more of a mental coach. Many a director longed for being treated by her. Since her practice went so well, we were waiting for her to decide to ask for a divorce.'

Brian feels that the man wants to say something, but does not.

'But that did not happen,' he says.

'No, that did not happen,' the former neighbor replies.

'Were you still seeing each other?'

'Every once in a while. Those were usually pleasant evenings, although the subcutaneous tension never fully disappeared.'

'Did they argue?'

'An example,' says Monod de Froideville. 'One evening the conversation came to the large number of divorces among friends and acquaintances. Guido laughed that they had survived their crisis gloriously. Marieke could not laugh about it. "Please don't be a swanker. Everything is easy with an income of more than half a million a year," she said. "You have no reason to complain. In a moment of weakness, I agreed to marry in community of property. Half of what I earn is yours," he replied. "From what you have earned," Marieke corrected him. "If we divorce you will stay here, because I can never pay the mortgage myself." Guido laughed. "That's why it's good for you that we are still married," he concluded.'

'Painful,' Brian says.

'Indeed. Embarrassing, that's a better word.'

Brian is looking for words not to let this subject pass.

'In recent weeks, even before the tragic death of Marieke van Boxbergen, we have wondered how their relationship was. From your story, I note that the mutual tensions were not big enough for a divorce. The money certainly played a role in this. But, uh, I wonder if that is a solid base for a marriage.'

David Monod de Froideville is laughing.

'Are you married yourself, or do you have a girlfriend?'

'Neither.'

'In the end, money is indeed not enough. Maybe I'm going beyond my authority, but I do not want to refrain you from this.'

Brian changes position and tries to hide being too eager. Monod de Froideville tempers his voice, as if he wants to prevent someone from listening.

'As I talk to you now, I have often talked to my wife. And your questions were also ours. And being neighbours, you notice certain things. At one point we had the impression that we saw certain cars very often. And those cars often stayed longer than a normal consultation of about an hour or an hour and a half.'

'You mean that Marieke van Boxbergen held one or more extra-marital relations?' Brian asks, his head turning red almost immediately realizing that he has been too direct. David Monod de Froideville smiles.

'You did not hear me say that. I think that enough has been said about the relationship between Guido and his wife. Maybe you have another question?'

It is clear that the conversation has to be ended quickly now.

What else? Brian cannot think of anything else.

'That was a lot of information,' he says.

'Yes, I can imagine that further questions arise later. Please call me.'

'I certainly will. Now it's time to return to Deventer. May I thank you for your frankness?'

'You're welcome.'

'I promise I will call you when the case is solved.'

'If you want to, my wife and I would really appreciate that.'

Brian drives his car down to the center of Bloemendaal. He has fixed up with Hubert Dijkhuis at five o'clock in Café De Vergulde Zon in Nes aan de Amstel. First he will call Ellen to inform her of his latest discovery, then he will have a walk on the beach.

45 Thursday, December 28, 9.30

Robert Devenijns drives to the estate of Landgraaf, but immediately sees that he should not be there. Police cars drive on and off and from the sound of barking dogs he knows that a large-scale investigation is being carried out. Waiting close to the estate does not make any sense. People in the area will be alert to unknown people. It is better to focus on Harry Beerenkamp first. He keys in the phone number he found out this morning. No one answers, as expected. The next number belongs to someone called Straver, one from the neighbors. It's another example of why he is so good at his job. Before he sneaked in at Beerenkamp, he read the names on the nameplates of the six houses to the left and right. He did it automatically. Only this morning he realized that he had those names stocked somewhere at the back of his head.

'Straver,' croaks a smokers voice.

'Good morning, Van Deelen,' says Robert Devenijns. 'I am looking for your neighbour Beerenkamp. Do you know where to find him?'

'I'm not his secretary.'

'You are his neighbour. He owes me money.'

'Bad luck. Call him, not me. I have no money.'

'I have no time for jokes. Where is he?'

'Haven't got a clue. The police are also looking for him.'

'If you lie, you're dead man, capito?'

'Take it easy, man. The police already treated me a criminal. They also thought I knew where he was.'

'But you probably know where I can find him.'

'Really man, I've got no idea at all.'

Robert is satisfied to find out that Beerenkamp has disappeared without a trace. That means he is valuable in a way. His intuition tells him that Beerenkamp will be his means to get close to Landgraaf. Therefore it's his priority to find him.

He has developed his own method for finding people: calling people who could know him. On the principle of 'species looking for similar species' he pretends to be a drug dealer who wants to solve some financial problem. His experience is that criminals always enjoy lurking colleagues, especially if the opportunity is handed on a silver plate. When he was still working as a policeman, he quickly realized that all the shutters closed when you honestly told who you were.

He starts with the neighbours whose names he knows. The first three people that answer the phone react similarly. At first they felt offended being called by a total stranger and when he mentioned the name Beerenkamp they seemed scared to death. At the fourth call a certain Ligthart is the fish he wanted to catch.

'Yes?'

'Van Deelen. I'm looking for Beerenkamp. Do you know where he is?'

'I don't know Van Deelen.'

The tone of his voice immediately reveals that Ligthart is one of the likes of Beerenkamp.

'That's me. Do you know where I can find Harry Beerenkamp?'

'That's none of your business.'

'How do you know? He still owes me money.'

'Your problem.'

'Not my problem, but my boss's problem.'

'Which boss?'

'A boss to whom I will report that Mr. Ligthart did not feel like being very cooperative.'

'I did not say that. I only said I did not know where to find Beerenkamp.'

'Maybe you know someone who knows better.'

'You could try Sluis.'

'Sluis?'

'His favorite bar. Just ask for Jan Beker, he's a man who knows things.'

'I knew you could help me,' Robert concludes the conversation. So he has to go to café Sluis, but that will be later. What else can he do at this moment? Not much. He decides to go to the police station and watch if something is happening. In the meantime he will search the internet to find out more about Landgraaf. He needs damning pieces of information to put the pressure on him. That is the only way he can force Landgraaf to pay the outstanding bill of one and a half thousand Euros.

46 Thursday, December 28 10.30 hours

Jozef and Ellen sit with Guido Landgraaf at the table in the kitchen of the Lankbergen estate. The atmosphere is tense. As far as Ellen can judge, there is no one else in the house. That means that the sisters of Marieke have gone home.

'I don't believe that you had an appointment with a writer. No publisher says anything about a biography about Guido Landgraaf. Frankly, some of them asked aloud whether there would be a market for that,' says Jozef.

'I think so myself. People simply want heroes, great examples, leaders they can look up to.'

Jozef does not say what is on Ellen's lips: and you think that's you? His gaze clearly says yes to that question.

'Your story is not credible. No one can confirm that you had an appointment and there are no witnesses who can confirm that you were in Nunspeet that afternoon. Nor can anyone confirm that there were plans to issue a biography about you.'

'I would not do that if I was a publisher. I'd kept such a plan secret for as long as possible.'

In disbelief Ellen waits the last remark to permeate into her brain. Does Landgraaf think they are having a talk with no strings attached? Is he unaware of the seriousness of the situation? Or is it a conscious conversation tactic?

'Mr. Landgraaf, do you know what the consequences might be if you do not have a verifiable alibi?'

'That I am a suspect. But that is absurd, of course. Why should I kill my own wife for god's sake?'

'I've been through crazier things.'

'Are you accusing me? In that case, the nature of this conversation will change. Then I will remain silent and I will refer you to my lawyer.'

'That's out of the question. We investigate two murder cases and your information is crucial. Can I show you the something?'

Jozef unpacks the five folded A4-papers with the mail messages to Harry Beerenkamp from his coat pocket and hands them over to Guido Landgraaf. She studies them, seemingly emotionless.

'What is this? A joke?' he asks quietly.

'That's the question we asked ourselves. What does it serve you putting on that hassle on your estate?'

The head of Guido Landgraaf turns red and his gaze hardens.

'Are you out of your minds!' he barks. 'Use your brains! What is the number of your superior? If I had given someone such an idiotic assignment, would I be so stupid to use an e-mail address with my own name? A hotmail address can be created at any place at any name. This is utter madness. Someone wants to take me. Who is that Harry Beerenkamp for god's sake? I have never heard that name in my life.'

Ellen swallows. Guido Landgraaf expresses the uncomfortable feeling she had last night. Norman said exactly the same thing. Why did she not say that to Jozef right away? He hasn't got the faintest idea how those computer things work. On the other hand Landgraaf responded very quickly to Jozef's implicit accusation. That could also indicate that he consciously used that name, only to create the illusion that it is someone else's work.

'I understand that,' Jozef replies quietly. 'I only wanted to show you the mails that we found on Harry Beerenkamp's computer. From your comments I gather you didn't send them. Is that right?'

Guido Landgraaf sighs.

'This is becoming a nightmare. Soon I'll be in the cell because I supposedly killed my own wife.'

Jozef is silent. The silence is interrupted by the squeaking of Ellen's telephone. She sees that it is Brian and runs out of the kitchen. Breathlessly she listens to what Brian found out in Bloemendaal. When Brian told her everything, she asks Joseph to come outside.

'Will I make some coffee?' asks Landgraaf, who has got his act together again.

In the corridor Ellen repeats what Brian has just told her. Jozef curses. A reaction that Ellen can not properly understand.

'Let's confront him with these facts right away.'

There are three steaming cups on the large kitchen table.

'That was a colleague,' says Jozef. 'He has dug up some information I would like to verify.'

Guido Landgraaf shows no reaction at all.

'I have asked you several times if there are any enemies that would like to make your life miserable. You always insisted there weren't any.'

'That is not true. If there are, I do not know them.'

'If you say so. This however is about the period from 1995 to 1999.'

'Then I was lost. Call it a burnout, call it a midlife crisis, call it insanity. Every person has periods that it does not work the way you would like it to be.'

'You were overstrained and fired.'

Guido Landgraaf nods.

'If I understand correctly, an Icelandic teacher has incited you to leave your home and search for the meaning of life, or something like that.'

'As I said, I was lost. To be precise, Abel Aldarvisur attributed my overstrain to the unrest of my soul.'

'And therefore encouraged you to beget offspring.'

'I take it you have visited David Monod de Froideville?'

Joseph looks at Ellen questioningly. She shrugs her shoulders.

'David Monod de Froideville has been my neighbour in Bloemendaal for twenty years. A pseudo-psychologist who always prided himself on his insight into the human nature. Did nothing but corrupting government officials in developing countries, giving a tip in exchange for trading on the freedom of the local population and exploiting their raw materials for a song.'

'I do not know the man.'

'One of the views of Abel Aldarvisur was indeed that man needs a posterity to be able to rest the soul after death. It may well be that I believed him in those days. There was, of course, much more. He had the ability to connect people with themselves. I had lost myself in a period of a few years. I had become a director and worked as a madman, reading everything that could possibly be important and holding an opinion about it all. The scarce time off I spent on visiting exotic holiday destinations, undermining my base even further. Abel taught me that neither the beach of Bali, diving in the Red Sea nor walking in the Andes would restore my sole, but the planting of seeds and the harvesting of sweet fruits.'

'Sounds nice. Yet you have broken with him?'

'It was not that black and white. Maybe people had the impression of a sudden and cantankerous farewell. That was not the case. He taught me a lot of things. At one point, however, I was done with him. One could say he had healed me and I wanted to go back to Marieke. She more or less forced me to distance myself from Abel.'

'And so you did?'

'Abel understood. He was a great person.'

At that moment, Ellen's phone beeps again. She does not recognize the number. Yet she walks outside to answer. It is Herzog, the doctor. He wants to speak to Jozef urgently. Ellen returns to the kitchen.

'Jozef, it's for you. Herzog, it can not wait.'

Jozef also walks outside. Ten seconds later he is back, his face turned pale.

'Mr. Landgraaf, we will take you to the police station. You are suspected of murdering your wife Marieke van Boxbergen.'

Aghast Guido Landgraaf looks at Jozef.

'That must be a mistake,' he stammers.

'I'm sorry. Do you want to come?'

Jozef and Ellen join Landgraaf while he closes the house.

'The skin below the nails of Marieke van Boxbergen belong to him,' Jozef whispers when they walk towards the car.

47 Thursday, December 28, 11.45

Robert Devenijns pours the last remnant of coffee from the thermos into the stone mug that is permanently part of the interior of his car. His short search on the internet did not immediately lead to ways to get closer to Landgraaf. Usually that is not a good sign. Longer search rarely yields more relevant information. Therefore it is better to focus on Harry Beerenkamp. He has to find out why Beerenkamp had been targeting Landgraaf.

He looks up. A car approaches through the alley next to the police station, followed by a bordeaux red Peugeot 404. That car he has seen this morning, at the Lankbergen estate. Robert Devenijns takes his binoculars to see the faces of the occupants of both cars. His heart beats twice when he recognizes Guido Landgraaf, flanked by a policeman in the back seat of the police car. It is clear that he has been arrested and not brought to the office for a few informative questions.

What does that mean? Someone like Landgraaf is not just arrested. Different scenarios cross his mind. Is he suspected of murdering his wife? Does it concern the death of the boy? In that case it also becomes dangerous for him. Judging by the reports in the newspaper, he is probably one of the last people to have seen the boy alive, when he was watching the erection of the crosses from his shelter in the forest.

Robert Devenijns tries hard to understand the situation. Should he be happy with this development? Or can he finally kiss his Euros goodbye? The latter is the case when Landgraaf is convicted of murdering his wife.

However, as long as it is not yet that far, the new situation will probably offer opportunities. If Landgraaf is indeed arrested, the arrival of a lawyer can not be long overdue. The lawyer will be his bridge to Landgraaf.

One hour later, Robert Devenijns watches the black BMW looking for a spot in the parking lot in front of the police station. On the license plate he notices the name of a well-known car dealer from Amsterdam. A man in black suit gets out of the car and enters the police station. He is satisfied that he has correctly assessed the situation. He reads the note that he has written in the past hour.

Dear Mr. Landgraaf, yesterday we had a rather unpleasant conversation. We had an agreement. I would solve your problem and I did. The death of your wife is tragedy, the killing of that boy as well. But to be frank en fair, it has nothing to do with the job I did for you. Therefore, I would like to ask you to transfer the agreed amount for my adequately executed assignment within a week to my account.

I think it is fair to tell you that I have some useful information. You can either leave the police cell as a free man or spend the next ten years in prison. If you persist in your refusal to pay me for the services I have provided in accordance with our agreement, I will make the latter happen. I count on your good sense.

Although the letter is good enough, he doubts whether this is already the right time to play this trump card. In fact, he still knows too little. His threat only works if Landgraaf seriously fears of being convicted. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that Landgraaf has already confessed and has nothing left to lose. In that case, Landgraaf will pass on his letter to the police, turning the letter into a boomerang. Timing is crucial. Now is not the time.

Having decided to wait, it does not make sense to wait until the lawyer comes out again. That is why he has to find out the name and address of the lawyer. He gets out of his car and walks towards the black BMW. Generally people leave something in their car with their name on it. Even lawyers do not seem to care. The first thing he sees on the backseat is an envelope with the logo of Le Monchy, one of the most expensive law firms in Amsterdam. On the passenger seat he sees a report of a meeting with the name Louis Breur marked in the list of attendees with a yellow marker. Robert knows enough. When the time is right, he can find Landgraaf's lawyer.

He decides to go to café De Sluis, looking for Jan Beker.

48 Thursday, December 28 13.30

'Harry, stop harping like a sissy,' says Gerrit van der Kraats, the former manager of Harry Beerenkamp.

'For you is easy talking. I've got a cross on my forehead.'

'Women find men with scars attractive, I recently read.'

'But not in the shape of a cross. Maybe I can score on a Youth for Christ day, but not here on the street.'

'I will be happy to add a gash if that will cheer you up.'

'Please let's do it.'

Harry takes a stiletto from the inside pocket of his leather jacket.

'What is it supposed to be?'

'Nothing, it has to be nothing. Just a scar.'

'All right.'

In a flash Harry sees Gerrit's arm move towards his head. Even if he had wanted to, he would have been too late to avoid the hand with the shiny knife. Terrified, Harry grabs his forehead. A piercing pain spreads to his right eye and to his brain. Hot blood runs down his sleeve.

'Please don't ruin my furniture,' says Gerrit. 'There is a cloth in the kitchen.'

Harry curses. The pain now remains constant and is close to bearable.

'Want a beer?' asks Gerrit when Harry returns. He nods cautiously to prevent the wound from bleeding again.

'So, what's next?'

'I already said that. Nobody will believe I did not kill Rob. Everyone has seen that we left the shoarmah at two o'clock and that we walked over the Brink together.'

'And you're sure you have nothing to do with it?'

'Gerrit, you must believe me. That guy was a professional.'

'You too.'

'No, Gerrit. Not like that. I can give someone a clout. But that guy hit Rob with one blow to the ground. So hard that Rob was dead in one go.'

Gerrit van der Kraats looks at his former pupil with disbelief.

'If you say so.'

'Really, Gerrit. If the police find me, they'll sew me.'

'All right.'

'And on Christmas Day, the wife of Landgraaf was stabbed. At that moment I was in the car, because I was afraid the police would pick me up for the death of Rob. Only nobody can confirm that, nobody saw me.'

'Where were you?'

'On my way to you.'

'But you only called at eight o'clock.'

'Because you were not home during the day. I walked through Amsterdam.'

'And you do not know anything about that woman either?'

'I swear, Gerrit. At that time I was in the car, on my way to Amsterdam. Why would I kill that woman?'

'Why did you do those other things at that estate, Harry? Can you imagine that I think you're fooling me?'

'Someone tried to fuck me, Gerrit. I'm really in the shit, man.'

'What do you want?'

'A place where I'm safe for now. Until that case is resolved.'
'I still have a room in East. A month, no longer. I am not the Salvation Army.'
'That would be nice, Gerrit. I knew I could count on you.'

49 Thursday, December 28 14.30

'The results of the smell test are clear,' says Piet van Gestel. 'Landgraaf kept a firm grip to the knife and to the cloth.'
'Are you sure?'
'Absolutely. A hundred percent.'
'I mean the procedure. No doubts about the test being done correctly? The lawyer will ask.'
'No worries,' Piet answers.
'Good, let's go to the chief.'

Gerard Maas is on the phone, his back turned towards the doorway, when Jozef carefully knocks. The head of the district gestures Jozef, Ellen, Brian and Piet to enter the room.

'That was the Prosecution Council. They warned us of course to treat the case with extreme caution.'

'Do we ever do anything else?'

Gerard Maas smiles.

'Let's hear what we have got,' he says.

'Four points,' Jozef begins. 'First, the death of Marieke van Boxbergen made Landgraaf twenty-five million. Theoretically he had lost it because they had community of property.'

'In case they got divorced,' the district manager adds.

'Second, Landgraaf does not have an alibi. The story he tells is unbelievable and as yet unverifiable. Third, under the nails of Marieke van Boxbergen, we found DNA material from Landgraaf. And fourth, the murder weapon and the cloth in which it was buried in the garden of the estate, carry the scent of Landgraaf.'

Gerard Maas looks at all four for a moment. Ellen nods involuntarily as Gerard's gaze touches her's.

'Those are the facts,' he says finally. 'And the feeling? What do the facts tell us?'

Nobody says anything.

'Ellen?'

She expected the question, only asked by Jozef instead of Gerard Maas.

'Indeed, the facts speak for themselves. What bothers me is the relationship with the other issues. In addition, I see three things. One, why did Guido Landgraaf commission Harry Beerenkamp to kick up his estate?'

'To lead astray,' Jozef says.

'I think that's pretty laborious.'

'Precisely, to make it credible.'

'Go on, Ellen. What is point two?' Gerard asks.

'The death of Rob Meier. What does that have to do with it?'

'Probably nothing,' says Jozef. 'We have no other hypothesis than that Harry Beerenkamp is the culprit. We're looking for him.'

'Could be,' Ellen replies. 'But it is not in the least certain. Three, we suspect an unknown person having watched the events on Christmas eve at the estate. That is the biggest mystery for me. Who was he? And why? So there is still more unknown than known. I think we lack crucial information.'

'Reactions?' Gerard Maas asks.

'Yes, one more thing,' says Ellen. 'We think that Landgraaf himself has commissioned Harry Beerenkamp on the basis of the mails sent with the address guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com. That is no evidence. Anyone can basically create that email address.'

'Hm, suppose someone else indeed created that email address. That sheds a different light on the case. Then that other person is not only responsible for the jokes on the estate, he or she also wants to create the impression that Landgraaf himself is guilty,' says Gerard Maas.

'That sounds pretty weird,' says Jozef.

'Do you understand my concern?' Gerard asks.

Everyone nods.

'I propose the following,' says Gerard. 'For the time being, we detain Landgraaf. We have enough reasons to do so. We don't keep any cards up our sleeve and confront him with the evidence. Then he must act. If he does not talk, an indictment is inevitable. Furthermore, we continue the research. Get me more information about Landgraaf and his wife. If he is not the perpetrator, someone else must have had a motive. Agreed?'

Everyone nods again.

50 Thursday, December 28 3:00 pm

Through the grimy windows Robert Devenijns sees that the time in café De Sluis has been standing still for thirty years. Brown lathed walls, green checkered doilies on formica tabletops with cracks and burn marks, worn red-brown carpet tiles and one Heineken tap. Moreover, the smoking ban never reached the manager and visitors to De Sluis. The café is blue with smoke.

Robert knows that his entrance must be right from the first step. These types of cafés on the outskirts of the city have been running on the same guests for decades and a new visitor is being watched with a suspicious eye. When he comes in everyone will turn around and examine him from head to toe. In less than a second he will have to convince the guests that he is not a lost tourist, but someone who knows what he is coming for. In addition, he must be self-assured, but certainly not arrogant. Not curious, but they may know that he is looking for someone.

He takes a deep breath and pushes the heavy wooden door. There is Dutch pirate music that he has never heard before. What he expected happens, conversations fall silent and almost everyone turns around at the same time. With a brief nod, Robert greets all those present and walks quietly to the bar. There is one stool left unoccupied. 'Is it free?' he asks the sturdy man who is sitting next to it. The man looks at him without saying anything, takes a sip of beer and then nods. The bartender who has watched him all the time, turns his head off when Robert shows an intention to order something. Patiently Robert waits for the bartender to look his way again.

'A beer, please.'

The bartender holds a glass under the tap.

'There are not many strangers here,' he says without looking up. 'Certainly not in winter.'

'I have never been here before.'

The bartender puts the glass of beer on the bar.

'I'm looking for Harry Beerenkamp,' Robert says calmly. It is obvious that the bartender tries not to respond.

The conversation between the two men next to him stops abruptly and synchronously, both men reach for their glass of beer.

'He's not here,' the bartender says.

'Do you know where he is?'

'I'm just a bartender, not a babysitter.'

The men next to Robert now turn around and laugh at the joke of the bartender.

'I have been told that Jan Beker might know where he is. Is he there?'

The bartender hesitates for a moment and betrays that the man is there.

'Why do you want to know all of that? This is a café, not an information desk.'

Again the two men next to Robert laugh.

'No, but we do have a Tourist Information,' says one of them. 'Or a health center,' the other man grins. Robert replies to their comments by looking both of them in the eye for a few seconds. Then he turns at the bartender again. Meanwhile, he has seen all the men at the bar. He is almost certain that the second man from the right, with the gray short hair and glasses on, is the man he is looking for.

'Is that him?' he asks the bartender.

Robert picks up his glass and walks to the gray man.

'Jan Beker?' he asks.

No reaction.

'I have a question. Do you mind sitting down at a table?'

Without saying anything, the man stands up and walks to the table in the corner of the café.

'Beer?'

The man shakes his head.

'What do you want to know?'

'Where Harry is Beerenkamp?'

'Why do you think I know.'

'Somebody told me.'

'Who?'

'That does not matter.'

'I have no idea where Harry is.'

'Do you know he's wanted by the police?'

'I've heard something like that.'

'Do you also know that he is suspected of murdering that boy?'

'I was not there.'

'I did not expect that either. The point is that I have to find Harry before the police find him.'

The man is silent.

'Unfortunately I do not know Harry Beerenkamp. I only know that he owes me a lot of money. If the police have him, I can forget about my money.'

'Bad luck for you.'

The gray man is about to get up and return to his place at the bar.

'Do you know what happened in his house the day before he left?'

Robert sees that the man is startled. Now push through quickly.

'Will I tell the details? Or maybe he told you himself?'

'I, I've heard it.'

'Problems, Jan?' one of the men at the bar asks.

Jan Beker shakes his head.

'Well?' Robert asks compellingly. 'I understand that you do not know where Beerenkamp is. But where could he possibly be?'

It takes a while before the gray man talks.

'I think he's gone to Gerrit van der Kraats,' he finally whispers.

Robert looks at the man questioningly.

'His old manager. He also helped him about ten years ago.'

'Was he suspected of murder then?'

'Harry is not a killer. Just stupid. He was the best kickboxer in the Netherlands, but did not want to join the league. He thought he could earn more money in the illegal circuit, where big money is being gambled. In the beginning, when he beat all established names as a newcomer, that was true. It went wrong when the big bosses started to get involved and ordered him to lose the parties deliberately. Harry could not. After two wins nobody asked for they forced him to make the choice, play the game according to our rules or get out. Of course he continued to participate. For the first big fight the assignment was clear: go down in the eighth round. The opposite happened. Harry knocked his opponent out in the seventh round.'

'As a reward he had to fear for his life.'

'Gerrit hid him to wait out the storm.'

'Does such a storm go by? I do not know.'

'He had to pay, of course, a lot. Gerrit negotiated on his behalf.'

'And where can I find Gerrit van der Kraats?'

'He has a gym, somewhere in Amsterdam North.'

'That's easy to check. Thanks anyway.'

Robert walks to the bar and puts a note of fifty euros on it.

'For the beer,' he says and walks away without waiting for an answer from the barman. He knows from experience that sentiments can suddenly explode. If one of those sturdy men at the bar thinks that he looks down on them or fancies a fight, things can get out of hands in a second. He breathes with relief when he starts his car and drives off. His heart rate drops by at least twenty beats per minute.

He parks his car in front of the Postillion Hotel. Where is he going? What is his next step? The most important thing is to find out why Landgraaf has been arrested and how long he is being detained. Unlike Amsterdam, where he knows several police officers whom he can ask to be informed, in Deventer Robert has no entry to the police. That is why he decides to go to Amsterdam. If the information of Jan Beker is correct, Harry Beerenkamp is hidden somewhere. He can also find Landgraaf's lawyer there. Perhaps the best step is to contact Louis Breur from law firm Le Monchy and to find out if the lawyer is interested in the whereabouts of Harry Beerenkamp. After having bought a bag of fries and salad at the Mac Donald's he drives towards the A1.

51 Thursday, December 28 3.30 pm

Jozef and Ellen walk through the corridor from the police station to the interview room.

'Prepare for the worst,' Jozef says. 'That Breur is one of the most hated lawyers in the Dutch top segment. His strategy is driving the police or prosecutor up the wall and wait until the annoyance caused by him leads to mistakes. He is very successful with that.'

The atmosphere in the interview room is unpleasant. The expression of Guido Landgraaf shows nothing but contempt. Louis Breur, the lawyer of Guido Landgraaf, immediately makes an unsympathetic impression on Ellen. With a straight face he looks at her emotionlessly. She can not prevent herself from responding defensively to the icy gaze.

'Jozef Laros.'

The lawyer ignores Jozef's outstretched hand and seems unaware of Ellen's presence.

'What are we going to talk about?' the lawyer asks. 'My client can in no way be held responsible for the death of his beloved wife. I demand you to release mister Landgraaf immediately. The sooner we can end this puppet show, the better.'

The expected quick-witted reaction from Jozef was not forthcoming.

'Your client is detained on suspicion of murdering his wife Marieke van Boxbergen. If you don't mind, I will summarize the facts that give rise to it.'

It occurs to Ellen that Jozef is solely concerned with the lawyer. He waits a moment and looks at the lawyer, who does not react at all.

'I consider your silence as consent. Please let me know if I misinterpret your signal. Marieke van Boxbergen was killed by knife stabbing. The murder weapon was found in the forest belonging to the Lankbergen estate, wrapped in a cloth. The murder weapon and the cloth provided a positive match with your client in a correctly performed smell test. Under the nails of the victim, body material has been found that, according to the DNA profile, originated from your client. We have not been able to verify the proclaimed alibi of your client. Those are the facts.'

The lawyer perseveres the silence.

'In addition to these facts, there is information that we can not properly address. In all honesty, we cannot think of any sensible motive. Assuming that your client's account does indeed contain an amount of fifty million, as the newspapers have written, your client hypothetically benefits from the death of his wife, with whom he was married in community of property and who possibly may have considered a divorce.'

Ellen observes Guido Landgraaf. For a moment his stoic gaze makes way for something that looks like an emotion. From a reflex of his shoulder, Ellen concludes that he had to restrain himself from saying anything.

'In addition, there are indications that your client has directed the events preceding the murder themselves. How that relates to the murder is still a question for us. You understand that the sum of facts and suspicions label your client as a suspect. I can not forbear to state that we have come to know your client as little communicative and little cooperative. I just want to leave it at this for now.'

Before anyone can say anything, Jozef has risen and steps towards the door of the interview room. He holds the door open for Ellen.

'You always do wrong with those people,' says Jozef as they walk to his room. 'I would have liked to have made a normal interview, but that did not seem possible given the lawyer's attitude.'

'But what are you aiming for? Are you trying to drive a wedge between Landgraaf and his lawyer?'

'Not on purpose. I only want one thing, namely that Landgraaf is going to talk. And that chance is only getting smaller with a lawyer who says nothing and lets the talking to us, speculating that we make a mistake once.'

Ellen doubts whether Jozef is right. He has however convinced her that the involvement of a tough, handy lawyer requires a special approach, where doing too little is better than too much.

'What are you going to do?' Jozef asks.

'First, think. Secondly, Norman said this morning that he wants to investigate that mail address from Guido Landgraaf. He is convinced that Landgraaf did not make it himself and he thinks he can find out who did it or where it happened.'

'So it will be a family business after all?'

'For heavens sake. I just asked him to keep a little more distance. However, I see this as a specific problem that can only be solved by an expert. What about you?'

'Let's talk about it tomorrow. Now I'm going home. We have four friends for dinner and calling off is not an option. Even the flexibility of Margot has limits. Besides, I do not want that myself. Will we meet at Averroës tomorrow at half past seven?'

'I'll be there.'

Ellen walks to her room and calls Norman. She briefly tells what she has gone through today.

'And you? Did you discover something? That e-mail address could be crucial.'

'I was just trying to call you, but I got your voicemail. I understand that you were quarrelling with a lawyer.'

'Indeed.'

'Well, hold on tight. I have interesting news. A friend of mine works at an internet provider and has many contacts. He has sorted out by whom the mail address guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com has been created.'

Ellen's heart begins to beat faster.

'He does not have a name, but he traced the computer to which the address was delivered. It is an old e-mail address that was already applied for in 1998. Hotmail was just in the air at the time. According to my friend, the address was requested on a computer from the Ministry of Economic Affairs in The Hague.'

'A ministry?'

'Yes, he was pretty sure about that.'

'Gee! What does that mean?'

'It seems rather unlikely that Landgraaf did it himself.'

'Is it? The energy sector is covered by Economic Affairs. I assume that Landgraaf was a frequent visitor during the merger.'

'This happened earlier.'

Ellen looks at Landgraaf's resume that lies before her.

'1998? In that period Landgraaf was involved in Oibibio. Would the key lie in that period?'

'Who knows.'

'Can that friend of yours get even further?'

'Probably not. However, he expects the administrator of the Ministry's network to be able to find out. Often data about computer use can be found somewhere.'

'Even after such a long time?'

'He thinks it is not impossible. Are you coming home?'

'I will ask the others what they have found. I expect to be home around 7:30.'

'Then I will ensure a healthy and nutritious meal.'

'You're a sweetheart.'

Quickly Ellen runs to Jozef's room. Fortunately, he had not yet gone home.

'Ministry of Economic Affairs?' Jozef moans.

'Norman is quite sure.'

'If we play this officially, the chance that this case will be resolved is immediately nil. This is exactly what lawyers like Louis Breur are waiting for. The more people interfere and the more political it becomes, the more mistakes are made. And are you sure that Norman's friend can not find out more?'

'He will try, but there's little chance.'

'I call Gerard Maas. He undoubtedly has an opinion about this. For the moment, let's pretend that we do not have this information. Say that to Norman.'

52 Thursday, December 28, 18.15

Ellen answers the phone. It is the receptionist.

'There is someone who wants to tell something about the dead boy at the Bergkerk,' she says.

'Put him through,' Ellen replies.

'Good evening,' a man's voice growls.

'What can I do for you?'

'I just read in the newspaper about that boy who was beaten to death,' the man says thoughtfully. He has an accent that Ellen can not immediately place. She waits patiently for the man to formulate his thoughts. 'I think I've seen what happened.'

Ellen's heart begins to beat faster.

'When did you see that?' she asks.

'In the early morning of Christmas day. I took a walk because I could not sleep, I do that more often. Then I saw it.'

'What did you see exactly? In other words, why did not you call us earlier?'

'Only today I read what happened that night. That night I wasn't aware that, eh ...'

The man is silent without finishing his sentence. Ellen can not properly assess the situation. What does that man want?

'Um, I find it hard to tell the whole story over the phone.'

Ellen doubts.

'And when I come by? That might be a little easier.'

'Now?'

'As far as I am concerned. Or does not that suit you?'

'Well... I'm home now.'

'And where is that?'

'Walstraat 157. A house with green shutters and window frames.'

Ellen tries to imagine the house. According to the number, it is at the end of the Walstraat, close to the spot where Rob Meier was found.'

'I'm coming now,' she says.

When she puts phone down, she asks herself whether she has decided too impulsively. At this moment there is no one who can join her. Piet has already done so much, she does not dare to call. Brian is still in Amsterdam or Haarlem and Jozef is now cooking for friends. When she calls him he will certainly tell her to cancel the visit. The man sounded insecure. Maybe his willingness to tell something will be gone tomorrow. If she is fast, she can still be home in time. Knowing Norman, dinner will be ready at exactly half past seven.

Quickly she picks up her stuff, closes the room and rushes outside. She walks fast through the Noordenbergstraat to the Grote Kerkhof, via the Korte Bisschopstraat to the Brink and through the Roggestraat in the direction of the brightly lit Bergkerk. When she is at the top, she stops for a moment to get her breath under control. Just as she is walking into the Walstraat, she thinks that she should let someone know where she is. She pulls out her cell phone and scrolls into the list of contacts to Jozef Laros. As expected, she gets his voicemail.

'Ellen here. I will stop by a possible witness in the Walstraat. Now you know.'

Again she hesitates, but she can not think of what is holding her back. She just has to do it. If can't do any harm, it may do some good. With big steps she now proceeds and suddenly recognizes the house that the man has described. There is no light in the house. Maybe the resident is in the room at the back of the house.

Only when she stands in front of the house does she see a minuscule dash of light between two curtains that let no light through at all. She presses the bell and hears a buzzing tone. There is no reaction. Ellen presses again.

Again no response. She tries to look through the slit between the curtains, but it's too narrow.

Just as she decides to walk away, she hears footsteps on a wooden floor or staircase. Maybe the resident was in the toilet. The door swings open, there is a thin man in front of her. She is startled by his appearance. Black hair, pale skin, brown eyes and a narrow face.

'Good evening,' Ellen begins. 'My name is Ellen van Dorth, inspector Deventer police.'

She shows her card. It seems as if the man is equally startled. Ellen knows that a amazement or fear does not mean anything. Innocent citizens are also startled when a policeman suddenly arrives at the door.

'Glad you wanted to come,' the man says with a smile. English, Ellen immediately thinks. Unmistakably an English accent. Or maybe it is Scottish? It is something like that, for sure.

'You saw something on Christmas Eve, you told me.'

The man nods.

'Indeed, that's what I was thinking about when I read the newspaper.'

Now Ellen hears clearly that the man's r is deep in the throat. That indicates a Scottish, or maybe Irish accent.

'I understood that you were taking a walk,' says Ellen. She begins to feel more and more uncomfortable. What does that man want from her? Her natural tendency is to walk away. This skinny man is working on her nerves.

'That is true,' the man replies. 'I have sleeping problems and after a walk I usually manage to fall asleep again. Maybe you want to come in?'

For a moment she wants to back off. Her curiosity however outdoes her fear, and so she walks past the man who holds the door. On both sides of the narrow corridor the wallpaper comes off in different places. The back of the stairs is crooked and there is no more than a bulb, hanging on a electric wire, in the middle of the hallway.

Suddenly two arms grab Ellen. Immediately a hand presses her mouth shut, so her cry of terror is nipped in the bud. The arms feel like metal clamps. She has no chance of moving, let alone to come loose. The arms almost lift her from the ground and push her forward. It doesn't make any sense to resist.

With his foot, the man opens the door at the end of the corridor. They enter the kitchen. For a moment she feels the grip around her waist loosening. With one hand the man quickly opens the door right of the stove and then reinstates his iron grip. He pushes Ellen forward in a room that looks like a deep store cupboard.

The man pulls her down. Her heart is now pounding like a madman. Is the going to rape her? She tries to break free at full force. The man strengthens his grip.

'I don't want to hurt you,' he says. 'If you cooperate I will not harm you.'

Now Ellen kicks the man against his tibia. The man responds by throwing her to the ground with a totally unexpected movement. He still keeps his hand on her mouth so she can not make any noise.

'I have to open this hatch. If you won't be slightly more cooperative, I am forced to hit you into unconsciousness. That might cause a little headache. I will release you now. One scream and you'll be dreaming of daisies.'

Ellen does not doubt that the man speaks the truth. He is incredibly strong and the way he laid her down shows an exceptional fighting technique. She relaxes her muscles. Resistance is futile.

With one finger he pulls out a ring from the floor and opens the heavy looking trapdoor seemingly effortless. A steep staircase ends up in a dark hole. Panic is gone and makes way for fear. What is the man doing? Is he going to lock her up in a basement? At the thought of a torture chamber, her legs slacken. She has to make every effort not to faint. The man points down and gestures to descend the stairs. When she is halfway, the light goes on. To her surprise she steps into a neat and tidy basement room. Opposite the staircase is a door.

'I'm going to lock you up,' the man says. Again Ellen is close to collapsing. All sorts of scenarios shoot through her brain. Can anyone find out that she is here? She did not tell anyone. A basic mistake. She has only spoken to Jozef's voicemail. What exactly did she say? Walstraat, but also a number? No, only Walstraat.

'It's not about you,' the man says. 'Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you.'

Next to the door is a box with number keys. The man puts himself between Ellen and the number lock. From his movements she gathers that he presses four or five keys before the thick and heavy door opens. Will she be put into a safe? Lamps are switched on automatically. The room behind the door is fully furnished. There is a bed against one wall and a sofa against the other. There is also a dining table with two chairs and a kind of buffet. 'This is your room tonight,' the man says. 'I'll bring something to eat and a bottle of drink. The bucket in the corner is your toilet. Tomorrow I will tell you why you are here. Screaming or to making noise in a whatever way makes no sense. This space is 100% sound proof.'

Before Ellen has been able to take in the man's words, the man has disappeared and the thick door has fallen into the lock. In a reflex Ellen pushes the door handle down. In vain. The door is locked. Ellen wants to scream, but does not question the words of the man. No matter the loudness of her screams, nothing will be heard outside.

Thoughts and feelings fight for a place in her consciousness. She kicks angrily at the door. In panic she pushes the door handle down again. Nervously she walks through the room. Where did she end up? Then she feels the iron grip of the man again. And his threat to beat her unconscious if she would not cooperate. This man killed Rob Meier, beat the boy to death with a targeted blow. There is no other way.

Exhausted she drops on the couch and starts to cry. She is thinking about Norman. He is now waiting for her. When will he be aware that she has disappeared?

She is startled by the cracking of the door that slowly opens. In the doorway the man with a tray is in his hands. 'You will be hungry. Or did you already eat before you called me?'

Ellen tends to scream, now the door is open. The chance that someone hears it is small. The chance that someone responds to it even smaller. She shakes her head. The man puts the tray on the floor.

'It's warm,' he says, superfluously. Steam rises from the board. 'By the way, my name is John Brooks and I want to repeat that I will not harm you in any way. Tomorrow I will tell you why I locked you up. There are plenty books in the cupboard, in English.'

Ellen does not respond. She waits for the man named John Brooks to be gone. Then she picks up the tray and puts it on the table. They are potatoes, something similar to green cabbage and a piece of meat. Because of the smell of the food she suddenly feels that she is starving. She has not eaten anything since lunch.

The food does her good. Slowly she realizes in what situation she has ended up. The most important thing is that the man, according to his own words, does not have it in for her. She believes that. But why did he lock her up? Is it because of the murder? Is he afraid to be caught by the police? Maybe he did it together with Harry Beerenkamp? Or did he witness Harry Beerenkamp killing the boy? It makes no sense. Anyway, the detention of a police officer is the stupidest thing he could do. And the man didn't make a stupid or confused impression. She looks around and feels that a calm is falling over her. There is no point in worrying. The man has made it clear that any attempt at resistance is senseless. Nor does she have to make any illusions that she can escape from this cellar or warn someone by making noise. She can do nothing but wait and see what will happen.

53 Friday, December 29 7:00

The ringing of the telephone does not immediately trigger a startle response. Jozef is used to being called at the strangest moments, so also at seven o'clock while he is engrossed in the newspaper. Only when he presses the green button does he realize what the phone call could mean. Will there have been another murder?

'Laros.'

'Good morning, Jozef, you're talking to Norman.'

'That is early.'

'Yes, and I also have a strange question. Do you know where Ellen is?'

'Ellen?'

Jozef is getting warm. Norman calling him means that something strange is going on.

'Is not she in the Ankersteeg?'

'There I am now.'

There are several reassuring questions crossing Jozef's mind, but he knows that Norman does not call for nothing. The few times he spoke to him, Norman did not give the impression that he was insecure or easily worried. Now Norman sounds seriously concerned.

'Did she say what she was going to do yesterday?'

'No, only that she would be home around six o'clock. She did not expect it to be later.'

'I know she sometimes visits a friend in Groningen. Hasn't she gone somewhere?'

'That's possible, but in that she would have let me know. No, I think something is wrong.'

'I'm going to the office. There I will ask if someone knows something. In addition, I had fixed up with Ellen at Averroës at half past eight. Maybe she is there. You'll hear from me as soon as possible.'

'That's fine. Do you have my number?'

Anxiously Jozef goes to Averroës as fast as he can. He does not believe it is a stupid misunderstanding between Ellen and Norman.

'No, Ellen has not been here,' says Thomas van Rijckevorsel.

'If she turns up, will you immediately send her to me?'

'I will.'

Jozef runs to the police station. The agent behind the reception has not seen Ellen either.

'Can you tell if anyone saw Ellen last night?'

'I'll see who was here yesterday.'

Jozef walks to the room of Ellen and Brian.

'Good morning Brian, have you seen Ellen?'

Jozef does not see the excitement in Brian's face.

‘No, but I did find out something yesterday. Do you have time to listen to that later?’
‘Can it wait? I must first find out where Ellen is.’
‘Do you need her so urgently?’
‘Not that, but according to Norman she disappeared without leaving a message.’
‘What?’
‘I don’t understand, but I’m a little worried. Have you seen or spoken to her yesterday?’
‘I called at around 11:30 to report on my conversation with Guido Landgraaf’s neighbours. The both of you were at Lankbergen. The rest of the day I haven’t heard anything.’
Brian’s phone is ringing. It’s someone from the reception, looking for Jozef.
‘For you. The reception.’
‘Yes? A phone call last night? Who? No idea? And then she left? At what time? Six o’clock? Can you figure out who called? Only the number is good too. Thanks.’
‘She left the police station at six o’clock last night,’ says Jozef to Brian. ‘Can you check her computer? Maybe there’s something else there.’
‘I will. Maybe I immediately make a report of the conversation that I had yesterday with a former colleague and former fellow student of Guido Landgraaf. That gave some interesting information. Guido Landgraaf was not as popular as he always pretended. Certainly not in the past.’
‘Write it down, please. I will send it to Gerard Maas at ten o’clock. And I need an overview of everything we know and what we are doing.’

54 Friday, December 29 8.00

Ellen is startled by the creaking of the door. That means someone arrives. Is the same man who locked her up? For a moment she thinks with relief that it is the police who found her. Slowly the thick steel door opens.
‘Good morning,’ says the man with the pale, sharp face and black hair. Ellen looks at the man and tries to see through at the emotions which are hidden behind his dark brown eyes. ‘Have you been able to sleep a little?’ he asks. She nods, which of course is not true. In a half-sleeping state she waited until it was seven o’clock. Then she got up.
In the past hour she has looked at one of the four scrapbooks that lay in a drawer of the dresser stained by woodworms. The scrapbook contained mainly carefully cut newspaper articles or prints of articles from the internet. At the moment the door opened, she was reading an article with the headline “Europe’s most dangerous woman at liberty.”
‘Interesting?’
Ellen nods and looks at the man again. What does he have to do with those articles? Why did he collect them? It is clear where the accent of the man comes from: Ireland. The article she just read is about Donna Maguire, an IRA terrorist who is held responsible for a long series of attacks. Among other things, it describes the attack in Roermond in 1990 in which two Australian tourists were accidentally shot because they were mistaken for English soldiers who were stationed on a nearby army base. Although Ellen could not tell the story herself, it is familiar to her. At that time she was eleven years old, so she may have consciously experienced it. It may also be that she has read or seen something about it on television.
‘Are you a member of the IRA?’
The man shakes his head.
‘If you’re interested, I’d like to tell you more about it.’
‘Why do you keep me locked up?’
The man shrugs his shoulders.
‘I’ll tell you later.’
‘So you witnessed the beating of a boy at the Bergkerk that on Christmas Eve?’
‘Yes. Do you want something to eat and drink? Bread, cornflakes, coffee, tea?’
Ellen considers to reject the offer. But that would mainly harm herself.
‘A little IRA terrorist goes on a hunger strike, I once heard,’ she blurs out.
‘I’m afraid you didn’t get yourself well informed. Only people who are improperly imprisoned and abused there can afford to stop eating, if necessary to death.’
‘Then my association is not strange. I am also imprisoned improperly.’
The man must smile, not unsympathetically.
‘I actually came for a breakfast. We’ll talk about the rest later.’
‘Bread and coffee, please.’

When the man has left the cellar room Ellen feels some kind of peace. The man looks relaxed and does not seem to have the intention of doing anything to her. On the other hand, terrorists are very capable of separating achieving goals from personal feelings. The ideological purpose comes first, individual interests have to give

way at all times. Maybe this breakfast is her gallows. She realizes that thought of being killed does not disturb her right now. Her stomach only contracts when she thinks of Norman. What will he do? Is he in panic? He certainly called Jozef. What does Joseph do? Is he in panic? That is quite possible, although he will not show much of it. Jozef is a master in hiding feelings.

'I'll be gone until eleven o'clock,' the man says when he has put down a tray with a thermos and three white rolls.

'What happens if you for some reason don't come back? Will I die here slowly?'

'That will not happen. You're just unlucky that you are my deposit at this moment. If it is up to me you will not be hurt.'

'Then leave the door open. I promise I will stay here,' she says, but she knows that her proposal is not real. As soon as it is quiet in the house she will run into the street. The man thinks the same way.

'I would not stay in your position.'

The man turns around and pulls the door behind him. With a solid click, the door falls into the lock. Why did she not ask the man to inform Norman that he does not have to worry? She is angry with herself and she doesn't like the taste of the cheese sandwich. She blames herself to stack mistake on mistake.

To kill the time she takes the other three scrapbooks out of the cupboard and checks if there is an order. All albums contain articles from different years. Most clippings come from English newspapers of the years 1988 and 1989. They all deal with IRA attacks in Northern Ireland. Ellen tries to remember whether she ever heard anything about the IRA in high school or during the study. She has the impression that the heyday of the IRA was already over in 1988. This means that the man's interest is not aimed at the IRA in a general sense, but at a specific and relatively short period. Leafing and reading superficially, it becomes clear to Ellen that all articles from 1990 and later are no longer about attacks in Northern Ireland, but in Europe, especially Germany. Ellen can also vaguely remember that. Attacks were then carried out on British soldiers and army bases on the European mainland.

The more she reads, the more she wonders what the curiously pale man has to do with it. Was he himself with the IRA? Has he been involved in the attacks on newspaper clippings? Or is he just a victim? Suppose John Brooks is wanted as an IRA terrorist. Why did he call her? She does not hunt for terrorists, but is looking for witnesses to the murder of Rob Meier. What did he say exactly? He considered her as his deposit. Has he escaped from prison? That may be an explanation for her confinement. He called her. Was it a preconceived plan to lure her to his home and lock her up? But with what purpose?

He called her because he knew something about the murder of Rob Meier. He has not mentioned that yet. Then another thought comes to her mind. Suppose he made a detour and suddenly came face to face with Rob Meier and Harry Beerenkamp, two reared and drugged hooligans. Then it is conceivable that the two boys challenged John Brooks, that at the end of the evening they wanted to beat someone, just for the kick. Ellen has felt how strong John Brooks is. She can imagine that Rob Meier had no chance in a fight with him. But why did he lock her up? If he acted out of self-defense, locking a police officer is the stupidest thing he could do.

Ellen stares at the buffet from which she has taken the scrapbooks. They were in the top drawer. What's in the other drawers? She pulls out the second drawer. Tools, pens, pencils, rope, plugs, sockets, lamps and many electricity wires. She opens the third drawer. It is practically empty, except for four flat boxes. She takes out one box and carefully lifts the worn lid. To her surprise, there are two flutes in the box. She opens the other boxes. They all contain flutes.

55 Friday, December 29 10.00

'At half past six a phone call came in at the reception. It was someone who wanted to report something about the murder of Rob Meier. The caller was transferred to Ellen. Ten minutes later, Ellen left the desk,' says Jozef.

'So Ellen probably went somewhere on her own because of the phone call,' says Gerard Maas.

'That's right. It is certain that the phone call had something to do with the murder of Rob Meier,' Jozef replies.

'Suppose the call led to a potential perpetrator, do you consider Ellen being able to go there on their own?'

Jozef understands the scope of the question. What Ellen has done is wrong anyway. Assuming she had a good reason to respond to that phone call, she should at least have left a message. Of course the well-being of Ellen is Gerard's priority. However, if something has happened to her, then he is partly responsible for that. That is why Jozef thinks before he gives an answer.

'Generally, Ellen is very careful.'

'Is it conceivable that there were reasons why Ellen lost sight of the basic rules in this case?'

Again Jozef takes time to formulate his answer.

'It's a strange case. Also for me. First that hassle on Landgraaf's estate, then Rob Meier and then Marieke van Boxbergen. There must be a connection between them. But which? This lack of clarity creates a constant uncomfortable feeling. It may be that the unrest and ambition to bring this case to a good end is the cause of Ellen's carelessness. On the other hand, I think it inconceivable that Ellen has approached a potential killer by herself.'

He straightens his back and looks Gerard Maas in the eyes.

'I guarantee that the telephone call which triggered Ellen to act alone was a relatively innocent information request. If later it turns out otherwise I am prepared to bear the consequences.'

The head of the district smiles.

'I appreciate your trust in Ellen. Now, however, it is only important to find Ellen as quickly as possible. Have we got any new leads since yesterday?'

Jozef shakes his head.

'Our two colleagues from Zwolle are looking for Harry Beerenkamp and have not made any progress yet. Brian has discovered a few things about Guido Landgraaf yesterday. He will tell me today. The Rob Meier case is stuck. No witnesses, no Harry Beerenkamp, no motive and now Ellen is lost.'

'Something has to be done. I have decided to call for help.'

Jozef sighs. He already feared that. On the other hand, he does understand that Gerard intervenes. He cannot do anything else. Suppose something has happened to Ellen, he must be able to show his bosses that he has recognized the seriousness of the situation and acted accordingly.

'Jorrit Groenvors takes over the Rob Meier case.'

That is a relief. Jorrit is a colleague from Zwolle, capable and sympathetic. Certainly not someone who sees such a case as an opportunity to score at the expense of a colleague.

'You finish the Landgraaf case. Jorrit also focuses on the disappearance of Ellen. You understand this division, I assume.'

Although Jozef does not agree, he nods. In this situation he has no option but to accept the decision of Gerard Maas.

'I am happy that Jorrit is coming. That is easier than a colleague from our own club,' says Gerard Maas and expresses Jozef's feeling. Jozef knows that he is not very popular with a number of Deventer colleagues and he knows that there are at least three who would use this case to undermine him.

'And what about Landgraaf? Is the closing of the case in sight?'

Jozef shakes his head and looks at Gerard anxiously.

'I am afraid not.'

'There are people taken before with less evidence,' says Gerard.

'This is a difficult case,' Jozef sighs. It is important to choose the right words to prevent calling in questions about his judgment in this case. 'Although the evidence is piling up and our doubts about Guido Landgraaf telling us the truth, I wonder if Guido Landgraaf is the killer.'

'So you do not believe he did it,' says Gerard Maas firmly.

'I would not say that like that. Of course he is our most important suspect at the moment.'

'That will do for now,' says Gerard Maas. 'In this case we have to be 100% certain. Good luck. Jorrit is there at half past one. Do you talk to him?'

Jozef nods relieved. Gerard Maas is the best boss he has had throughout his career. He is one of the few managers for whom trust in his employees is always the starting point.

56 Friday, December 29, 10.30 am

Robert Devenijns wavers as he stands in front of the marble platform of the monumental building on the Prinsengracht. Le Monchy Advocaten is written in golden letters on the wide dark wooden door. Robert knows that Louis Breur is inside. At nine o'clock he parked his BMW at the last free spot on the canal.

Devenijns takes a deep breath and presses the bell next to the door. There is no immediate response. Robert knows that he is first studied on two screens connected to the cameras on the left and right above the door.

During the holidays, one in two callers is a nebulous tourist who thinks Amsterdam is one big open-air museum.

'Le Monchy Advocaten, how can I be of service to you?' asks an affected female voice.

'I have a letter for Mr. Louis Breur.'

'Do you have an appointment?'

'No, but it's urgent.'

'What is it about?'

'About the Landgraaf case.'

'What is your name?'

'It's not that relevant.'

'And you have a letter?'

‘Yes.’

‘Do you want to hand it over personally?’

‘Not necessarily. However, it is important that Mr Breur receives the letter directly.’

‘Someone comes out to receive your letter.’

Robert hands over the letter to a man in a blue suit and a light blue shirt. He recognizes the clothing of a private security company. In about an hour he will call Louis Breur.

57 Friday, December 29 11.00

‘Coffee?’ Jozef asks Brian.

‘No, I’m on my tax. I’ll get some tea.’

Jozef shakes his head concisely.

‘So, it’s up to us to solve the murder of Marieke van Boxbergen,’ says Jozef after reporting on his interview with Gerard Maas.

‘Let’s take the time to put all the information together. Of course I am also curious about your findings.’

‘Okay, I made an overview.’

‘Start with it.’

Brian gives Joseph two A4 sheets.

‘Damn,’ says Jozef. ‘I have to call Norman first. That poor boy is waiting for my call.’

Jozef dials the number of Ellen.

‘Norman, with Jozef. I’d to call you.’

‘No news for sure.’

‘Unfortunately not.’

‘You have no idea where she can be?’

‘Regretfully no.’

‘I am still trying to find out who created the mail address guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com. My friend penetrates deeper and deeper into the computer rooms of the Ministry of Economic Affairs.’

‘It is not a hacker, is it? Then we get big problems.’

Norman laughs.

‘No worries. It just goes through their own helpdesk.’

‘There is something else that I would like to hear your opinion about. Ellen is missing and since we are dealing with murderers in our work, there is enough reason to worry.’

‘Does it sound strange when I say that I’m not worried at all?’

‘That sounds a bit strange indeed. Do you have a reason for that? Or is it just a feeling?’

‘Ellen is strong, careful and reliable. She always looks before she leaps.’

Jozef tends to mention that one deep ditch with a madman can be fatal, but he decides to respect Norman’s peace of mind.

‘Good that you see it that way. Worrying is generally not the most effective energy use,’ he says neutrally. ‘Shall I call you as soon as I know more?’

‘And I will let you know if I found out precisely about the mail address.’

‘Do you know Norman?’ Jozef asks Brian.

‘I met him a few times. Nice guy. Fits well with Ellen.’

Jozef is surprised by the last addition. He has been working with Ellen and Brian for almost three years now and he has wondered from the beginning whether Brian was secretly in love with Ellen. That was not because Brian showed any affectionate feelings towards Ellen in his presence. The thing is that Jozef can not imagine the life that Brian leads. He himself got involved with Margot at the age of eighteen and thirty-five years later he still does not regret that he made a marriage proposal five years later. For him a life without Margot would be hard to bear. When Brian comes home he has no other company than his books and his music. He does not know many friends or family, as far as Jozef knows. Yet Brian does not give the impression that he suffers from his bachelor existence.

Jozef studies the two sheets that Brian has given him. It is a clear chronological overview. First the events on the estate, the pigs on the driveway, the banners, the burning crosses. Perpetrator: Harry Beerenkamp cum suis. Then the death of Marieke van Boxbergen with the four indications: the rattling alibi, the smell test on the murder weapon, the DNA material under the nails of the woman and the financial motive. Below Brian has written a number of questions.

- Who is the client of Harry Beerenkamp? Guido Landgraaf himself? Or someone who wants to pretend to be Landgraaf himself? Actions: find out who created the hotmail address, track down Harry Beerenkamp, solve murder Rob Meier.
- Was there someone else in the garden on Christmas Eve? Who? Why? Does Landgraaf know about this? Action: Ask Landgraaf.
- Alibi Guido Landgraaf is unbelievable. What is wrong? What was the reason? Where did he really go? And why? Action: Ask Landgraaf.
- What happened between 1995 and 1999? Who is Abel Aldarvisur? What is his relationship now with Landgraaf? Did Landgraaf father a child?
- What happened before 1999? What kind of man was Guido Landgraaf back then?
- Hypothesis: Landgraaf is not the culprit. How can it be that everything points in his direction? Is that intention? Or coincidence?

Jozef stares at the last bullet. Brian makes his doubt very concrete.

‘Your last question intrigues me,’ he says.

‘Um, I find the whole story rather illogical. When Landgraaf has murdered both his wife and directed the preceding events on the estate, this not only testifies to a fragmented mind, but also a certain degree of intelligence. Both to invent it and to carry it out.’

‘You got me on that one,’ says Jozef. ‘No doubt Guido Landgraaf is intelligent.’

‘I think that an intelligent person can commit a better murder than this. A clever killer creates a closing alibi and does not bury the murder weapon in his own garden.’

Wrinkles appear on Jozef's forehead.

‘I completely agree with you. My dilemma, however, is that an intelligent person can realize that we are also reasonably smart and will draw this conclusion. Valuing your opponent's strength is an important key to success.’

‘If that is true he tends to overestimate the opponent, in my view,’ says Brian.

‘Overestimation is always better than underestimation.’

‘So, do you consider Landgraaf able to commit the murder and have deliberately ensured that all directions point in his direction?’

Jozef is laughing.

‘If you put it that way, it sounds far-fetched. Nevertheless, I do not want to exclude the possibility. Now tell us about your discoveries from yesterday. The two other questions have to do with that.’

‘First I visited the former neighbours in Bloemendaal, the Monod de Froidevilles. The owner of the house told a lot about the period that Guido Landgraaf was in Oibibio.’

‘Is not that the bankrupt business of some Heijn?’

‘Yes. In the early nineties, Guido Landgraaf had, according to his neighbour, lost his way and sought refuge with an Icelandic guru, Abel Aldarvisur. He advised him to leave his wife because a man can only become truly happy if he has placed a descendant in the world. Landgraaf then spent a year in a commune near San Francisco.’

‘Did he raise a child there?’

‘That does not tell the story. Maybe he knows,’ Brian says.

‘Then you spoke to someone else?’

‘Yes, in a chic restaurant on the banks of the river Amstel. I hope I can declare the bill of two hundred Euros.’

‘Was it any good?’

‘I was not impressed. Anyway, I am not an expert.’

‘That should not have been necessary.’

‘My company did not really contribute to the festivities. I was there with Hubert Dijkhuis, a former fellow student and colleague of Guido Landgraaf. An incredibly annoying man.’

‘I guess he invited you there and expected you to pay the bill.’

‘That's exactly how it went. His stories fortunately redeemed a lot. Especially because the friendship between him and Guido Landgraaf has cooled down considerably.’

‘These are not always the most reliable informants.’

‘Even with that knowledge in mind, his story sheds a different light on Mr. Landgraaf.’

‘Tell.’

‘According to Hubert Dijkhuis, the life of Guido Landgraaf falls into two parts, before and after 1995. Prior to that, Landgraaf was mainly aggressive and dominant, a fighter who saw the world as an arena and made a career by defeating his opponents. Due to this approach he was used to the fact that his method evoked resistance. For a long time he has been able to ignore criticism and disapproval. In the early nineties things got messed up. Probably due to a combination of increasing pressure from his surroundings and a growing awareness about his own behavior.’

‘An ordinary mid-life crisis.’

‘Dijkhuis used the same words. The result was that he steadily headed for a burn-out. His ruthless and unscrupulous ambition and the persistent methods to realize that ambition demanded ever greater effort. It was impossible for him to respond adequately to the tension that was slowly eroding him. At the end of 1994 he was fired. The formal reason was a strongly disturbed relationship with employees and the workers council. That was the end of a disastrous year in which Landgraaf lost control over his own life and the company. He had been traveling half of the time, according to his own words, to orientate himself on the international energy market. His favorite destination was Brazil, according to him, the country of the future.’

‘Ha, ha, that would be good for us too. For example, a study trip to Italy about the mixing of politics and crime.’

‘Via Oibibio, Landgraaf came into contact with Abel Aldarvisur.’

‘Just to get the picture clear. What exactly was the relationship between Dijkhuis and Landgraaf?’

‘They both studied economics in Groningen, but were no friends at the time. They did a graduation course together. Dijkhuis said that he had done most of the work by far, but that Landgraaf had ensured that they were rewarded with a good grade. After their study they started to work together at the relatively small Frieslandbank. Landgraaf made a fast career and after a few years he was Dijkhuis' boss. In the wake of Landgraaf Dijkhuis also rose in the hierarchy of the company. After the departure of Landgraaf Dijkhuis' career development stagnated. A telephone call from Landgraaf with the question whether he wanted to become a financial director at the Energy Company Northwest Netherlands came as a gift from heaven. In one fell swoop he got a top position with corresponding salary. The switch turned out bad. Hopelessly outdated administration and automation systems made his work as financial director impossible. That was not the worst, however. The biggest problem was the anxious atmosphere within the company. Managers were scared to death for the terror of Landgraaf and feared for their position continuously. Landgraaf had surrounded himself with a bunch of sneaky hangers and yes-marbles.’

‘That was also the reason he had accepted Hubert Dijkhuis, I assume.’

‘Probably, although is unlikely that Dijkhuis shares this view. Anyway, it did not go well with the company. Landgraaf was increasingly cornered and kept getting more and more wild. At the end of 1993, the figures showed that the company had made a loss. That was a miracle in a monopolistic market. It was even worse that the negative results came like a bolt from the blue, and that no one could explain why. Hubert Dijkhuis was appointed as the culprit by Landgraaf and had to vacate his post. His resignation led to great indignation within the company and that was the beginning of massive resistance against Landgraaf, which meant that he eventually was fired.’

‘I can hear what Dijkhuis felt: he was a real martyr, who saved the company through his sacrifice.’

‘It will undoubtedly have been a little less heroic. The facts are correct. The core of his story is that Landgraaf was a bulldozer before 1995. On the way to the top he must have made quite a bit of victims. There is no other way.’

‘Has Dijkhuis also mentioned names?’ Jozef sighs.

‘I asked him that question too. After some insistence, he came with a few former employees.’

‘And?’ Jozef can not hide his impatience. ‘Are those people fired by Landgraaf or something?’

‘Some are. Others were put on a sidetrack by Landgraaf.’

‘To be honest. I'm not impressed. Those people will have been angry, but it does not sound like a reason for a bloody revenge, after all those years.’

‘I also drew that conclusion. Then Dijkhuis came up with a different story.’

‘You build up the tension slowly and wait until the last chapter with the denouement,’ he says and cannot hide a trace of irritation. Brian grins uncertainly.

‘That's probably because Hubert Dijkhuis did the same. He came up with this story only when I was about to pay.’

‘He seems a fine man to me. Likes to play safe.’

‘Definitely. While I was counting the money, he started about their study time. Guido Landgraaf was a member of Sint Martinus in Groningen and was elected president of the club in 1968. At that time, a persistent rumor circulated about a death as a result of abuse during the ragging of new members. Of course, that was denied in every possible way. According to the association, nobody had died at all. Several members claimed that someone had died, but that this person was not a member at all and did not want to be. Others thought that nothing special had happened during the ragging, but that a boy had died a few weeks after the introduction period as a result of pneumonia. In the background, the rumour arose that Guido Landgraaf wanted to cover up the whole business and members of the corps insisted on not laundering the dirty washing in public. Conflicts within the association also had to be resolved within the association, not outside. It was whispered that Guido Landgraaf himself had been the main culprit and had urged other members to cross the moral line. It has always remained in the atmosphere of gossip. According to Dijkhuis, there has never been a declaration or police investigation.’

‘This makes sense, even though I'm not into rumours. Was Mr. Dijkhuis himself also a member of the corps? Was he there?’

'No, he said he thought it was a terrible club. His relationship with Landgraaf was limited to the study of economics and their joint graduation project.'

Joseph drums his fingers on his desk.

'Find this out. Who knows, it will provide some extra information about Guido Landgraaf. Even though I am heartily sickened by the man. He never told us this history either. As far as I am concerned, the Public Prosecutor is going to charge the man for murdering his wife. Maybe he's going to talk then.'

58 Friday, December 29, 11.30

Robert Devenijns parks his dark green Renault Scenic for Gym named Steel. In the car he has a new wig and his false mustache glued. Stretching, he walks through the revolving door to the beautiful girl behind the desk.

'What can I do for you, sir?' she asks smilingly, while in the meantime evaluating his posture.

'I am looking for Gerrit van der Kraats, is he there?'

'Do you have an appointment?'

'No, but it is very urgent. It's about an important matter.'

'What is your name?'

'Also Gerrit, but then Den Braber.'

That is the name Robert uses the most. The girl is calling.

'Enter the corridor over there and then the second door on the right. That's where you find Gerrit.'

'Thanks.'

Harry Beerenkamp thinks for a moment that he is dreaming when he gets up from a series of twenty-five powerlifts with a pain-distorted face because of the piercing pain in his upper arm, and looks out of the window. The guy who parks his car right in front of him looks very much like the bastard who took him on Christmas day. He studies the man well again and knows for sure. What does that guy inspire to come here? Several disturbing thoughts shoot through Harry's head. Does the man know Gerrit van der Kraats? If so, has he acted on behalf of Gerrit? Or is he looking for him? But how does he know that he is here? Has Gerrit told him? Or did he find out himself? Then it will not be long before the police also finds him.

The questions are pushed away by images of the painful humiliation and a great fury takes hold of him. Harry waits for a moment until the man goes in through the main entrance and then quickly walks to the dressing room. He does not have much time to think. His first impulse is to catch the man outside and to tear him apart on the spot. But is that smart? First he must have answers to a number of questions. Which role does Gerrit van der Kraats play? Does the man act on his own or on commission? If so, by whom? He decides to leave the gym through the back entrance and to investigate first if there are more people.

Robert Devenijns knows exactly how he is going to tackle it, the direct confrontation. He does not have another option. He knocks on the door that the girl has indicated.

'Come on in.'

The three muffled words are enough to know that he is dealing with a man that was born and raised in Amsterdam. He straightens his back and steps inside. Gerrit van der Kraats is not the stocky muscle bundle that Robert had imagined. The gym owner is a head taller than Robert and has a friendly face. His handshake is warm and powerful.

'You don't know me,' Robert begins with a poker face. 'But I'm looking for Harry Beerenkamp and I understood that you know where he is. You have a nice gym, by the way.'

The big man looks at Robert piercingly. That is why his reaction is just too late. If he did not know anything, he would have said that right away. Now he needs a fraction of a second to estimate what kind of meat he has in the tub. Robert knows enough. In order not to embarrass Gerrit van der Kraats unnecessarily, he looks through the large window at a large hall with all kinds of sports equipment. Here and there, men pull or push dangerous devices.

'Harry Beerenkamp?'

'Yes, he borrowed money from my boss, a lot of money. Now that jerk is suspected of murdering a boy in Deventer. The police are looking for him everywhere. If he gets caught, I can forget about to my money. My boss wants to be ahead of the police, you understand that?'

'Do I know your boss?'

'I do not know. He knows you, that's for sure.'

'I don't know Harry Beerenkamp and now get out very quickly!'

The man is getting ready to get up, the fists clenched. Calmly Robert stands up, even though his heartbeat suddenly rises above one hundred and fifty.

'Calm down,' he says. 'It was only a question. I have more addresses. If he is not here, he'll be there.'

Before the imposing figure of Gerrit van der Kraats can move, Robert has left the room and walks to the exit as quickly as possible.

'Happy New Year,' he hears the girl behind the counter saying.

Robert Devenijns has developed a good sense of danger for the last thirty years, and at the moment he leaves the gym through the revolving door his muscles flex and his heartbeat rises. He looks around from the corner of his eyes. Nothing to see. Still, he slowly slips his hand into his coat pocket and with his thumb and forefinger he pulls open two snaps on the inside of the bag. A stiletto falls naturally in his right hand.

He cautiously walks across the parking lot and unlocks the doors of his Renault from a distance. If he puts his hand on the door, he is grabbed from behind and thrown to the ground. He bangs hard with his head against the Ford Mondeo standing next to his car. Even before he has reached the ground, he gets a hard blow against his right kidney. In a flash he sees the red beard of Harry Beerenkamp. A knee in his stomach squeezes the air out of his lungs. Resistance is useless. Harry Beerenkamp is much stronger than he is. And he does not have to have any illusions about Beerenkamp's intentions. Only by talking can he prevent Beerenkamp from finishing it. He must convince Beerenkamp of his good intentions.

'I was looking for you,' he says, banging the pain. 'The police are looking for the murderer of Rob Meier and I am your alibi.'

Robert feels the pressure on his spine decreasing.

'I don't believe that. What do you know? And why did you destroy my couch and my television?' asks

Beerenkamp uncertainly and represses his doubt with a second, even harder hit on Robert's kidney. 'This is for the fridge,' he adds. 'And this is not the last.'

'If something happens to me, you hang. There is a letter at a notary in which I claim that I have seen that you have struck down Rob Meier.'

Again the pressure of Beerenkamp eases a bit.

'Then why did not you go to the police?'

'That's simple. I worked for Landgraaf. Only now I have a problem because he doesn't want to pay me. He or someone else has killed his wife. You are probably also on the suspects list for that murder. Actually it looks bad for you. I suspect you did not do anything, but I also know that the police will be very pleased to put you away for twenty years. With your help, I can take Landgraaf in. You can earn two to three tons. That's why I came to see you.'

Robert can not talk further because of the pain. If Beerenkamp does not bite, it looks bad for him.

'I don't quite understand,' says Harry Beerenkamp, turning Robert halfway and giving him a blow on his rib cage. A dry tick indicates that a rib is broken. 'This is the first.'

'Finish me,' moans Robert. 'At five o'clock this afternoon my letter goes to the police. If you hit me one more time.'

'Bluff,' says Harry Beerenkamp, but does not strike. For a moment Robert is about to faint from the pain when Beerenkamp kicks him hard on his back. He notices that the cross on his forehead is no longer a cross, but rather a sailing ship. 'How do you want to get that money?'

Robert carefully tries to get up a little.

'Can not we just get up? Someone will come out of the gym sooner or later,' he groans.

'Okay, but no kidding, otherwise I will break the rest of your ribs at once.'

He feels that Beerenkamp is letting go of him and gets up. Now it has to happen. Groaning and roaring, he turns around and pretends he can barely stand up. What is more reality than drama. Without moving his head, he looks where his attacker is. He flexes his muscles. In a lightning-fast motion, he takes the stiletto from the pocket of his jacket, throws himself in the direction of Harry Beerenkamp and plants the knife with all his strength in his upper leg. In response, Harry Beerenkamp tries to kick Robert with his other leg. Before the foot reaches Roberts head Harry Beerenkamp falls down. Screaming of pain, he is lying on the floor. Still Beerenkamp tries to get up and grab Roberts leg, but he manages to stand on Harry's hand with his full weight.

'Better be careful next time, idiot,' says Robert and gets into his car. With wheezy tires he drives backwards and to his relief Harry Beerenkamp just rolls away in time to prevent Robert from riding over his legs. A knife stab can be seen as an emergency, a shattered leg is not.

When Robert Devenijns leaves the parking lot of the gym and drives east, he sees two police cars approaching from the other side with flashing light. He drives slowly. When he sees in his rear-view mirror that the police cars turn into the parking lot, he pushes the gas pedal down and turns right at the first crossing. It is important to disappear as quickly as possible.

Harry Beerenkamp has stopped his attempts to get up and is moaning on the ice-cold clinkers. If he sees the police cars, he knows it's over. He sees that Gerrit van der Kraats is looking from behind the glass how two

policemen hoist him in the car. The contemptuous gaze of his old trainer speaks volumes: he called the police because he was tired of it all.

59 Friday, December 29 13.00

The sound of the door awakens Ellen. She had swayed on the couch with one of the scrapbooks on her lap. 'Lunch,' says the man who locked her up. In spite of the situation, Ellen still does not think John Brooks unsympathetic. He puts a plate with three brown balls and a glass of orange juice on the table next to the couch. This time he does not leave, but closes the door behind him. Ellen feels her stomach contract. What does the man want from her?

After the man has closed the door he walks to the dresser and pulls a flute from the drawer. He starts playing without making any announcement. It is unmistakably an Irish melody. After a slow start the notes follow each other faster and faster. With astonishment, Ellen looks at John Brooks' slender fingers moving up and down at lightning speed. The man himself has his eyes closed and is not aware of any spectator. He goes on in trance. Ellen asks herself if she can surprise him with an attack. The closed door deprives her of the courage. She can do nothing but to close her eyes and surrender to the hypnotic music. She is trying to discover a structure in music. After a while she thinks she recognizes a melody that keeps coming back. Just as Ellen opens her eyes again and wonders how long the man can keep up, the music slows down. It ends with the melody that Ellen had recognized, note by note and so soft that it can hardly be heard.

For a fraction of a second Ellen tends to clap when John Brooks opens his eyes and looks at her with a smile.

'That's why I have this cellar,' says John Brooks. 'To play.'

'It seems to me that you don't have to be ashamed of your performance.'

The man laughs.

'Certainly not. People said I could become Irish champion on the tin whistle.'

'Can you become a champion at it?'

'It is one of the most prestigious awards in Ireland. Do you want to hear something else?'

John Brooks takes another flute out of the drawer and presses the play button on the CD player. There is a violin and a drum. He closes his eyes and listens without doing anything himself. Then he moves the flute to his mouth and starts playing. The violin plays the leading melody and the flute swirls around it. Ellen feels tears coming up. She does not want to cry and wonders if her emotions are caused by the music or her own situation. Her thoughts wander to Norman, to Jozef and Brian, to Gerard Maas. Would he have started a large-scale search? What would she do herself? Without a clue, searching for a missing person is looking for a needle in a haystack. If she were Gerard Maas, she would certainly not put available people on a search for her. Probably she would lay the priority at the two murder cases.

'You thought about other things, didn't you?'

Ellen nods. She has not even noticed that the music has stopped.

'That was Frankie Gavin on the violin. He comes from Galway and was terribly good at the tin whistle. It was always my dream to become just as good as Frankie Gavin.'

'I don't understand why you only play here on your own. Are you afraid to play for public? I was also public.'

'Do you want to hear the whole story?'

'If it helps me to understand why I am here...'

'One does not have much to do with the other.'

'Maybe not much, but I assume all things are somehow related.'

'You read all the scrapbooks, didn't you?'

'Stories about the IRA,' Ellen nods.

'I indeed belonged to them. As a boy of eighteen I signed up and a year later I was found suitable as a fighter for the Irish Republic. My terrain was Armagh and some of the attacks that you have read about have been committed by me. And indeed, I have also have killed innocent citizens.'

Ellen stares at the man. He shows no emotions at all.

'Why?' is all she can ask.

'Anger, I think. My father was shot by the British army.'

'Are you Catholic?'

'I still am. Yet my religion had nothing to do with me joining the IRA. The hatred of the arrogant English was poured in to me as a child and when I was old enough to think for myself, I saw those prejudices confirmed in everything. For me it was a natural choice.'

'And now? Are you still with the IRA?'

John Brooks shakes his head.

'The U-turn came after an attack where I saw an innocent eleven boy dying in front of me, in a burning car in which I had placed a bomb. Suddenly I realized what we were doing. The car turned out to be the wrong one. It

was characteristic of the arbitrariness and numbness of many IRA members. It did not matter who or what became the victim. Every attack was justified and contributed to the goal. I decided to get out of it. But not only that. Even without me, the attacks continued and I had seen with my own eyes what a misery that caused. That's why I wanted to do something to put an end to that madness. The latter was not only a moral act, but also a pragmatic one.'

Ellen shows a questioning look.

'Quitting the IRA is not actually possible. Someone who stops will be killed. You swear fidelity for life with your life. A strong concept. There were only two ways to stop and still stay alive. The first is to travel abroad, South America, Thailand or some other remote areas and build a new life there. That definitely did not appeal to me in any way. The other possibility was to go over to the enemy and that is what I did.'

'But then you know for sure that there is a price on your head.'

'That's right, so in return you get a different head from the enemy. I am now called John Brooks and that is also in my passport. That was not what I used to be called.'

'What is your real name?'

John Brooks is silent for a moment.

'Tom Nolan, but that is irrelevant. Tom Nolan is dead, drowned when he wanted to flee over the sea for a British naval boat.'

Ellen swallows a couple of times.

'A few days after the attack in Armagh, I reported to the British Army. Obviously a lot of suspicion at both sides. A month later I had an appointment with my new boss, a nice man of about forty years. He knew exactly what he wanted: use to infiltrate in the IRA groups that had become active on the European mainland. After a number of sensitive losses in Northern Ireland, the IRA decided to shift the scope to British Army bases in Europe, particularly in Germany. I therefore applied to participate at the IRA-headquarters and actively assisted in the preparations for a large number of attacks in Europe. It would really be a big operation. I reported to my British boss every week. At a certain point I got the impression that a number of my IRA-colleagues were beginning to smell a rat. That's what I said to my boss. He decided that I could not withdraw, so that same day the German police attacked a number of flats in different German cities. The flats were full of weapons and a number of IRA members were arrested. So, I prevented several attacks through my betrayal. One group, however, remained elusive, five or six people around Donna Maguire. Despite the information I gave the British Army they managed to commit a number of attacks, including those in Roermond. At that time I was already in Amsterdam, not as Tom Nolan, but as John Brooks, an Englishman with extensive experience as a bartender.'

'Why not as a bartender who also whistles a nice tune?'

'A nice tune,' says John Brooks, smiling. 'It feels awkward to say it myself, but I play really very well. As I told you before, I used to be one of the best. And I have a recognizable style, at least for the experts.'

'So you're worried that your play will betray you're actually Tom Nolan?'

'I am afraid that already happened when I lived in Amsterdam. After a long period of hesitation I started to play in a folk band. Since then, there are people who know that Tom Nolan is not dead. I actually have indications that they are on my track.'

'Here in Deventer?'

'No, believe me, in that case I would definitely not be alive. A new group has emerged that wants to revitalize the IRA under the guidance of a number of veterans. In doing so, they first want to deal with mistakes from the past. And I'm one of them.'

'How do you know that?'

'In Amsterdam I rolled into the computer business. I now work at a company in Almelo that specializes in telecommunications. That is why I know a lot about the internet. Without any effort I was able to hack the computers of a few former colleagues. A few months ago my name popped up in several mails. In those mails it was suggested that I lived in Amsterdam. It is a matter of time they find out my current name and also that I live in Deventer.'

'How did you actually get here?'

'Love. My then-girlfriend, Anneke, lived in Deventer. A short while after the reckless gigs with my band I left Amsterdam without informing anyone, and I moved in with her...' He hesitates. 'She looked like you.'

Ellen scares. What does he mean? She tries to pretend nothing is wrong.

'So, since then you have not played in public anymore?' she asks concisely.

'No, not even privately. It was not until I had renovated this cellar that I dared again. That was the only benefit of ending our relationship.'

Ellen can imagine that John Brooks wants to tell her more. After Anneke left him, there probably has been no to whom he could tell his story. Though she is fascinated by the things he told her, she does not feel like serving as a counsellor for a confession and then having to die because she knows things that must remain secret. Or is it only about her? A shiver pulls across her spine.

'Listen, John,' she says. 'I think you're a nice guy. Yet I listen to your story with some mixed feelings. You will understand that.'

John Brooks nods.

'You are not here voluntarily, that is clear to me. Tomorrow around this time you are free. I guarantee that.'

'I believe you,' she says. She would like to know exactly what John has in mind, but does not ask. 'And since you finished this cellar you have played here every day?'

'Playing the whistles is the only way to control my fear.'

'Fear?'

'I am always afraid. What about I do not know exactly.'

'For your old friends. I can imagine.'

'No one has friends in the army,' he says with a touch of reproach. 'My fear is not about being found, it lies deeper. Every night I wake up at three o'clock, often bathed in sweat. Then I walk around the city.'

'Have you ever sought professional help?'

John Brooks shakes his head

'You are the second to whom I tell my story.'

Again Ellen's stomach pulls together. What does John Brooks want from her?

'Anneke took away much of the fear. It took her, however, too much energy in the long run. She couldn't keep u and I don't blame her for leaving. Since then I only have my flutes.'

John Brooks stands up and walks to the buffet. He pulls out another flute.

'Every flute has its own key. This one is in e-minor.'

He starts playing. Like the previous pieces, the music starts slowly. Now there is no acceleration. Ellen soon recognizes a melody. She even thinks she has heard it before. This time, her thoughts do not wander. The song takes control of her. She sees a tear rolling across the cheek of John Brooks. Her eyes are also moist.

'That was very nice,' she says when the music is over. She notices that she is rattling with hunger and takes a sandwich.

'My fear peaks around Christmas and New Year's Eve,' says John Brooks after a long silence. 'During Christmas night I could not sleep at all and therefore I wandered through the Bergkwartier. A boy approached me at the Bergkerk. Further on, another man was watching. The boy grabbed me and pushed me to the lawn behind the church. He said something about going down and then tried to hit me. I parried the blow and hit him against the head. He immediately fell to the ground. It was a reflex from my education. Later I understood that the boy had died.'

'So you were the one yourself.'

'I should have realized that he was not an equal. My defense was one of life and death. That was not need to hit him that hard.'

'If you tell it like that, it sounds like self-defence.'

'So it was. But I simply cannot defend myself in court. They are already trying to track me. If they find me, the next day I will be dead. So I have decided to flee.'

'You could have done that without taking me prisoner?'

'I feel responsible for the death of the boy and wanted to tell the police. After all, you are looking for the killer. Moreover, I want to prevent an innocent being convicted.'

'You do not have to worry about that, Ellen says. A letter would have been enough.'

'You do not believe me,' says John Brooks and looks at her. She turns her eyes away. 'I saw you that morning, when you came to see the boy with your colleague. It was as if I were dreaming. You really look like Anneke.' Ellen stares silently to the ground.

'It was an impulse to call the police station. I do not know what I would have done if I had not got you on the phone.'

'When are you leaving?' Ellen asks as relaxed as possible.

'In an hour'

'Where to?'

'I fly to Asia. Now I'm going to pack my things. I'm will say goodbye to you.'

Ellen gets scared.

'Why don't you release me now? I promise I will not say anything.'

'Your bosses will not appreciate that. I trust you as a person, but I cannot trust you will not say anything. Sorry.'

John Brooks leaves the cellar. When the big door falls in the locks Ellen bursts into tears. She is really scared now. The man is in the highest need and able to let her be here. It's no different than his time with the IRA. In that period he also sidestepped his conscience when he committed the attacks in Northern Ireland. She stands up and jerks at the door. It is rock-solid.

'Help !!' she screams. She knows that no one can hear her. Defeated, she flops on the couch and crawls away under the blankets, only not to exist.

Jozef walks through the Ossenwaard, the nature reserve on the western bank of the IJssel. On the left, black long-haired cows graze, further on there are thick gray horses. Through the fog he sees no more than vague contours of the city on the other side of the river.

He does not like walking and it he rarely comes here. Now he cannot think of a better alternative. The research is in an impasse. Brian has a few leads, but to Jozef the chance that they will get them anywhere is small. His only hope is based on Landgraaf himself. Jozef is convinced that he is the one who can help them. The problem is that Landgraaf has a reason to remain silent. Of course, Jozef can not rule out that Landgraaf is the perpetrator. That would explain his silence. Yet he would not bet his money on that.

An hour ago Jozef told Landgraaf that he had his fate in his own hands. Assuming that he had not killed his wife, he had every chance to leave the police station as a free man, if he only told them everything he knew. If, on the other hand, he persisted in his incomprehensible non-cooperative attitude, Jozef could not guarantee that he would not be brought before the judge. And Jozef thereby warned that he had seen people convicted on the basis of less strong evidence. Landgraaf, however, did not shrink and referred Jozef to his lawyer.

So Jozef called Louis Breur, the lawyer of Guido Landgraaf, and presented him with the same dilemma. Breur also did not give an inch. He only repeated that his client was completely innocent and if the Public Prosecution wanted to bring the case to court, there would be a gigantic claim for damage.

Walking through the mud and into the mist, surrounded by animals that control the natural vegetation in the floodplain, it's the first time that he dares to face that Ellen is gone and that there is a chance that something happened to her. So far he has only acted and thought about further actions. Suppose Ellen is being held by the man who killed Rob Meier, how big is the chance that she will be killed? In combat situations it happens that police officers are killed. As far Jozef knows, the killing a police officer in cold blood is a great rarity. On the other hand, a crazy assassin who feels being crippled can flip. But how likely is that? If Ellen had any suspicion that she would meet with a potential perpetrator of one of the murders, she would have asked someone to come along. For Jozef that is beyond question.

Or is it not? Perhaps that is his biggest doubt. If Ellen has indeed stepped towards a possible murderer on her own, Jozef has to blame himself, being her mentor. In that case something went wrong in the guidance. This slumbering guilt amplifies his overall feeling that all things went wrong anyway. In retrospect, he has completely misjudged the situation and underestimated it. He knows what is the most important cause of this: his aversion to Landgraaf. He did not want anything to do with that man. And that was not about the man Landgraaf, but about the fact that the man had appropriated fifty million Euros that actually belong to Dutch citizens. Jozef himself also contributed three Euros to the bonus of Guido Landgraaf. The thought of it makes Jozef angry again. But that anger, in this case, has prevented him from taking the matter seriously and objectively considering the facts that are important for his work. Should he have taken the signals more seriously? Could he have suspected that the strange events on Lankbergen were the harbingers of a murder? If so, he has made a serious mistake.

He still has not got any control over the case. There is no picture in his head. The loose facts do not want to become a coherent story. With Ellen he sometimes philosophized about the mental process of a criminal investigation. She wanted to know which method was hidden behind his seemingly messy and intuitive way of working. What is the secret to a successful investigation? Her conclusion was that an image is being formed during the research. Connecting lines arose between facts and the facts moved alongside each other or away from each other. New facts automatically gained a place in the resulting figure, which was given an increasingly fixed form. Yet the figure in Ellen's head was different from the figure in his head. There was only one explanation: his thirty-year experience. This enabled him to form an image of facts that remained incoherent to Ellen. Ellen felt frustrated and wondered if she also had to wait thirty years to fully master the profession. Now Jozef must think about that conversation. Right now, no image emerges, no matter how hard he tries. It remains a list of facts that have a certain coherence, but still do not make a recognizable picture. Why? That is the main question that is bothering him. Is it because he did not fully commit himself to the research from the beginning? Or is something else going on? Does he overlook the crucial connecting lines of the picture? The longer he thinks, the more he becomes convinced that an essential part of the story is missing. There must be something that connects all events. Why doesn't he have any idea where to look?

Somberly he trudges through the mud. He has made a big mistake which he put a dear colleague at risk. It is a paralyzing thought that, in the thirty years that he is a detective, he has not often suffered to this degree. He has not been so aware of how much he has become attached to the collaboration with Ellen in recent years. Her eagerness to learn the craftsmanship and her cheerful ambition have certainly enhanced his motivation to teach her all he knows. The thought that she would no longer be there gives him goose bumps. Despite his gloominess he realizes that he can not imagine her being dead. Walking through the sucking river sludge and surrounded by

dead thistles he considers it more likely that she will decide to give up police work or to continue her work as a detective in another city.

It takes a while before he recognizes the squeak. It is his mobile phone that he has taken with him for a change, especially in view of the possibility that Ellen would call him.

‘Jozef Laros,’ he says when he has pressed the right button just in time.

‘Jorrit Groenvors here. We have got Harry Beerenkamp. He was arrested in Amsterdam and will be delivered here in half an hour. He seems to have been badly hurt, but is able to be questioned. Do you want to be there?’

‘Of course. I’m coming.’

Perhaps this will finally offer a chance to make any progression in the case, Jozef thinks hopefully. But Beerenkamp will also not know where Ellen is. Why did not Ellen leave a message in one way or another? As he puts his phone in his pocket, a heavily disturbing thought comes to his mind. Ellen will not ...? He unpacks his phone again and stares at the keyboard. How does he listen to his voicemail? It has been a long time since he last did that. He briefly considers to call his wife Margot to ask for it. Then he remembers and dials 1233.

‘You have one new message,’ the woman’s voice says. Jozef is waiting for the message with a wildly beating heart.

‘Ellen here. I will stop by a possible witness in the Walstraat. Now you know.’ Sweat breaks out all over his body. Damn, damn, damn. He curses himself while calling Piet van Gestel.

‘A message from Ellen was on my voicemail. She went to someone in the Walstraat.’

It takes a while for Piet to respond.

‘The Walstraat? Not a number?’ he asks. Jozef knows that Piet used the short silence to flush all other critical questions. He is grateful to him.

‘No, only Walstraat. Nothing else.’

‘Okay, we will get started right away.’

For a moment Jozef wants to say that Piet has to be careful, but changes his mind just in time. Piet understands better than anyone that he has to work with caution.

61 Friday, December 29 13.45

Brian dials the number of the society of the student association Sint Martinus in Groningen. Nothing happens. Even in this period of the year there should be someone around. Therefore he dials again. After the fifth time a tired woman’s voice answers his call.

‘Good afternoon, you’re speaking with Brian Jansen, from the police in Deventer.’

‘This is Groningen,’ the voice answers and then the connection is broken.

Brian presses the repeat key.

‘Yes?’ It is the same voice.

‘Again with Brian Jansen. I know I’m calling to Groningen. Do I speak to someone from Sint Martinus?’

‘Yes.’

‘I am looking for someone who can tell me more about the history of the association.’

‘I don’t know anything about that.’

‘Is there anyone else who knows something about history?’

‘I put you through.’

It becomes quiet for more than a minute.

‘Yes?’

Brian repeats what he has just said.

‘What do you want to know?’

‘I’m interested in events during an introduction week of your association.’

‘If I already knew, I would not tell you. We highly value the privacy of our members. Unfortunately, I can not make an exception for you.’

‘I’m afraid I can not settle for that. The events I’m talking about happened in 1968. Do you have a list of people who were members at that time?’

‘We certainly have that list. But the same applies as I have just said. I’m afraid I can not help you.’

‘It is not an informal question, but a police investigation. If your association does not want to cooperate, that is your right.’

‘Then I would like to make use of that right.’

‘Can I write down your name?’

‘Why?’

‘So that my colleagues know you’re the one that took the decision not to cooperate on behalf of the association.’

‘Can you repeat that again.’

'I was wondering if you are competent to decide that your association is not cooperating in a police investigation.'

Brian hears a soft cursing.

'I will connect you with the president.'

'Kersten.'

Brian repeats his question for the third time.

'I can be brief about that,' replies the president. 'I don't do business over the phone. If you want certain information, you are always welcome at the club. Then we will see if we can help you. In addition, I can indicate in advance that you must have a good story. We are not an information bank. Our former members often hold important positions and therefore we must be very reluctant to provide information about things that have taken place within our association in the past. It is easy to put such stories out of context.'

Brian suppresses his tendency to respond.

'I would not want to compromise you. Thank you for your explanation,' he says and breaks the connection before the president can respond. That was not such a smart action, Brian says to himself. What else could he have expected? Probably he had reacted in that way himself.

His second source of information about Landgraaf's in relation to the student's society is the Groningen police. The problem is that he does not want to make a formal case for it. He would prefer to speak to a veteran who can remember the matter, possibly with the help of a file that is undoubtedly stored somewhere far away. Since he knows no one personally at the Groningen police, he sees no other option than to start at the front door.

To Brian's surprise no difficult questions are asked. Helpfully he is put through to people that can possibly help him. After four phone calls he got the right man, former inspector Albert Termunten, forty-two years of service and a memory like an elephant.

'Guido Landgraaf, I can still remember him,' he says. 'That is not surprising, of course, because he has been in the news regularly in recent years.'

'Do you remember what it was about?' Brian asks.

'Something had happened at Sint Martinus, which was not for the first time and certainly not for the last. I have been there more than once in my career. Usually because of abuse during the ragging period, almost always after reporting by parents. In most cases we could not do much. Sint Martinus is known for being a closed stronghold where everyone is afraid of each other and nobody dares to say anything.'

'Could you find out which case Guido Landgraaf was involved in?'

'I think so. Sixty-eight, did you say?'

'Yes.'

'I have to dig into the archives, but that does not cost me much time. Are you in a hurry?'

'Quite.'

'Let's see, it's two o'clock. Can you come to Groningen?'

'I can.'

'If you get in the car now, you'll be here around four o'clock. Then I should have found the file.'

'So you think there is a file.'

'I know that for sure. I spoke to Landgraaf myself. At that time he was leader of the association.'

'President.'

'Exactly, but that word never crossed my mouth. It was about a boy who had died, probably as a result of abuse during the ragging. I can not remember the facts. Usually everything comes back automatically when I read the file.'

'I can't wait to be there.'

Brian takes his coat and writes a note for Joseph. He comes across him in the hallway.

'Any news from Ellen?' he asks.

'Yesterday afternoon she recorded a message on my voicemail. She went to a possible witness in the Walstraat.'

'Walstraat?'

'Piet is going there with his team.'

'What shall I do? Stay here or go to Groningen to see a file about the death of a student in 1968? I do not know if it serves us, but our Groningen colleague knew at least to remember that Guido Landgraaf was involved.'

'It is a fragment from the life of Landgraaf anyway. And somehow we have to find an opening to get through to the man. As far as I'm concerned, you go.'

'Can I still reach you tonight?'

'Yes, at home or at the office. As long as Ellen is not back, I have no rest. We have also found Harry Beerenkamp. He is being brought here from Amsterdam.'

'Good news.'

'We will see. Good luck in the far north.'

62 Friday, December 29, 2.30 pm

'I'm leaving,' says John Brooks, alias Tom Nolan. 'Definitively,' he adds.

Ellen looks at him terrified. What does that mean for her? Will he let her go? Or leave her in the cellar, doomed to die of thirst?

'I'm sorry,' he says. Ellen's heart goes wild. She must do her best not to hyperventilate. 'I can not afford to release you. Then you will pass on what I told you and I will be arrested before I leave the country.'

Ellen jumps forward and grabs John by the throat. With all her strength she tries to push him over. She has no chance. John Brooks grabs her wrists and seemingly effortlessly he frees himself.

'Quiet Ellen, nothing is wrong. Did you really think that I would leave you to your fate?'

Ellen looks at him in his brown eyes and does not know what to think. She starts to cry.

'I close the door. There is enough food and drink in the cooler box to keep you going for a week, but you do not have to wait that long. The lock will open automatically in twenty-four hours. I programmed that. Then you are free again.'

Ellen looks at John Brooks through her tears. What does he mean? Should she sit here for a day and hope that it is true what he said? A wave of panic goes through her. Her legs become limp and she almost falls down.

'Trust me, nothing can go wrong,' he says with a smile. 'Again, I'm sorry to lock you up. And I want to thank you for listening to my story. Do not be discouraged by this unfortunate incident. I think you're a good one for the police. I'm off.'

His eyes meet those of Ellen. He quickly turns around and leaves the basement. Ellen becomes nauseous when the door falls into the lock with a subtle touch. Exhausted she drops on the couch. She has to wait for twenty-four hours. And then? Is she free? She is startled when she hears grumbling at the door. It's John Brooks again.

'The flutes,' he says. 'I am lost without my whistles.'

For the second time, the door falls into the lock. Ellen walks to the console next to the door. It only happened once that John Brooks had to open it from the inside, that was after the intimate whistle concert. The other times he left the door open. Of course Ellen tried to look over his shoulder which keys he pressed, but that was impossible. The only thing she could tell from his movements that it was a four-digit code.

Yet there should also be another method to open the door from the inside. John Brooks was always here to make music, with closed door of course. Suppose that the electronic system was defective in one way or another, he would starve here. Frantically she pulls drawers from the dresser and spreads the contents on the carpet. Nothing special. Screws, a stapler, packages of paper handkerchiefs, rope, a box of rubber bands and more rubbish. The rest of the buffet neither contains keys or secret codes. She walks up and down through the room of about three and a half by five meters. She remembers a movie about an escape from a prison. With a nail or something like that the main character scratched the joint around a stone, until he could pull the stone out of the wall. That was an operation of months or maybe years. But in the end he managed to escape. In this case the wall is finished with plywood or clipboard, covered with wallpaper, behind which is probably a thick layer of insulating material. She fumbles with a nail into a gap at one edge of the room and establishes it to be rock solid.

Or is there another room under this cellar? There is parquet on the floor and a rug in the middle of the room.

There also should be some sort of ventilation system somewhere. Otherwise the oxygen would be running out fast. She states to herself that there are enough reasons to examine the basement in detail. But does that have to be done now? She looks at the contents of the cool box and it is indeed sufficient to easily keep up for a week. In addition, there are drinks beyond storage date in the cupboard and cans with vegetables and fruits. If the door does not open in twenty-four hours, she still has time to demolish the basement, looking for a possible exit.

There is a pile of books on the bottom shelf of the buffet. She spreads the books on the floor. As far as she knows the names of the writers, they are English. Or Irish of course. She chooses the thick book Ulysses by James Joyce. She remembers from high school that it was a difficult book. Nobody read it for the book list. Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed, she reads. That is understandable. She flops down on the couch with the book.

63 Friday December 29 3.30 pm

Jozef walks with Jorrit Groenvors through the corridor to the interview room. The Zwolle colleague did not say a word about Ellen, whilst he has certainly been informed about it by Piet. Since Jozef does not know what Piet has said, he does not start talking about it.

'I go all-the-way,' says Groenvors.

'What do you mean?'

'Did you see that guy's criminal record?'

'It's not a sweetie.'

'I think that is too positive. I can offer ten times more comprehension for someone who, in a rage of anger, kills somebody, than for such a guest who repeatedly beats up people. This guy is completely unscrupulous.'

Jozef is surprised by the fierceness of the normally rather quiet Groenvors.

'I agree with you,' he says, wondering what his colleague meant by all-the-way.

Jozef studies the face of Harry Beerenkamp. On his forehead are recent injuries caused by a knife. A number of cuts seem to form a random motif. Then he remembers the story of Beerenkamp's neighbor Fons. He was talking about a cross. Jozef studies the scarfs again and then recognizes the cross that is placed right in the middle of the forehead. Who had caused the other wounds? Or is Beerenkamp someone who deliberately mutilates himself?

Jozef has gone through his criminal case again. It is an impressive list of fights where his victims had to be transported to the hospital with broken ribs, arms and legs or heavy concussions. That fight mentality and the urge to hurt someone else does not fit into the image of self-mutilation.

'Nice, that you are here,' says Jorrit Groenvors, who is leading the interview. 'Any idea why?'

'I've been here before.'

'That is not an answer to my question,' says the detective in a friendly manner. Jozef sees fighting spirit in the eyes of Beerenkamp. The battle has begun.

'What exactly was your question?'

'Whether you know why you're here.'

Harry Beerenkamp shrugs and slumps in his chair.

'So, as far as you are concerned, we bring you home again,' says Jorrit Groenvors and stands up. 'Fine, sorry we bothered you,' he continues as he walks to Harry Beerenkamp. With a super-fast movement, he slaps his right shoulder. 'Just good friends, buddy.'

Harry Beerenkamp gives a cry and shrinks from the pain.

'Bastard,' he groans.

'I only gave a friendly pat on the back. You're not a sissy, are you?'

Harry Beerenkamp does not respond.

'Are you in the Lord or something?'

Jozef is pleasantly surprised that his colleague has seen that.

'Or did you try to beat a Jehovah's Witness because his head did not please you. Only the Jehova Witness proved to be an even bigger bastard than you, and unfortunately stronger. Maybe it was an FC Zwolle supporter, disguised as a Jehovah's Witness.'

Jozef chuckles. Perhaps Jorrit Groenvors is a football supporter in his spare time. Up to now, the performance of his colleague from Zwolle, whom he only knows as a calm and friendly man, is extremely surprising.

'Bastard,' says Harry Beerenkamp one more time.

'You know, Harry. You have the appearance against you. We are dealing with two murder cases and everyone is anxiously awaiting the announcement that we have got one of the murderers. It would be even better if that person did not commit one but two murders. Everyone thinks you are capable of that. A crazy and overgrown hooligan, that's what you are.'

Jorrit Groenvors leaves a minute-long silence. He keeps his eyes fixed on Harry Beerenkamp, who looks straight at the tabletop and now pulls with his leg and his shoulder.

'I gave you time to think. Listen carefully. I would like to hear from you a couple of things. First of all, from whom did you receive orders to arrange the harassments on the estate of Guido Landgraaf? All your much younger friends have admitted that they participated, but that you were the captain. Second, what happened at the Bergkerk in the early morning of Christmas day, between three and four? We have witnesses that saw you and Rob Meier walking on the Brink. You are, as far as we know, the last person Rob Meier has seen alive. Did you have a fight? Had he done something wrong for which you wanted to punish him? You did that more often, we heard from a reliable source. Or was something else going on? And then third. What happened next? By whom are you hurt so badly? Who has molested you and your luxury three-seater sofa? Do I have to write it down for you?'

He does not wait for the answer and walks to the flipchart in the corner of the interview room. He grabs a marker and begins to write.

1. Who ordered you to harass Lankbergen?
2. What happened to Rob Meier?
3. Who visited you on Christmas morning?

'Come on Jozef, we are going to drink coffee. Mister Beerenkamp we'll be back in a quarter of an hour. That is your first and also your last chance to tell us exactly what happened. The next step is that you can explain to the court why you are not the murderer of Rob Meier and Marieke van Boxbergen. Although our proofs are not very

strong, you have the big disadvantage that you have the appearance against you. Judges are humans like you and us, and therefore not insensitive to the fact that you've proven to be a cowardly bastard. We'll hear from you later.'

Walking down the corridor, Jozef sees that his colleague has a red head and that a single drop of sweat beads on his bald forehead.

'Heavy?' he asks.

'This is not my usual approach,' Groenvors replies.

'It seemed perfectly natural. I certainly got the impression that I always misjudged you.'

'I admit, I sometimes enjoy being an asshole.'

'We will see if the approach works. I think it was the best method. Such people only break if they have found their superior.'

'But whether he considers me as his superior, I dare to doubt.'

'In any case, you performed really well. It was a sincere pat on the back.'

'I would not be able to do that a second time. That Beerenkamp is a ferocious fighter. If he's on his qui-vive, I've already had three blows before my hand touches his shoulder.'

'I'm afraid you're right. And he's not at all impressed by the fact that you are a policeman.'

'He acts in reflexes. In fact, such a man is non compos mentis. He strikes at the slightest setback or something else he does not like.'

They walk to Jozef's room.

'I put my own coffee in my room, not be forced to drink that poison from the coffee machines here.'

'It is the same everywhere,' confirms Jorrit Groenvors. 'Will I call Piet? Hearing whether he has already made progress.'

Jozef nods, although it feels a bit awkward not to call himself.

64 Friday, December 29, 4:00 pm

Brian parks his old Mercedes on the parking lot of the Groningen police station. At the entrance he is taken care of by a man with a big gray mustache and a short beard.

'My room overlooks the parking lot. I saw you coming,' he explains. 'Albert Termunten, nice to meet you.'

The tongue of the man is unmistakably from Groningen.

'Brian Jansen, from Deventer. I'm glad I could come by so quickly.'

'I just read all the articles on the internet for an hour. You have a damn nice problem in Deventer.'

'It's a disaster. And now a colleague has been missing since this morning.'

'Since I have not read anything about it, it is not yet public knowledge. Therefore I advise you not to mention that to a stranger, even if it is a reliable policeman like me.'

Brian head turns red. The Groningen inspector is absolutely right.

'It's really affects me. I work with her quite a lot. Also in this case,' Brian apologizes.

'It's okay. Let's go to my room. There are the reports I found in the archives.'

'Have you been working here since 1968?' Brian asks as they walk up the stairs.

'I started as an errand in 1965. I will retire next year.'

'There are not many who make more than forty years of service.'

'I would like to tie it up for a few more years. But unfortunately that is not allowed. Coffee?'

'Prefer tea.'

'Also fine. Sugar?'

'Thanks.'

'Actually, that is not possible. Here you are supposed to support the Groningen beet farmer.'

'Can I do that in another way? A small donation in a collection box, or something?'

'I will introduce the idea to the Chief of Police.'

'What kind of person are you?' asks Albert Termunten as they sit together at the table in the big room. Brian looks at him uncertainly.

'You mean civil status and everything?'

'Do you prefer to read the file yourself, or would you rather listen to an oral summary of me?'

'I am a rather fanatical reader, but in this case I prefer the latter.'

'Good, then I at least spent the last hour useful. All I read confirmed what I remembered. Do you know Sint Martinus?'

'Not really. It is a student association and I know what that is. I studied in Nijmegen for two years myself.'

'Sint Martinus is a traditional corps, unmixed, own houses in the city and a severe ragging. It seems to create a bond for life.'

'They say it's the basis for an old boys network.'

'Perhaps that prospect is the reason why boys who get fresh from high school accept the humiliations of a ragging. I think nowadays it is not as bad as it used to be. In the past it was really terrible. Boys who were forced to empty a bottle of gin and then walk naked through the city. Or boys who had to spend two days in a pigsty and barely survived. Or boys who were instructed to put dog shit in their hair and then had to eat effervescent tablets so that they started foam. There are countless examples. I have seen that a boy reported to the police station, in a state of mortal fear. A society had organized a fox hunt and that boy was the fox. Every time they caught him, he could choose between a bottle of beer in one go, or a slap with a club. That boy was literally a hunted animal.'

'For me, these are stories from another planet. A normal person does not allow that to happen.'

'My idea, but not everyone thinks that way. Like a certain Gerben Wolff in 1968. The boy came from a village in the Groningen countryside and wanted to become a member of Sint Martinus. Probably he had no idea what kind of club it was and he wasn't aware that he did not belong there as a somewhat naïve and innocent farmer's son. After the general introduction of the university he reported for the association introduction. What happened there we had to reconstruct from stories of unwilling students who were involved. The story that we have formed on the basis of all interviews is that Gerben Wolff was the dupe from the beginning. The senior students immediately felt that they could let him do everything. He had to brush the toilets with a toothbrush, which he then had to use it for brushing his own teeth. For his zero-year colleagues it was obvious he was the weakest of them all and they used him to stay out of trouble themselves as much as possible. Gerben Wolff got the full blow from all sides. Probably he has become so exhausted that he died as a result.'

'What? During the introduction? Then there should have been headlines. And that did not happen, I understood.'

'You are absolutely right. The boy died a week later from a neglected pneumonia.'

'So it was very difficult to make a connection between the ragging and his death. But how did that get to the police?'

'By his parents. They said that Gerben was under the bruises and had several internal bleedings. They had heard that from the doctor.'

'But that doctor could not help him?'

'Of course he immediately sent him to the hospital, but it was already too late. He was too much weakened.'

'What a blow to those parents.'

'They were broken. I can still remember how they sat at my table one day after the death of their son. An uncle had insisted that they report to the police. But actually they did not know what they were doing. They themselves had never thought of denouncing the association for maltreatment with death as a result. They had therefore little tell us. They were taciturn people. In the file you will find the report of two interrogations.'

'Yet you decided to start an investigation.'

'Yes, but it was dubious. Not least because of the bad experiences with investigations in that world. A wall of blunt unwillingness and hostility towards intruders.'

Brian telephone conversation that afternoon was no different.

'So I and my colleague had the honor of forcing our way into the student's stronghold as youngsters. Nowadays that is not easy, but then it was even more difficult. Most members of Sint Martinus were upper-crust and felt far above the rabble. You can imagine how people reacted to two boys in their twenties in blue uniform. At that time you could study for a long time and most of the members were much older than us. It was a disconcerting experience that ruined my image of students for good. The organizers of the introduction week were talking to us while drinking beer and two of them, seemingly accidentally, overturned their glasses so that the beer splashed against our uniforms.'

The way in which the experienced Groningen inspector tells the story is rather funny, in itself. Brian can not suppress a smile.

'I can laugh about it now,' says Anton Termunten. 'But then I was furious. And it got even worse when we were admitted to the boardroom. Guido Landgraaf sat there, slumped into a large leather armchair at the head of the table, cigar in his mouth, and a glass of whiskey in his hand. "Drinks, boys?" he asked. We could of course not accept that. I feasted my eyes. On the one hand it was a big mess, on the other hand it had an unprecedented grandeur to me. On the wall there were paintings of former board members, on the board table stood some gigantic candles whose candle wax had flowed freely over the immense table for decades. Between the paintings were coats of arms and other medieval-like odds and ends. 'Please, give yourselves a good look,' said Landgraaf. 'It is probably the first and last time you enter this room.' The tone was set immediately. My colleague picked the chair that was closest to Landgraaf and wanted to sit down. 'What do we think we are going to do?'

Landgraaf asked in his punctuated tone. 'Did I say you could sit down there? A simple policeman I really can not have so close to me. My karma gets confused of that.' He pointed to the other end of the table. 'That seems like a good place for you. The acoustics are perfect, so we do not have to scream to understand each other.' We were completely overwhelmed and obeyed submissively to what Landgraaf said. That was also a lesson for life, as you will understand.'

Brian nods.

‘That’s what my boss always says. The harder you fail, the harder you grow.’

‘I will remember that,’ says Anton Termunten and sighs deeply once. ‘You can imagine how the conversation went. "Are you aware that a member of your association has died?" I asked. "I can not deal with the aches and pains of all members. For me, only the main lines are important," he replied. "And is it of any interest to you that we suspect that his death was caused during the introduction period of your association,” I firmly continued. "On what date did the member in question die?" Asked Landgraaf, to conclude that the introduction period had already been over for a week. "We suspect that he died as a result of things that happened during the ragging." Guido Landgraaf looked at us scornfully. "Suspicion, suspicion. Suspicion doesn’t get us any further in this world, does it? Knowing, that’s what it’s about. That is why we are at the university. I suspect that the member concerned tried to rape a pig and that the pig did not like that. You never know what those farmers in rural areas are doing." My colleague stepped up to biff that arrogant student. Fortunately I could stop him. Otherwise we and not he would have ended up in the dock. We did not stand a chance in hell of the clever haughtiness of Guido Landgraaf. After a very unsuccessful questions, we slinked off.’

‘And your boss was satisfied with that?’

‘He started the investigation as a moral obligation towards the boy’s parents, not because he expected anything from it.’

‘So that was the end of the story?’

‘Yes, that was, until we received an anonymous letter about two months later. It is in the file. The author of the letter thought Guido Landgraaf was responsible for the death of Gerben Wolff. He wrote that Guido Landgraaf had chosen him as a special victim of harassment and humiliation that belonged to Sint Martinus’s ragging period. You have to read the letter, it describes everything that had happened. Anyway, the boy was completely exhausted at the end of the period and then had to spend half a day in a cold lake. As a result, he has contracted pneumonia to which he later succumbed.’

‘An anonymous letter?’

‘We thought the letter was written by a member who had remorse. At that time we dealt with the matter differently. We ordered almost all students involved to come to the police station and had everyone personally questioned. Most of them denied that it had happened or said they did not notice it. A few recognized that he had the impression that a number of people took a pique to Gerben Wolff. People also confirmed that Gerben was jokingly prevented from coming out of the water. But then, that kind of messing about was part of it. Everyone knew that the introduction week for new members was not exactly fun.’

‘And Landgraaf?’

‘He laughed at us challenged us to make a case of it. Every fool could write such a letter. Or perhaps the letter was written by a friend of him who wanted to play a joke. He was not in any way impressed, not from the death of Gerben Wolff, nor from the letter that designated him as guilty.’

‘And the writer of the letter is never outdated?’

‘It could be any student who had been there.’

‘Was it a handwritten?’

Anton Termunten nods.

‘Have you considered taking a paper test from everyone?’

‘That was a possibility. Only the commissioner had meanwhile intervened in the matter and he wondered what that would bring. Suppose we found the writer, so what?’

‘He could testify against Guido Landgraaf.’

‘That would have been his word against that of Landgraaf and his lackeys. And to be honest, I think the Chief Commissioner wanted to get rid of the case as quickly as possible. He soberly established that Gerben Wolff had essentially acted voluntarily by joining that club’

‘I wonder if such a reasoning would stand up in court.’

‘As a greenhorn I was not in the position to object to my boss. And to be honest, I think he was right. It was clear that he did not want to burn his fingers to a case against a powerful student society whose members had powerful fathers.’ He looks at his watch. ‘I have to go now. As far as I am concerned, you take the entire file with you to Deventer. Then I will get it back in due course. Is that a good deal?’

‘Sounds fine.’

Brian decides to go back to Deventer first and to dig through the file at home. He doubts if he will call Jozef right away. Although the information about the death of Gerben Wolff does not contain any direct indications of a specific person targeting at Guido Landgraaf, it proves that Landgraaf’s claim that he has no enemies is not true. Brian checks Jozef’s number but receives the reception. The agent reports that Jozef is busy with an interrogation.

'Piet has found three Walstraat residents who are above any suspicion and know a large number of other residents. He is going through all the Walstraat houses with them. He expects only a few to remain,' says Jorrit Groenvors.

'Piet is good,' says Jozef.

Silently the detectives drink their coffee.

'Great coffee.'

'My only footing in this case,' Jozef says. 'Making sure the coffee keeps tasting me.'

'You sound almost cynical. I do not know you like that, Jozef. Is it because of the disappearance of your colleague?'

'It indeed terribly annoys me.'

'Because you feel responsible for her?'

'More or less. I know she is old and wise enough to take care of herself, that she has had a good education, and so on. What I mainly suffer from is that I have not dealt with this whole case properly. From the beginning I have been overtaken by the events. Nowhere is a story created, the fragments remain fragments.'

'To be frankly I don't have an overall picture either. From experience I know how annoying it is when an outsider is put on your case, it feels like a license of inability. Nevertheless, I think that in this case it was a good procedure to separate the case of Rob Meier from the Marieke van Boxbergen case. There is a connection, that is clear. But sometimes you have to let go of connections in order to simplify the puzzle.'

Jozef nods. He understands what his colleague means, but does not feel it that way. In fact, a case is never too complex. The motives of a murderer are always simple, both murders are committed straightforward, a blow to the head and knife stabbing. What makes the case complex? First, the silence of Guido Landgraaf and secondly the missing link. That thought has firmly established itself in Jozef's head. He overlooks something elementary, something that is lying in front of them, ready to be picked up.

'Shall we? Our fighter boss has been thinking long enough.'

'Let's give him the final blow.'

Gerard Maas meets them in the corridor. He looks bewildered.

'Jozef, do you have a minute?'

'Not really. We go to Harry Beerenkamp, the man we were looking for, the prime suspect of murdering Rob Meier.'

'Did he confess?'

Jozef shakes his head and looks at Jorrit.

'Five minutes?'

'No problem.'

Jozef walks behind Gerard Maas to his room.

'We have to do something with Guido Landgraaf. Meanwhile his lawyer calls me and demands his release. If not, he must be charged. Increasing the pressure is a frequently used method for enforcing errors. The fact that he is calling me directly also contributes to this. I'm going to consult with the Officer. Will I aim at an indictment?'

Jozef takes a minute to think. His feeling says that Guido Landgraaf did not do it, even though the facts speak differently. On the other hand, he understands the situation.

'I don't understand why he does not free himself. His alibi is no good and he can do something about it. The idiotic thing is that that damn lawyer has more or less obliged him to keep silent. Maybe you can persuade him to speak out.'

'So you still think he did not do it?'

'That's my feeling. But what is that worth in this case?' says Jozef gloomily.

'Come on, Jozef. This is just a messy case without a sparkle of luck so far,' says Gerard Maas. 'I know what to do.'

Jorrit Groenvors is still in the hallway.

'Landgraaf's lawyer is raising the pressure.'

'You have to be careful with those guys that earn more than 400 Euros per hour.'

Harry Beerenkamp hardly responds when they enter the interview room. With a short, angry look he shows his displeasure.

'And?' Jorrit Groenvors opens the conversation. 'Where do you want to start?'

'I did not kill Rob Meier,' Harry Beerenkamp says and remains silent.

'And? In our view you were the last one that saw Rob Meier alive.'

'He was beaten to death by a man who walked there.'

'Can you describe that man?'

‘Not long, not short, no special clothes, and I think he had black hair, and his face was pale. I could not see more.’

‘And that man just beat Rob Meier?’

Harry Beerenkamp clears his throat.

‘Rob had drunk too much and bothered that man. He did not like that and knocked Rob down.’

‘Behind the church?’

‘No, at first he let himself be pushed by Rob.’

‘Actually Rob wanted to punch out. Is it not?’

Harry Beerenkamp nods weakly.

‘And why didn’t you help your mate?’

‘Too much fuss. Moreover, I was shocked by the way that man approached Rob. The right one that Rob put down came very quickly.’

‘You were scared.’

‘Uh, in effect, that’s what happened.’

‘Is there perhaps a witness who can confirm this? You understand we can not accept your statement just like that.’

‘As far as I know, there is no other witness. Yet it is like I said.’

Jozef believes him. He looks at Jorrit Groenvors. He seems to agree.

‘Can you describe the man again?’

‘Average length, one meter seventy-five or so, thin, pale face, black hair, no glasses. Furthermore, I could not see it well in the dark.’

‘I will pass that on to Piet,’ says Jozef. From the hardly noticeable but clearly surprised reaction of Jorrit Groenvors, Jozef concludes that he is one step ahead of his colleague this time.

‘Then the next two points,’ continues Jorrit Groenvors when Joseph is back. ‘On your computer we found emails that were sent by Guido Landgraaf. The address was guido.landgraaf@hotmail.com. Was Guido Landgraaf your principal for the jokes you made on the estate and the attack on his wife?’

‘I did not kill his wife,’ Harry Beerenkamp replies. ‘I don’t know anything about that,’ he adds nervously. For the first time Jozef senses trace of panic.

‘I did not ask that. We will talk about the death of her later.’

‘I have never spoken to Guido Landgraaf.’

‘But you did get emails from him.’

‘Eh, yes.’

‘Didn’t you think that was strange?’

‘Well, maybe. On the other hand he paid well. I didn’t object to getting a few cents of that fifty million taxpayers money back.’

Jozef can not suppress a smile. That is how he might have said it himself.

‘How did he pay?’

‘A week after the execution of the assignment.’

‘How did you get the money? And how much did you get?’

‘Cash, in an envelope. Once per post. Usually he had it delivered by someone.’

‘Delivered?’

‘Coincidentally I saw that someone was putting the envelope in my letterbox.’

‘And that was not Guido Landgraaf?’

‘He didn’t look like him.’

‘But you just said that you had never spoken to him before.’

‘He has often been on TV. But again, it was dark and I do not know for sure.’

‘How much money?’

‘Always a few thousand Euros.’

‘And part of it was for your friends?’

‘They didn’t know I got the money. I didn’t force them to join me. Otherwise I would have done it alone.’

‘So, you really don’t know who was your client?’

‘I assumed it was Guido Landgraaf. How should I know what inspires that kind of people?’

Again, Jozef believes what Harry Beerenkamp says. Jorrit Groenvors looks questioningly at Jozef.

‘You know more about this. Have I forgotten something?’ he asks.

Jozef shakes his head. He is curious about the visit on the first Christmas morning.

‘And then the most painful episode. Who has hurt you so badly? And not once, but twice. First on Christmas morning, and again today. Was it the same person who killed Rob Meier?’

Harry Beerenkamp puts on a morose expression. He shakes his head and looks at the table.

‘Even if you do not say anything, it is quite clear to us what happened and why it happened. The cross on your forehead speaks volumes. First, the big unknown was aware of what had happened earlier that evening. Second,

he managed to find you. We have indications that someone has observed you and your friends that night. Probably that person followed you and stroke hard the next morning. But why? Was it an act of revenge? I don't think so. I bet it was a violent way to make something clear? Am I right?' 'He told me to stop. Unnecessary. For me the party was over anyway.'

'That is clear. The next question is more important. Did you know that person?' 'No.'

'Was it the same man who knocked down Rob Meier?' 'No.'

'Did that person take you today?' 'A painful expression appears on Harry Beerenkamp's face. It is clear that is agony caused by the humiliation rather than the physical pain.'

'I was afraid to be charged with the murder of Rob and fled. A friend of mine had a place for me in Amsterdam.'

'The gym where the police have arrested you.'

Harry Beerenkamp nods.

'I was training when I suddenly saw that same guy. He had apparently discovered where I was. You understand what happened to me. I wanted to catch that guy. And luckily I hit him hard. I think he is now also in his bed. Unfortunately, I was too careless. He was so easily taken by me that I underestimated him. I did not pay attention, and then he planted a knife in my leg. Damn.'

For the first time in the conversation, some energy speaks from the words of Harry Beerenkamp. He reports a fight that he has lost, but no more than that. He is unhappy like a football player who had lost a match. The next time he will be extra motivated to eliminate his opponent.

'And you still do not know who it is.'

'No, I swear. This morning I saw that he had put on a wig and probably his mustache was also false.'

'Was he from Deventer?'

'Certainly not. He had an Amsterdam accent. I would have known him otherwise.'

'Did he say anything else on Christmas morning?'

Harry Beerenkamp shakes his head.

'So he did not mention the name Guido Landgraaf?'

He shakes his head again. Jorrit Groenvors looks at Jozef. He looks at the door as a sign that he has heard enough.

'Thanks so far,' says Jorrit Groenvors kindly. 'You understand we cannot release you, but I think you have shown yourself a service. If you remember anything you haven't told us, do not hesitate to pass it on immediately.'

Jozef can not avoid the impression that Harry Beerenkamp is relieved.

66 Friday, December 29, 4:00 pm

Ellen shuts the book of which she has read fifteen pages with difficulty. It is impossible to keep her thoughts with Joyce's anything but easy text. Moreover, she got cold. She walks around the room a few times. Maybe she should start looking for an escape route. Some physical exercise will at least warm her. She pulls open the second drawer of the buffet to see if there are any useful tools in it. As expected, there is no sturdy hammer or large screwdriver. A pair of pliers, a pair of scissors, a knife. Stuff of an electrician. The scissors seems to be the most useful.

The further examination of the does not reveal thing she already knows. Behind the white wallpaper are sheets of plywood or chipboard, and behind them is probably the insulating material with which John Brooks has made the cellar sound proof. To find a weak spot she has to tear off the wallpaper.

Despondent she plumbs back on the couch. Involuntarily, her thoughts wander off to Norman. Where is he at the moment? And what is he doing? Is he in her house at the Ankersteeg? Or did he go to his own apartment? With the help of a friend, he tried to find out who had created the hotmail address of Guido Landgraaf. Maybe he is doing that. She can not prevent gloomy thought to emerge. What exactly is it between Norman and her? Is he the man of her life? Will they have children together later? And when are they finally going to live together? At the same time she sees the face of Max, her former boyfriend. What did he say when she told about Norman?

'Sounds like you're a good match.' She did not ask what Max meant exactly. Why do people say that Norman and she fit together so well? Max is not the only one. Jozef, friends, her parents say it the same. Everyone thinks that she and Norman are a perfect couple. They never said that about her and Max. Benevolently they said that Max was a special boy, that he had creative ideas, that he was doing an interesting study. Underneath that she always felt a disapproving opinion: she actually deserved better. Did she take that into account in her decision to break their relationship?

The reunion with Max in Amsterdam has made one thing clear: she is not separated from him yet. Is it fair to compare Norman with him? Norman is a great guy, that is beyond dispute. Does it make sense to think about it?

Yes, of course. Once, she will have to make a definitive choice. She is startled by that thought. Did she not make it yet? What is behind the hesitation to start living together? Did she also have those doubts before seeing Max again? Is she sufficiently in love with Norman to make a choice for life?

Damn! Stop that! Upset she walks to the wall. With her fingernail she teases a piece of wallpaper and starts to pull at it. Only a few fragments come off. This has been the work of a professional decorator. She scratches pieces of wallpaper from the wall at various places, until she strikes a small unevenness. There she removes all wallpaper. It is a hole that has been filled up. She also removes the filler. A crosshead screw emerges. Since she does not have a suitable screwdriver, she will never be able to remove it. Desperately, she wonders whether there are other possibilities. Can she saw a hole in the wooden wall with a knife or scissors? A flurry of desperation overtakes her and she begins to cry. What the hell is she doing? She will be dying here slowly. What will people say about her? Own fault. She should not have been so stubborn. And who is at the front of the funeral procession? Norman, or Max? Or are they walking fraternally next to each other? She dries her tears and sits down on the couch again. Her mouth is dry as cork. She grabs a bottle of cola out of the box that John Brooks left behind.

67 Friday, December 29, 16.30

'What do you think?' Jorrit Groenvors asks.

'I think he spoke the truth.'

'So he did not kill Rob Meier?'

'No, even though it is a strange story.'

'Rob Meier wants to beat up an innocent citizen, a typical case of senseless violence, just because he had to prove himself. Unfortunately for him, that innocent citizen appeared to have a powerful right arm.'

'If we follow the Beerenkamp version, that's what it comes down to,' Jozef concludes.

'It is not likely we'll find any more witnesses to confirm the Beerenkamp story. That's why we have to find the man with the black hair. I think I'm going to Piet right away.'

'I first want to know if Gerard Maas has spoken with Landgraaf's lawyer or the Prosecutor.'

When Jorrit Groenvors had left the room, Jozef picks up the phone and dials his own number.

'It's me,' he says as his wife Margot picks up. It feels good to hear her voice. He explains the state of affairs and expresses the hope that they will find Ellen unharmed.

'I hope you're right,' says Margot. Jozef knows that she is trying not to bother him with her anxiety. He also knows that it is even more difficult for her than for him. She can only wait patiently for news. He promises to call her immediately if new developments have occurred.

He leans backwards, stares at the white wall and recounts the conversation with Harry Beerenkamp. What exactly did he say? He received assignments from someone, probably not Guido Landgraaf. He did not kill Rob Meier. On Christmas morning he was beaten up by someone who knew about the burning crosses. That person summoned Beerenkamp to avoid Lankbergen in the future. The same person must have acted on behalf of Guido Landgraaf, there is no other way. That immediately explains the cautious attitude of Guido Landgraaf towards the police. He did not need the police to stop the bullying. He arranged that himself. Suddenly, Jozef understands why Landgraaf says nothing at all. He thinks that the man he hired to counteract Harry Beerenkamp killed Rob Meier. If so, he is afraid to be held responsible as the man's client. Jozef slaps the table with his hand. That is it! If Landgraaf knows that Rob Meier is beaten to death by a casual passer-by, and not by the man he hired, he will talk. Gerard Maas must know that! Jozef walks through the hallway to the room of Gerard Maas. He recognizes the loud voice of Public Prosecutor Hartman and knocks on the door.

Half an hour later, the Prosecutor agrees with Jozef and Gerard Maas that it is too early for an indictment. They agree that Gerard Maas will talk to Guido Landgraaf himself and try to convince him that it is better for everyone if he cooperates and tells what he knows.

Jozef returns to his room. It is dead quiet and every step in the long corridor causes a hollow reverberation. He is aware of his own presence in a strange way. What is he doing here? Finding Ellen, solving the murder of Marieke van Boxbergen, fathoming Guido Landgraaf, waiting for Brian, finding out who twice stabbed Harry Beerenkamp, understanding everything. Very sharp images from the past weeks roll across the screen in his head, faster and faster. Just until they suddenly stand still and form a multicolored palette. Jozef can choose which image he brings forward and magnifies. It is as if he sees the sun for the first time after a long walk in the mist.

Now he sees what he has always omitted. Although he is almost certain that Guido Landgraaf did not kill his wife, he never seriously examined the hypothesis that he is innocent. He focused exclusively on the facts and possible connections between the two murders and the intimidations on the estate. That has clouded his view. Suppose that Guido Landgraaf is not the culprit. That raises a number of questions. How did his body material

get under the nails of his wife? Why didn't they examine Landgraaf's body for traces of a fight? How did the real killer get hold of a cloth with Landgraaf's body odor? How did Landgraaf's fingerprints get on the murder weapon?

Why does he ask himself these questions for the first time? The hypothesis that Guido Landgraaf has nothing to do with the murder is not new, he realizes. He already discussed it with Brian once. However, he has to admit did not want to face the consequences of this hypothesis before.

Why did Landgraaf, despite his innocence, use an unverifiable alibi? That is also an interesting question.

Suppose an unknown person killed Marieke van Boxbergen. How did that person get Landgraaf's body material, how did the murderer get to a cloth with Landgraaf's body odor on it? This is only possible if the killer knows Landgraaf, or is somehow close to him. This question can best be answered by Landgraaf himself. Jozef quickly walks to Gerard Maas to share his thoughts.

Back in his room, Jozef does not know what to do. Restlessly he stands up and sits down again, then walks with the coffee machine to the bathroom to throw away the old coffee and fetch water, but halfway down he does not feel like coffee at all. He knows he only wants one thing, going to the Walstraat to closely follow the search for Ellen. Jorrit Groenvors will not send him away, but he also knows that he should actually not be there because the Rob Meier case is not his. Should he be waiting here for Brian? He has reported not to be back before six o'clock. Actually it is better to eat something, the rest of the evening it might not be possible.

When he has put on his coat he remembers that he should call Norman. So he takes off his jacket again and dials the 06 number he wrote down this morning.

'Hello, Norman. Jozef here. I don't have any news yet, but I would like to keep you informed of the developments. Does that suit you?'

'I've just stepped into Ellen's house.'

Jozef tell in all honesty about Ellen's voicemail message on his mobile and that they are now investigating all the houses in the Walstraat.

'What do you think, Jozef?'

Jozef was already afraid of that question. Should he tell Norman that he deeply believes in a good outcome? Or is it unfair to create expectations for which the factual basis is lacking?

'I expected the question,' Jozef replies thoughtfully. 'But he is difficult to answer. The facts in themselves don't give cause for optimism. It is not often that an agent is missing. We try to prevent it from being in the newspaper tomorrow, but it might be possible that the front page of newspapers will have some panicky headlines. Yet we do not know more than I have just told you. To come back to your question. I am not desperate. My feeling says we will find Ellen alive and well. You understand my reluctance to say so. I don't want to give false hope.'

'It sounds strange, but I'm pretty sure that the connection between me and Ellen has not been broken. So I think she is still alive.'

'Maybe it does work that way. I'll call you as soon as I know more. Do not hesitate to call me.'

'I will. I am also expecting a phone call from that friend of mine who is trying to find out who created the hotmail address of Guido Landgraaf. As soon as I hear something I'll let you know.'

'If it works, that would be nice.'

'I am only trying to make a small contribution. Thanks for your call anyway.'

Rain hits Jozef in the face when he steps out of the revolving door of the police station. Where will he go? He decides to eat a fries at the snack bar in the Nieuwstraat. That always tastes well and does not take much time. If that Norman friend does not get to the Ministry of Economic Affairs tomorrow, he will raise the matter with Gerard. There is a good chance that the national criminal investigation will interfere, with all the resulting consequences. Jozef prefers to postpone the moment that this case is taken from him for a while.

68 Friday, December 29, 6 PM

Jozef praises his decision to go to the cafetaria. The fries and the frikandel with peanut sauce have an unexpectedly positive effect on his mood. He oversees the case and knows exactly where to focus on over the next 24 hours. His most important insight is that the murderer of Marieke van Boxbergen, if it was not Landgraaf himself, must have been able to get body material from him. With a little cooperation from Landgraaf, they must be able to search for the great unknown in a targeted manner. In addition, the track of Brian seems to offer starting points.

He stands up to settle. Then his mobile phone beeps. It is Brian.

'I have just returned and am in my room. The file from Groningen offers very interesting information. I want to talk to you about that.'

'I'm coming right away.'

Brian is already waiting at the table in Jozef's room.

'You have even made coffee,' Jozef says in surprise. He is still unaccustomed to such initiatives from Brian, although Brian has slowly but surely crept out of his shell over the past two years. Jozef knows that Ellen played an important role in this. Due to her ambitious impatience, she was much more annoyed than Jozef in the often passive and wait-and-see attitude of Brian.

'Tell me. What did our Groningen colleagues know about Guido Landgraaf?'

Brian repeats the story Anton Termunten told him.

'Please, read the letter from the anonymous writer,' says Brian, handing Jozef a yellowed A4.

Dear Chief of Police,

In this way I would like to point out a crime that took place some weeks ago. Gerben Wolff died of the consequences of severe abuse during the introduction week of the Groningen student association Sint Martinus. The sole responsibility for his death rests with Guido Landgraaf, the president of the association. For reasons unknown to me, he had chosen Gerben Wolff to indulge his lust for power. He personally ordered other newcomers to wake Gerben up every hour by hitting him hard with a broomstick. During the day he instructed Gerben to follow him everywhere and to ensure that his shoes did not get dirty from the mud of the campsite. Gerben was allowed to use two carpets for this and therefore the entire day he did nothing but pick up carpets lay them in front of Guido Landgraaf's feet. The combination of this effort and not being allowed to sleep caused a great physical exhaustion. On the last day Gerben was ordered by Guido Landgraaf to take off his clothes and swim naked in the lake next site of the introduction camp. After Gerben had been swimming up and down, Guido Landgraaf forbade him to come out of the water because his naked appearance was offensive. Gerben spent four hours in the cold water.

The exhaustion and hypothermia have led to pneumonia of which Gerben Wolff has died.

I am writing this to you because I believe that Guido Landgraaf should be held responsible for the death of Gerben Wolff. In an association like Sint Martinus all members have to obey the president. That is one of the foundations of the solidarity within the association. The president may therefore be expected to be aware of what power he has and what influence his words have.

Yours sincerely, an anonymous witness who wishes to remain a member of Sint Martinus despite the tragedy that occurred to Gerben Wolff.

Jozef reads the letter twice.

'It seems to me that, provided that the facts described can be proven, there is sufficient cause for criminal prosecution.'

'That was also the opinion of the detective I spoke to, Albert Termunten. Despite the skepticism of the former Chief of Police, they were allowed to start a new investigation. That, however, led to nothing. Whoever questioned them, Sint Martinus remained a wall of arrogant unwillingness.'

'So the second chance for the Groningen police could not be converted into an indictment,' Jozef concludes.

'Nevertheless this letter seemed important to me. Because it is a proof that Guido Landgraaf's statement that he has no enemies is not correct.'

'I will certainly take it with me if Landgraaf is willing to talk,' Jozef says.

'Is he going to?'

'Landgraaf can choose between talking or an indictment for murdering his wife. Gerard Maas gets him talking. The evidence is strong enough.'

'I hope so.'

'Do you still have tasks on your list?'

'I will go through this big file with reports of all interrogations. Maybe some relevant information is hidden somewhere. This also applies to the conversations I had yesterday. I will put my notes down on paper. I also have another lead: Abel Aldarvisur, the Icelandic guru who got Landgraaf back on the right track. It is clear to me that the life of Guido Landgraaf can be subdivided in the period before and after Aldarvisur. The image evoked by the various stories is that he has transformed Landgraaf from a power-hungry potentate into a non-unsympathetic leader.'

‘Or in someone who knows better how to hide his psychopathic tendencies. For me, the story of that student status is proof that Landgraaf is a psychopath. I’ve read somewhere that many top managers suffer from psychopathic traits.’

‘If I can find Mr. Aldarvisur, I will certainly ask him.’

67 Friday, December 29th, 7.30pm

‘He’s all yours,’ says Gerard Maas. ‘Give him another few minutes and he is ready to make an unofficial statement. No recordings or notes are taken during the conversation. Actually, he felt that I had to do the interview, but I refused. He could choose between you or no one.’

‘Well done, Gerard,’ Jozef grins. It is not the first time that the district manager proves to be of decisive importance at decisive moments. ‘I’m curious. What has changed him?’

‘Exactly what you thought: he was shocked by the news about the death of Rob Meier. He obviously thought that Rob Meier had been killed by the same person who had beaten up Harry Beerenkamp. In that case, he would have been at least co-responsible as a client. I have been able to refute that. In addition, I have told him that I can only interpret the attitude and approach of his lawyer Louis Breur in one way. Breur assumes that Landgraaf is indeed the perpetrator. That is why he opted for the method of maximum opposition, all with the aim of throwing sand into the machine of the Public Prosecution and the police.’

‘Was he susceptible to that? He is not easily impressed.’

‘If he changes his mind, do not hesitate to tell him that the Public Prosecutor has given him only twenty-four hours of respite. Tomorrow, at the end of the day, that term will expire, then he will be charged with murder.’

‘Okey-doke, chief.’

Guido Landgraaf looks at Jozef neutrally friendly when he enters the interrogation room. He seems to be completely at ease.

‘Have you had any coffee?’ Jozef asks.

‘Nothing but compliments about the care here. The coffee was fine.’

‘Then let’s start. Normally I want to make some peripheral movements during such a conversation, but that does not seem necessary in your case. I just have a number of concrete questions, which I expect you to answer in a concrete way.’

‘Sounds logical.’

‘Your alibi is weak. You said that you had an appointment in Nunspeet with someone who wanted to write your biography. Unfortunately, no one has been able to verify that. You do not know the name of that person, no publisher intends to publish your biography, writing a biography is a process that does not necessarily have to start on Boxing Day. In short, that story is not or only partly true. What is it really like?’

Guido Landgraaf is not able to conjure up the normal reassuring smile on his face the same way as Jozef has experienced before. The change of facial expression remains stuck in a painful grimace.

‘You immediately put the finger on a sore spot. And you are right. I did not have an appointment with the author of my biography. The plan to write an autobiography is indeed in an advanced stage, but for that I would never agree to meet on Boxing Day and certainly not in Nunspeet.’

Guido Landgraaf stares at the wall and thinks.

‘No, I was called that morning by a man who claimed that he was working on an end-of-year article for De Telegraaf about successful mergers and acquisitions of the past year. Obviously, the establishment of ZONNU also belonged to this, but there has been rumours that the financial basis under the new company was full of holes. As a journalist, he felt it was his duty to investigate those rumours. I had to respond to the journalist’s request to meet me that same afternoon.’

This story is true, there is no doubt about that. Despite the tragedy of the situation, Jozef can not completely suppress a smile. At the same time, it takes away Jozef’s last doubt. Guido Landgraaf was indeed in Nunspeet and thus has a clear alibi.

‘I was deliberately lured by someone who knew flawlessly what I would respond to: the prospect of a laudatory article in De Telegraaf and a rumour that could ruin my life’s work.’

Jozef nods as firmly as possible. The possibility that Guido Landgraaf will expand on his own vanity in an impulse of openness suddenly feels uncomfortable.

‘Although I can not verify this story, I think it is plausible. But that is only a feeling.’

‘For capable people with a solid portion of relevant work experience, feeling is at least as valuable as logical thinking. Unfortunately, the concepts of feeling and intuition are often misused by incapable managers who confuse it with their emotional regurgitation. It is not surprising that decisions made by such figures have no foundation.’

Jozef also wants to dismiss this remark as unverifiable, but controls himself. He depends on the good will of Landgraaf.

'Do you have any idea who lured you to Nunspeet under false pretenses?' he asks. 'Did you perhaps recognize his voice?'

Landgraaf firmly shakes his head.

'Unfortunately. Then I come to the next point. I suspect that you have asked or hired someone to put an end to the incidents at Lankbergen. Is that right?'

'Yes. I did. The attack on my wife and her horse was the reason to take matters into their own hands, in addition to the efforts of the police. Not that I have no confidence in the police, but two people know more than one.'

Jozef nods in agreement, although he suspects that Landgraaf has done it earlier than he now claims.

'That's why I approached a kind of private detective. He did a very energetic job and called me the day after Christmas to say that we would not be bothered anymore. You can imagine my reaction, with the police in house to investigate the murder of my wife. Then I heard about the boy who had been beaten to death at the Bergkerk. If that was the work of the person I hired, I was more or less responsible for that. Fortunately, your boss has informed me of the latest developments. I hope you understand my reluctance to speak.'

This time Jozef agrees without reservation. Although he still finds it hard to immerse himself in the person of Guido Landgraaf, he manages to imagine his nightmare-like scenario: his wife is murdered, he is wrongly considered the main suspect and is also unintentionally responsible for the murder of Rob Meier. From this point of view, it is a miracle that Landgraaf is still so calm.

'Do you know what your private detective did?'

'I did not know that, but your boss told me. He has tackled that Harry Beerenkamp firmly. Who I do not know, by the way.'

It is obvious that the last addition refers to the conversation in which he confronted Landgraaf with the hotmail address in his own name, which was resolutely dismissed by Landgraaf as nonsense.

'Was that your assignment too?'

'No, I asked the private detective to put an end to the series of incidents. I thought it was of no interest to know how he would do that. That was naïve, looking back.'

'So you did not know the working method of that man.'

'I got his name from an acquaintance. The man is officially registered as a private detective.'

'Can you give us the name of the man?'

Guido Landgraaf shakes his head with a smile.

'The attack that your detective committed on the house of Harry Beerenkamp and the person himself can be characterized as a criminal offense. Shouldn't that be a reason for you to give up the name anyway?' Jozef asks.

'I am afraid not. In my opinion it is only a matter for the police if Beerenkamp has reported certain facts. And as far as I know, he did not.'

Touché, Jozef thinks.

'I suppose you only had two contacts with your private detective, the first to tell him what you expected him to achieve and the second to tell him he could forget about the agreed reward. Is that right?'

'You are right. Perhaps I have underestimated you in recent weeks.'

Jozef does not know what to say. Why does Landgraaf say this kind of thing? Is it part of a power game? Does Landgraaf make a showdown of every conversation?

'I can not judge that,' Jozef replies. 'Maybe I will persuade Beerenkamp to make a declaration after all. So far our conversation has been about you. Let's talk about someone else. For this I propose as a working hypothesis that your alibi is correct and that you did not kill your wife.'

Jozef is waiting for a response from Landgraaf, but it does not work out.

'Then a number of questions arise. How did body material with your DNA end up under your woman's nails? How did the perpetrator get your body odor on both the murder weapon and the cloth in which the murder weapon was buried? I conclude that the perpetrator must also have had access to your home before the day of the murder. Only you can help us with that.'

While Joseph says so, he is startled by the thought that crosses his mind. Does the estate employ staff? Landgraaf himself will not be mowing the grass, thinning the forest and blowing off the leaves from the driveway. Such a large and old house must be maintained properly.

'Do you employ personnel?' he asks.

'Only Geert Hadeking. A reliable man who has been working on the estate for more than forty years. He is about sixty and immediately told me that he would like to continue until he was sixty-five or even longer. Because I could use his knowledge and experience very well, I rewarded him a generous pay rise. Which does not mean that I have to look for a replacement in the coming year. He can learn from Hadeking for a number of years. Moreover, I have discovered that there are quite a lot of jobs that Hadeking has no time for.'

'And then there is no other staff? No permanent housekeeper or other help at home?'

'Marieke was looking for someone who could help her cleanse. But that had not worked to date.'

'So she cleaned the whole house herself?'

'In fact she did. Although I was always willing to roll up my sleeves myself. Moreover, we only used a small part of the house. We were actually not much further than the stage of planning. The intention was to restore the whole house in old splendor and create luxurious guest rooms.'

'To rent out?'

'Not necessarily. As far as I was concerned, we would use them to invite friends. But we didn't feel like rushing to finish things.'

'So, if I understand correctly, Mr. Hadeking is the only one who walks around the estate every day.'

'Indeed. Of course he uses plumbers, carpenters and green workers if he deems it necessary. He has complete freedom in the way he gets things working.'

'Does he also live on the estate?'

'No, he lives a few miles away. In a small house in a forest that also belongs to the estate.'

'Have you seen him since Boxing Day?'

'No, I had given him a week off.'

'So maybe he does not know what happened?'

'Probably someone told him or he read it in the newspaper.'

'You have no objection when I visit him, I assume.'

Landgraaf shakes his head.

'Then I have one last question. Do you know Gerben Wolff?'

The open gaze of Guido Landgraaf stiffens and narrows.

'What are you up to? Do you also want to have my baby photos?'

'When we heard that someone had closed the driveway with dead pigs, I asked you for the first time about people who might hate you. Later I asked that question again. Since you have not been very communicative in that area, we dig into your life ourselves.'

Guido Landgraaf sighs.

'What is your next step? Re-do the research of that time again? So what? What if there is someone who claims that I have mistreated Gerben Wolff? Or that the anonymous writer does report this time? What then? That case was then closed and is still closed. Gerben Wolff died, due to the effects of pneumonia. Yes, it is possible that the ragging caused pneumonia. Yes, I was then president. Yes, I did not spare that boy. However, he was there himself. I could not know how he felt. If he went too far, exhausted himself too much, that was primarily his own responsibility.'

'Gerben Wolff is dead. We are not talking about that. We are not talking about your responsibility at that time either. We look for motives to make your life miserable. And we have encountered this case. I understand that you can not imagine that someone is still bothered by those events. Is that right?'

'During such an introduction period things happen and I know quite a lot of people who later regret having been involved or ask themselves how they could have let it happen. It is a tradition that forms the basis for a stable association. Every aspiring member must show that he is willing to offer something to become a member. However, you are also expected to stand up for yourself and indicate your limit. If you draw a clear line yourself, it will be respected.'

'That is obvious. For the moment I have no more questions. Maybe you want to say something?'

'No, I just hope that this nightmare will soon be over.'

Jozef thanks Guido Landgraaf by shaking his hand. The fifty-million-year-old man's hand is clammy.

Jozef walks to his room. Somewhere in the back of his head a question lurks. Part of the story of Guido Landgraaf pinches. It has something to do with something that he has seen or heard before.

With great strides he walks to the cell to which Guido Landgraaf is being brought back by the agent. From a distance he sees that the agent says something to Landgraaf and then prepares to lock the cell door.

'Wait a minute,' Jozef calls. The agent opens the door again. 'I have one more question,' Jozef explains and steps into the cell. 'You were talking about Geert Hadeking. I understood that he is a real outdoor man who does a lot of work around the house.'

'Right.'

'The first time I visited Lankbergen, you were wounded. That morning you had hit your thigh with the chainsaw. I suppose the felling of trees is a pre-eminently job for Geert Hadeking?'

Landgraaf can not hide the fact that he is shocked.

'What do you mean? You do not think ..?'

Jozef does not say anything.

'That is unthinkable. Geert Hadeking is one of the rare people that is thoroughly reliable. Feel free to contact him. With your knowledge of people you will draw the same conclusion as I did.'

'Do I remember correctly that he was there when you got the accident?' Jozef asks.

Guido Landgraaf seems to realize that he has reacted too impulsively.

'To be honest, he caused the accident. He slipped over a smooth tree root and lost his balance. I found that very annoying for him and told everyone that it was my own fault. Again, Geert Hadeking would not hurt a fly. He is a nature man pur sang.'

'I hope you're right,' Jozef says. If the agent has closed the cell door, he is almost certain that Landgraaf is not. At that moment, the full meaning of the story of Geert Hadeking only becomes apparent to him. He imagines how the handyman hit Landgraaf with the chainsaw. That must have been a bloody mess. Probably Hadeking himself offered first aid and called a doctor. For someone who is looking for DNA material from Guido Landgraaf it was an excellent opportunity. Could Geert Hadeking have caused that accident on purpose? Landgraaf is convinced that it was an accident. That was also apparent from his description. Geert Hadeking slipped and hit the upper leg of Landgraaf.

Jozef watches the clock in the corridor. It is half past eight. He can go to Geert Hadeking. But not on his own. Maybe he should call Brian. He is probably now studying at home on the Groningen file. Moreover, he is curious how far Piet van Gestel and Jorrit Groenvors have progressed. Did they find the man with the black hair? Do they know more about Ellen?

He turns on his computer and taps 'Geert Hadeking' into the Google bar. There are fewer than ten results.

Through the first link he ends up on a page of the city archive Deventer: CATALOG OF THE ARCHIVES OF THE GREAT AND VOORSTER GASTHUIS in Deventer (1267-1815). The name Hadeking is included in it, indicating that the name used to occur regularly in Deventer and surroundings.

The other results seem to be fluke. Jozef clicks the upper one: Geert, as usual ... It is the guestbook of a restaurant in Tynaarlo, where a certain Albert Hadeking thanks the cook Geert for the delicious food. Patiently Jozef tries one link after the other. Number fifteen reads: Does Van Fessem prolong.... The link leads to an article in a local edition of the Weekend newspaper of Soest. Jozef reads the full title of the article with surprise. Does Van Fessem prolong his national title of chainsaws?

Jozef quickly reads the entire article.

On Saturday, the Dutch championship doing fretwork with the chainsaw will take place in Lage Vuursche. Twenty participants will have two hours to transform a piece of tree trunk with a diameter of half a meter and a length of two meters into a work of art. Van Fessem, who has been crowned Dutch Champion for the last three years, is trying to prolong his title. When he wins again, he approaches the record of Geert Hadeking, who became a Dutch champion for five consecutive years in the early nineties. The public is cordially invited to experience this spectacle up close. Entrance is free.

Is this a joke? He looks at the date of the article and finds that it is already three years old. If Geert Hadeking was ever the champion of chainsaws, even if it was years ago, he is still very skilled. Is it possible that he accidentally touched the upper leg of Guido Landgraaf by accident? And that he then treated the wound himself? Where is the pants that Landgraaf was wearing? The longer Jozef thinks about it, the more he becomes convinced that Geert Hadeking has deliberately caused the accident in order to obtain some skin and blood from Guido Landgraaf.

The next question immediately arises. Did Geert Hadeking also kill Marieke van Boxbergen? Guido Landgraaf did not know Hadeking. Because the man made a good impression on Landgraaf, he has accepted him as a gardener. It can not be an old feud. But maybe Geert Hadeking and Marieke van Boxbergen were old acquaintances? The names Hadeking and Van Boxbergen have both been present in the Deventer area since the Middle Ages. Jozef takes a piece of paper from the desk drawer and writes that he should contact the family of Marieke van Boxbergen to ask if they know the name Hadeking.

70 Friday, December 29, 9:00 pm

Jozef doesn't notice the pizza delivery that almost overturns him when he crosses the Brink as quickly as possible. He walks into the Roggestraat. Piet van Gestel just called that they found the house of the man with the black hair. The brief description of Harry Beerenkamp was sufficient for three local residents to recognize with a hundred percent certainty the man who has been living in the house for a number of years. His name is John Brooks.

Piet catches Jozef halfway up the Roggestraat.

'The house is completely dark. The curtains are closed and there is no sign of life,' Piet summarizes the situation.

'And now?'

'An arrest team will enter the house within minutes. They are now trying to enter the backyard through the neighboring house.'

A little further down the road is Jorrit Groenvors with a phone in his hand. He greets Jozef with a friendly nod. Silently they wait for a signal from the leader of the arrest team. A few minutes later, the phone bleeps.

'They're in,' he says and starts to walk. Jozef and Piet follow him.

An agent in black suit is standing in the doorway and gestures that they have not found anything yet. The rooms of the house are illuminated one after the other. Then another black-dressed man comes out, the captain of the arrest team.

'There is nothing to be found above,' he says.

'Not in any hidden room? Those old houses often have strange edges,' Jozef says.

'My men are doing a final check. Below we are not completely finished yet.'

There is a loud voice from the other side of the house. The leader goes there.

'We have something,' he says, obviously excited. He gestures to Jorrit Groenvors and Jozef to follow him. They enter the kitchen and Jozef sees that a ladder goes down in a cupboard.

'The man in the basement is banging with a stick on a door. It sounds muffled metallic.'

'That's a safe door,' the man says. 'At least a decimeter thick.'

'Quiet,' says Jozef. He tries to get the pounding of his heart under control. Now he hears it again. A soft banging.

'What?' says the leader of the arrest team.

'Sst.'

He hears the faint banging again. Now the others also hear it.

'It's behind the door,' the man in the cellar says and knocks on the door again. A reaction immediately follows.

'Do we have building plans?' asks Jorrit Groenvors. The man in black shakes his head.

'All these houses have a basement. Often the cellars of adjoining houses are adjacent to each other. From the basement of the neighbors we should be able to drill through the wall,' says Jozef.

The leader of the arrest team orders the man to remain in the basement and summons the rest of the team to join him. Within twenty seconds everybody knows what his job is. Meanwhile, people from the Walstraat and the Roggestraat are approaching to see what is happening. They are kept at an appropriate distance by two policemen.

'Here we can go in,' says a member of the arrest team. 'The residents are certain that their cellar is adjacent to that of the neighboring house. We are now pushing a cupboard with bottles and cans aside.'

The two men who have taken a few crates with equipment, follow their colleague into the neighboring house.

Jozef watches how the men work together like a well-lubricated machine and don't hinder each other in any way.

A moment later the heavy rumble of a powerful hammer drill is heard. Cold sweat emerges all over Jozef's body.

A few minutes later the redeeming words sound.

'We are in contact. Everything is fine.'

At that moment Jozef can no longer restrain himself. He wrenches himself past the man in the black suit and walks through the hallway to the open door which leads to the staircase to the cellar. The man wants to withhold him but is stopped by Jorrit Groenvors. Jozef descends the stairs and the two men who are busy with the drill are willingly diverging. One of the men points to the few centimeters diameter hole. Jozef bows down.

'Ellen, are you there?' he says with a trembling voice.

'Hi Jozef, everything all right here. It is a comfortable cellar, but I am glad you are there. I was getting a bit claustrophobic.'

'You don't know how happy I am to hear your voice. Shall I call Norman? Then the men can continue with the rescue operation.'

'Sounds like a fine plan.'

Ten minutes later Jozef, Piet van Gestel and Norman are waiting in line in front of the house. When Ellen appears in the doorway, the crowded audience starts to clap spontaneously. Ellen looks around in amazement. Then she discovers Norman in between Jozef and Piet van Gestel. With tears in her eyes she walks towards him and falls into his arms. Jozef feels the gigantic burden sliding off his shoulders. Now he is also embraced by Ellen.

'Sorry,' she says. 'I am deeply ashamed.'

Jozef shakes his head.

'Pure bad luck. I had done the same thing as you. Where did that man go?'

'He is gone, forever.'

Jozef eagerly wants to ask questions right away, but he refrains himself.

'You are well cared for?' he asks.

'He was a nice man, who really took good care. Who knows that I was missing? My parents?'

Jozef shakes his head.

'We did not tell anyone. I only kept Norman informed. He was, of course, also the one who missed you first.'

Ellen looks around. Jozef also sees that Norman is calling a few meters away. Ellen looks at Norman, who makes clear that it is an important conversation. Patiently Jozef and Ellen wait until Norman is ready.

'Sorry, that was my computer friend,' Norman says excitedly as he pulls Ellen against him. 'He has unraveled who created the hotmail address of Guido Landgraaf.'

Jozef's heart strikes a few times faster.

'It concerns a certain Maarten Wolff, with double f. Wolff worked at the ministry from 1994 to 2000 and even had a high position. He created the address on a computer in a local office of the ministry in Zwolle, where he was head of a department at that time.'

'Wolff?'

'Yes, Wolff.'

The deceased student's name is Gerben Wolff. Is there a connection? Or is this a coincidence? No, that can't be. He must call Brian right away. Most importantly of course to report that Ellen is back again. This also applies to Gerard Maas.

'How did that friend of yours find out?' he asks.

'I wonder if it's smart to tell that.'

'I promise you I will not do anything with that information.'

'Still I do not say it. Maybe later.'

'Let's keep it like that. For the moment, we have finished talking and thinking. You should go home, recover, catch up.'

Ellen smiles and puts her arm around Norman's shoulder.

'I think that's sensible. On the other hand, I'm really excited hearing about the research. Have you made progress?'

'When you're ready, I'll tell you everything.'

'Tomorrow morning at Averroës?'

Jozef is laughing.

'I'll be there at half past seven. And I do not blame you if you prefer to stay home.'

'Has my cell phone been found somewhere? John, of course, took that from me.'

'John Brooks?' asks Jozef.

Ellen nods, Piet van Gestel too.

'We tried to trace your phone, but we did not succeed. Probably he has dumped it somewhere or disabled it.'

'I agree with what Jozef said. You must go home now. Nevertheless, I would like to ask you two short questions. Is that possible?' asks Jorrit Groenvors.

'John Brooks killed Rob Meier. It was self-defence. Rob Meier bothered him and wanted to knock him down.

John is gone now,' says Ellen before Groenvors can ask the questions.

Ellen hesitates.

'He was planning to fly to Southeast Asia. That's all I know.'

She now has a lump in her throat and Norman pulls her tightly against him.

'Thank you, Ellen,' says Jorrit Groenvors.

Arm-in-arm Ellen and Norman walk away. The man's hedge opens respectfully.

Jorrit Groenvors looks at Jozef and Piet van Gestel.

'I think I'm done. The murder case has been resolved. I will send a wanted notice for John Brooks into the world, but I do not expect much from that. Furthermore, I'm going to take another dive into the basement. According to the men, there are interesting things there.'

He gives Jozef a hand.

'Hopefully there will be any progress in your case now. With the help of Ellen that should be. She seemed unaffected by what happened,' he says.

'I also have that impression,' Jozef responds. 'But I'm curious how it will be in the coming days. Traumas can reveal themselves in strange ways.'

Jozef must think of the tragic accident at the beginning of his career. With a young colleague he had chased a suspected murderer. In a shooting his colleague was killed. Although Jozef resumed working the next day, he had a long time suffering from it.

'Anyway, thank you for the support,' he says to his colleague from Zwolle. 'And I wish you and your family a happy new year. I assume you will be off in the coming days.'

'You bet.'

Jozef also says goodbye to Piet van Gestel and the other men who are talking to the local residents. Slowly he walks through the Roggestraat towards the Brink. He would have preferred to go to the office to check the Groningen file with Brian and search for Maarten Wolff. He knows, however, that he will now work far less effectively than tomorrow morning. Nevertheless he has to call Brian.

'Brian, Jozef here. Have you already finished the file?'

'It is progressing steadily. They did their work thoroughly in those days, what a story.'

'Actually I didn't call for the file. We found Ellen.'

It remains silent on the other side.

'Sorry, in good health,' Jozef contritely adds. 'She was locked up in a basement in the Bergkwartier by the man who killed Rob Meier.'

'That is good news. So she is in good health?'

'That man has treated her well. He has fled and left Ellen in the basement.'

'I'm happy.'

'In the meantime, a friend of Norman has found out who created the hotmail address of Guido Landgraaf. It is a Maarten Wolff who worked at the Ministry of Economic Affairs.'

'I will immediately start to find out where we can find him.'

'Do you also want to scan the Groningen story for that name? Who knows, that name might be mentioned somehow.'

'I'll do that.'

'Are you in Averroes tomorrow at 7:30?'

'I'll be there.'

The next phone call is to Gerard Maas. The chief reacts euphorically, showing how much he was at a loss what to do with the disappearance of Ellen. Jozef also reports on his interview with Guido Landgraaf. Gerard Maas concludes that Guido Landgraaf is innocent and that he has told everything he knows. Tomorrow he will propose to the Public Prosecution to release the former director of ZONNU.

Finally, Jozef calls his own number.

'We have Ellen, healthy and well' he says before Margot could say her name.

It remains silent for a moment. Jozef hears that Margot must swallow.

'So, eh, she is all right?' she asks with a lump in her throat.

'She was locked up in the Walstraat by the man who killed Rob Meier. A former IRA terrorist.'

'Terrorist?'

'I'll tell you all about it. I'm coming right now.'

Jozef crosses the Brink and enters the Kleine Overstraat. He stands still in front of a do-it-yourself shop and looks in the shop window. He is shocked by his bent posture. Firmly he straightens his back and continues. He feels his energy increase every step on his way home.

71 Saturday, December 30 7.00

Ellen pushes the button of the alarm and leans against the warm body of Norman. With his eyes closed he turns and slowly caresses Ellen's back. She presses against him and feels that his body is waking up quickly.

'A relationship with a detective is different every day,' she whispers in his ear and begins to kiss him.

'So you want to be in Averroes at half past eight,' Norman says with a laugh.

'I certainly do.'

She pushes Norman on his back and rolls over him. He does not need more encouragement.

Thomas Adriaan van Rijckevorsel starts to clap spontaneously when Ellen enters his café. Jozef stands up from his bar stool and greets Ellen with three kisses.

'You are a star,' says Thomas, shifting the Deventer newspaper towards her. She is the center of the big picture on the front page. "***Detective released from cellar***" is the headline that dominates the front page. The article describes in neutral terms that Ellen was detained by a man she visited as part of the investigation into the murder of Rob Meier. The article does not say that the man is the suspected murderer.

'For the newspaper the photo was more important than the background,' says Jozef. 'A bit of journalist had, of course, made inquiries about such a meaningless press release.'

At that moment Brian comes in. He kisses Ellen.

'What can I serve you?' asks Thomas from behind the bar.

'The usual recipe, a tortilla sandwich and a café con leche, por favor,' says Ellen.

'Have you slept well?' asks Jozef when they are all three sitting at a table.

'Could not be better. Maybe the blow is yet to come, but I absolutely don't feel like suffering a traumatic experience. I am eager to get started and to hear what the state of affairs is.'

Jozef asks Brian to give a summary and complements it himself.

'So, if I understand correctly, we have two actions,' says Ellen. 'Visiting Geert Hadeking, the champion of chainsaws. And looking for Maarten Wolff.'

'I have not been able to find a relationship between Maarten and Gerben Wolff on the internet, but there's enough about Maarten Wolff himself. He is an independent management consultant and has a practice in Olst,' says Brian.

'Olst? That's close to Deventer.'

'Yes, at the address of his practice is a detached villa. He probably also lives there.'

Jozef thinks for a moment and then starts to laugh. He looks at Ellen.

'I think we'll forget something else.'

Now Ellen grins too.

'I was already completely absorbed into it. I suppose I have to tell something about my kidnapping?'

'Jorrit Groenvors has said goodbye yesterday, but without your statement, the case can of course not be closed yet.'

'So someone has to interrogate me. Good to experience that from the other side.'

'You know what? I first go to Hadeking with Brian. Then you can stop by Gerard Maas and personally tell your story. Since I do not expect Jorrit here anymore, I or Brian will have to take care of that questioning. Is that an idea?'

Ellen nods. Although she had liked to join Jozef and Brian, she feels that Jozef is right. Somewhere a mobile phone starts to beep. Ellen knows she does not have one. Brian also shrugs his shoulders.

'It's mine,' says Jozef, and walks to the coat rack in the corner of the cafe. 'Laros.'

It is a brief conversation.

'That was Gerard Maas. He wondered if you had been so crazy to go to work today.'

'What did you say?'

'I did not deny it.'

Ellen laughs.

'Was he worried that I had mysteriously disappeared again?'

'No, he wants you to come to his room immediately. The discovery of the Irish diaries has led to great alarm somewhere within a British ministry. They already sent someone to Deventer to investigate the case. Your presence is indispensable in this.'

'Fine, I'm ready.'

72 Saturday, December 30 9:00

Gerard Maas also embraces Ellen when she enters his room.

'You don't know how happy I am to see you again,' he says. 'Have you had any coffee?'

'We had breakfast at Averroes.'

'I hope you didn't feel obliged to go to work.'

Ellen shakes her head.

'For you it was more exciting than for me, I think. I have been scared, but not because of that man. His problems were much greater than mine. In all loneliness he constantly feared that the people he had ever betrayed would find him. At the end of the eighties he sat at the IRA and went over to the other camp.'

'That what I have understood indeed. At about half past ten I expect some high ranked officer from the British secret service here. We were forbidden to do anything until our man from London had arrived. I was just called by an assistant from our Minister of Justice. She wanted to emphasize that it was of the utmost importance that we support the British as much as possible.'

'Sounds like very important.'

'That is why I am happy that you are here. But you're really sure you did not want to stay home?'

'As far as I can judge now, that is not necessary. I will of course not forget my stay in that cellar, but it was not a real nightmare.'

'Good to hear that. Can I ask you something else?'

Ellen looks surprised at the district chief.

'Of course.'

'I don't really understand how this situation came about. He had called you, I understood. Was it a deliberate trap? Was he specifically down on you? Or did he just want someone from the police as a hostage?'

'I haven't been thinking about that for about 24 hours, as well as about the question whether I had been careless, of course.'

'That is not the background to my question,' Gerard Maas says with a gentle smile.

'At first, John said he felt guilty and wanted to make a statement to prevent an innocent being punished. But he could also have reported this by writing or telephone. Only just before his departure another truth came out. He had seen me at the Bergkerk the morning after the murder and was struck by the resemblance between me and his ex-girlfriend.'

'I do not think that particularly convincing and it neither sounds innocent. Suppose he'd rather see his ex dead than alive.'

Ellen shakes her head.

'That was definitely not the case. I could imagine though that had called me impulsively. He was afraid, felt guilty and could no longer bear loneliness. My greatest fear was that he would flee in some kind of panic and leave me there.'

'People can indeed act strangely. Will we leave it like this?'

'Okay. By the way, Jozef thought I had to make an official statement, so that the case could be closed. Jorrit Groenvors has finished his job and someone needs interrogate me.'

'That's right. Only the conversation with the London man has a higher priority. Besides, Jorrit has quickly typed an official report tonight with Brooks' story that he killed Rob Meier as self-defense. That will do for the time being. After the turn of the year we can complete his report. Hopefully the man is arrested somehow, then we can ask him once again. I understood from Jozef that he now has two concrete leads in the Landgraaf case.'

'You are talking about the Landgraaf case. That's actually strange. Marieke van Boxbergen was murdered and probably Guido Landgraaf has very little to do with it.'

'You are absolutely right.'

'Jozef is now visiting Geert Hadeking, the gardener. And then he goes, or we go to Maarten Wolff, the man who created the hotmail address.'

'Very well. Shall I call you when the Briton is there?'

Ellen walks through the long hallway to her room. Is it strange that she is here? It seems like everyone assumes that she has experienced something that was so intense that she needs rest to recover. When she enters her room, she thinks of John Brooks. Where would he be? When he said he would fly to Asia she did not believe him. The way he said it sounded different from his life story. Why did she repeat his words so firmly to Jorrit Groenvors? Actually she has to admit to herself that it won't bother her at all when he will not be caught, although there's no doubt he killed someone. Is that the reason she did not mention his real name Tom Nolan. She knows she will soon be forced to tell the whole story.

Her musings are interrupted by the ringing of her telephone.

'He is there,' says Gerard Maas.

In the middle of Gerard's room is a tall man with short gray hair. He looks straight into Ellen's eyes and she is inclined to look away, something she hardly ever does. The man steps forward and shakes Ellen's hand. He introduces himself as Guy Banton.

'I heard what you've been through. That's quite something.'

Another person who worries about her spiritual well-being.

'He did not hurt me,' she replies.

The Englishman addresses Gerard Maas and suggests to walk with Ellen to the cellar where she had been locked up. Meanwhile, Ellen can tell what she has seen and heard.

'Do you agree?' asks Gerard Maas. She nods.

'Is there someone to open the door?'

'One of Piet's men is there. They got the thick door open with a code they found in a kitchen drawer.'

Ellen chooses the route through the Noordenbergstraat. She also likes to show the Englishman something of Deventer.

'Nice town,' he says as they walk across the Grote Kerkhof. In the meantime, Ellen tells what has happened in chronological order. The fact that John Brooks is actually called Tom Nolan is not new to Guy Banton. And that actually applies to most of what Ellen tells about the attacks in Northern Ireland and Germany. He is clearly mostly interested in the fear of John Brooks. What was he afraid of? How did he know they had exposed him? Has he mentioned names? How did they track him down? Ellen tell what John told her, that it went wrong in Amsterdam when he could not resist the temptation to perform with a folk band.

'Fuckin' whistle player,' Guy Banton curses. 'We had warned him so often. Throw those flutes away. Never touch them again. Your play is more unique and recognizable than a fingerprint.'

'He could not do without. It was his only way to chase away the demons. That is why he has built a soundproof cellar.'

Guy Banton continues to ask about the people he was afraid of. Since when was he scared? How had he discovered that they were on his trail? Ellen knows that he was a computer expert and that he hacked computers from old acquaintances. But no names? No, John never mentioned any names.

They walk through the Roggestraat and arrive at the house that is still fenced off. Piet van Gestel himself is present and takes them to the cellar. Guy Banton absorbs everything silently.

'The flutes were in the top drawer,' says Ellen. 'He especially returned to take them with him. Below were the scrapbooks, you saw them.'

Guy Banton nods.

'And the computer?' he asks Piet van Gestel. 'Did you touch it?'

Piet van Gestel shakes his head. Guy Banton asks him to bring the computer and everything that might have to do with the computer to the police office. He himself will arrange a courier to transport the computer to London. I want you to examine every square inch of this house. Any name, address, photograph, I want it all.'

When Guy Banton turns around Piet van Gestel looks at Ellen. She shrugs her shoulders.

'I have seen enough. Your men are working well. Let's find a place to have a coffee. Maybe you can show me some more of Deventer. I am beginning to like it.'

Ellen walks back to the Brink though the Menstraat. Meanwhile she tells something about the history of the town. Jozef would have known much more interesting facts. Guy Banton likes the stranded witch against the wall of the café de Heksenketel. They walk along the IJssel to café the Dikke van Dale.

'You are amazingly cooperative without asking curious questions. I'm not used to that from the Dutch,' Guy Banton opens the conversation when they have grabbed a window table.

'It's not often that James Bond is in town,' Ellen replies.

Guy Banton laughs.

'I certainly do not have a license to kill. If you promise not to run to the press, I would like to tell you a bit more about the background of my presence.'

'My lips are sealed,' Ellen replies.

Guy Banton drinks his coffee in one gulp and sinks a little into the red leather-covered chair.

'The attacks on the European mainland constituted a final convulsion of the IRA. In Northern Ireland, we had settled the plea and all the leaders had been captured or shot or had fled. We were therefore unpleasantly surprised when the first bomb went off in Germany. The choice of Tom Nolan, or John Brooks, to choose our side was a gift from heaven. He knew everyone and thanks to him we were able to keep the damage relatively small.'

'The partners of the two accidentally killed Australian tourists in Roermond will think differently about that.'

'Every dead person is one too many of course. When Tom Nolan indicated that he suspected that they had his double play, we immediately got him back. Three weeks later he had started a new life as John Brooks in Amsterdam. The fact that he is still alive proves that we have done well. Soon after, it was done with the IRA. People like Donna Maguire were stuck and there were no new kids on the block. Which was not surprising, because Ireland was economically booming. It was no longer the ugly duckling under the wings of England. This also meant the will to fight for a united Irish republic vanished in thin air. Our department in London therefore became smaller every year. I am one of the few remaining ones. I would almost have been asleep if we had not received the message last year that a new group had arisen in Armagh. It had been formed by a number of old acquaintances who had spent years in prison. In addition, they were new people, not older than twenty years.'

'Are you suggesting that this has to do with the economic crisis?'

'You say what no one dares to say in London aloud. No country has been hit harder by the credit crisis than Ireland in the past year.'

'Except Iceland, of course.'

'They will manage themselves. The Irish problems are much bigger. In a city like Limerick, more than half of the workforce is dependent on the computer manufacturer Dell. In order to cope with the crisis, Dell has decided to move production from Limerick to Poland. A disaster for the town. There are more examples. What do all those people have to do? Ireland has nothing of itself. There is a disaster scenario similar to the emigrations during the Great Famine between 1845 and 1850. More than a million people died of hunger due to failed potato harvests. Many more people emigrated during that period.'

'That indeed sounds like a breeding ground for dissatisfaction and therefore also for organizations like the IRA.'

'You get it. That is why it is very important for us that we find Tom Nolan. Not only to protect him for the second time, but also because he can help us find and defuse germinating groups.'

Guy Banton is silent in a way that clearly indicates he has said everything he wanted to say. Ellen does not have the energy to ask anyway. As far as possible, she understands the situation and the reason for Guy Banton's presence. She walks to the bar and pays the bill.

They walk back to the police station in silence. She escorts Guy Banton to the room of Gerard Maas. He thanks her and praises her courage and clear sense. He expresses the hope that the Deventer police force will be able to use her services for a long time. And if not, she's more than welcome in London.

73 Saturday, December 30 9.30

Jozef carefully drives his old Peugeot 404 around the deep holes in the sand road leading to the house of Geert Hadeking.

'Living in the forest sounds romantic,' says Jozef, 'but all these spruces really depress me.'

'This is still a production forest of the estate,' says Brian.

'Isn't it something for you, a little house in the woods? For an enthusiastic reader like you, so much peace should be a paradise.'

Brian shakes his head.

'I like to be alone, but this would not be good for me. The city, the work, the sounds of the neighbours are my bridge to the world. In a remote place like this, the risk is too great that I will become a hermit.'

'That would be a shame. Look, there's the gardener's house.'

It is a neglected cottage. The roof is covered with thick layers of moss and the walls that were once white have turned green. The barn next to the house seems to collapse at any moment. In the barn there is a red Renault 4 with large rust spots everywhere. On the other side of the house there are long rows of stacked firewood.

'This will do for the rest of his life,' says Jozef, while noticing that there is no smoke from the chimney.

Actually, there is no sign of life at all. Jozef and Brian stand in front of the house. It is completely silent. Even the birds do not let themselves be heard. The whole situation feels uncomfortable. He is looking for a door bell, but it no sign of anything like it. He knocks on the door. Nothing happens. He knocks on the window a few times. Again no response.

He grabs the handle of the front door and tries to open the door. It is locked. They wander around the house. All curtains are closed. Jozef tries the handle of the back door. To his surprise, the door opens.

'Hello, is there someone?' he calls out. It remains silent. Jozef enters the house and punches his foot against an empty coke bottle that rolls over the tiles. Even the noise of the tumbling bottle does not lead to any reaction. In the house it is freezing cold. He goes through the left door and enters a room full of rubbish. This must have been a kitchen once. Between the boxes a narrow corridor leads to a dirty gas stove with a large pan on it. Jozef lifts the lid. It is a stew on which a layer of moisture has formed in a number of places. Jozef starts to suspect that something is wrong.

'I looks like our man has flown,' Jozef says. Brian opens the door on the other side of the kitchen.

'I do not think so,' he says, and retreats. Jozef pushes his way past Brian and enters the living room. In the middle of the room an old gray man hangs on a thick rope attached to a beam in the ceiling. Under the body is a fallen chair. Cursing at himself Jozef walks back outside through the kitchen. He unpacks his telephone and calls Piet van Gestel.

'We have one more dead. Geert Hadeking, the gardener of Guido Landgraaf, hangs on a rope in his own house. It looks like suicide,' he says, followed by Piet van Gestel sighing loudly.

'What do you want me to do. Right now I am in the house where Ellen was being held. Some Englishman has ordered to examine every square inch of the house.'

'Are you able to arrange something? Or should I call Gerard Maas?'

'I come myself and take someone with me. Then everything can continue here. I also take care of the rest.'

'Thank you, Piet,' Jozef says from the bottom of his heart.

'In the meantime, we might as well have close look,' Jozef says and walks into the living room again. 'See if the gardener has left a message.'

The living room is full of all kinds of electrical appliances. Old record players, radios, toasters, a sandwich maker, an oven, two lawnmowers and a pile of chainsaws. Jozef wonders if anyone ever came to visit. Guido Landgraaf has probably never been here. Did Geert Hadeking have family? No one has missed him in the past few days. At first sight he does not see things that may be of any significance. He therefore runs upstairs, where Brian scrambles around.

'Something here?'

'No, his bedroom looks pretty tidy. The other two rooms are full of boxes.'

'No notebook or single note next to his bed?'

Brian shakes his head

'Let's sit in the car. I'm cold and I just want to think about the situation for a while.'

Meekly, Brian follows Jozef.

'Why does a person commit suicide?' Jozef asks.

'Because someone is depressed. I think that is the most important cause.'

'Would Hadeking have been depressed? I do not think so. According to Guido Landgraaf, Hadeking did his work on the estate very devotedly and Landgraaf almost obliged him to take time off. His house does not make the impression of a depressed inhabitant, even though it is a big mess.'

'How old was he? Landgraaf has said it.'

'Sixty.'

'People also commit suicide if the rest of life is no longer useful. Hadeking has no partner or children. What is his perspective when he retires?'

'Maybe Landgraaf has fired him and ordered him to find another home.'

'Landgraaf told us that he greatly appreciated Hadeking and that he had given him a hefty wage increase to commit Hadeking to the estate for the coming years.'

'Why would he lie about that?'

Jozef is shocked by the scenario that crosses his mind. Suppose that Guido Landgraaf wanted to get rid of his wife, is it conceivable that he managed to get Geert Hadeking to do the killing part?

'Maybe Hadeking murdered Marieke van Boxbergen on behalf of Landgraaf and later regretted it,' Brian speaks Jozef's thought out loud.

'Is that possible? Does the state of affairs fit in that hypothesis? Why do all tracks point to Guido Landgraaf? That is the crucial question.'

'Did Geert Hadeking do it on his own initiative and did he try to put the blame on Landgraaf?'

'But why? What reason could Hadeking have had to do so?'

'Who knows. Suppose Hadeking is the murderer. Then the case has now been resolved.'

'Except for the other events on the estate. And we still have Maarten Wolff, who has created the hotmail address of Guido Landgraaf.'

'That's true. But perhaps it is not related to the murder of Marieke van Boxbergen. Maybe Geert Hadeking made use of the circumstances to perform his act. Hadeking and Van Boxbergen are names that have a history in this area.'

'Another old family feud?'

'Maybe.'

Deep wrinkles appear in Jozef's forehead.

'My brain get overheated. Too much cohesion, too many hypotheses.'

Jozef hits the steering wheel with his hand.

'I think we can only do one thing now. Looking for Maarten Wolff. Thinking harder on Geert Hadeking makes no sense. Do you agree?'

At that moment two police cars arrive.

'Is it wise not to reveal the death of Geert Hadeking for the time being? Provided there is no immediate family, of course, we must inform,' says Brian.

Jozef looks at Brian in amazement and then nods.

'You mean in relation to Maarten Wolff?'

'Suppose Wolff is involved one way or the other. I can imagine that the knowledge that Geert Hadeking is dead influences his attitude. For a suspect it is always useful to know that another suspect can not say anything anymore.'

Jozef nods approvingly and gets off to welcome Piet van Gestel. While he walks with him to the gardener's house, he explains that he does not want publicity yet. So no conversations with local residents or some journalist.

'We are now going straight to Maarten Wolff. Let's hope he's at home.'

'Shouldn't we collect Ellen? Or at least call to inform that we go without her?' Brian asks when they turn onto the paved road.

'Good thinking again, Brian. We have to go to the office first because I want to discuss with Gerard if we should bring in an arrest team.'

'That seems appropriate.'

'Do you call Ellen? Then she can get ready.'

Brian enters the Ellen number.

'Hello Ellen. We now return to the office and if Gerard Maas agrees we will arrest Maarten Wolff. Would you like to come along?'

'Of course. I just finished my Englishman. By the way, a certain Anton Termunten had called.'

'That is the colleague from Groningen.'

'He had some interesting information that is not in the file. I got the impression that he wanted to tell you urgently.'

'Do you have his number?'

Brian immediately calls.

'Hello Anton, what's up?'

'Something that could be very important. This morning I told the Landgraaf story to my colleagues during our coffee break. The old ones, as well as the younger ones were interested.'

'Anton, wait a minute. My boss is sitting next to me, I put the phone on the loudspeaker.'

'Hello boss. All of my colleagues know Sint Martinus and have read about fifty million Landgraaf thought it was his. When I finished my story, a colleague said something I did not know. He thought the Gerben Wolff case had been reopened one more time.'

‘Again?’

‘He wasn’t sure, but he thought a few years later.’

‘I presume that colleague was not involved himself.’

‘Right. He only remembered someone came to the office, claiming he could provide new information. The man was shoved on to my former colleague Jan de Roos. He can surely tell you more about it.’

‘Do you know where I can find Jan de Roos?’

‘He retired three years ago and is doing well. I know how to get in touch.’

Brian notes the 050 number.

‘Call him right away,’ is Jozef’s answer to Brian’s questioning gaze.

Brian dials the number. Nothing happens.

‘I’ll try again later.’

They drive to the office in silence. Ellen is waiting for them and tells them they should come to Gerard Maas immediately.

‘This is a disastrous case,’ sighs the district chief. ‘Was it suicide?’

Jozef nods.

‘I have no indication that anyone else has been involved. But my judgement in this case is not as reliable as I would like it to be.’

‘You were just gone when Guido Landgraaf asked for a conversation with me.’

Jozef makes no effort to hide his surprise.

‘The name Gerben Wolff caused it to dawn up on him, he told me.’

‘I’m curious.’

‘He remembered that Gerben Wolff had a twin brother.’

‘And that brother was called Maarten. Damn!’

‘You understand I was unpleasantly surprised by his story.’

‘Why, for godsake, did that fucker not tell us before? What else did he say about Maarten Wolff?’ Suddenly Jozef is in great hurry. ‘Let’s go get that man!’

‘I agree. It’s good to know that in Landgraaf’s memory Maarten was a strange fellow, an outsider during that introduction week.’

‘What!! Both brothers wanted to become a member of Sint Martinus? Why didn’t we know?’ He looks slightly reproving to Brian. ‘Why did the Groningen police didn’t mention that in their report?’

All of Jozef’s frustrations come to surface.

‘That fucking 50 Million man is not worth a damn penny. I think we should charge him for killing his wife. If he had been only a little more cooperative, his wife would still be alive. No, he thought he could solve his problems on his own. That arrogant piece of shit,’ he fulminates redheaded.

‘I understand your feelings, Jozef. There are a few things you should before going to Maarten Wolff. Landgraaf remembered that both boys came from the countryside and were not used to much freedom. The student world had a different effect on the two boys. Gerben reacted timidly and anxiously, Maarten went completely loose. Gerben was soon the target of bullying and teasing and Maarten did the opposite. Gerben received, Maarten dealt out. It seemed as if a fraternal struggle had been suppressed for years and erupted in this week. A day before the end of the introduction week, Landgraaf was forced to intervene and send Maarten home. Maarten was no longer in control and, despite a number of warnings, he continued going too far. According to Landgraaf, Maarten had never forgiven him that he had to go home and in fact had already been expelled from the association before he had become a member.’

‘Does Landgraaf put the blame for the death of Gerben Wolff down with his brother?’

‘I would not regard it as such,’ says Gerard. ‘For the first time Landgraaf mentions a name of a person with whom he had a serious personal conflict. And let that be exactly the name of the man who created the hotmail address of Guido Landgraaf.’

‘Mind you, in 1998.’

‘A very strange picture is forming in my head,’ says Ellen.

‘Of someone who has spent his entire life preparing a terrible revenge on the old president of Sint Martinus.’

‘Because Landgraaf has expelled him?’

‘Or to avenge his brother.’

‘According to the story of Landgraaf, Maarten did not care much about his brother Gerben.’

‘Don’t blame me my mistrust, but I doubt that the version of Landgraaf is entirely truthful,’ Jozef says.

‘Anyway,’ says Gerard Maas. ‘For me it is sufficient to arrest Maarten Wolff. The team is ready. Let’s go.’

74 Saturday December 30 noon

M. Wolff financial advice and interim management. The large green letters on a sign in front of the detached house in a quiet street at the outskirts of Olst leave no doubt that an independent consultant lives here. On the

driveway is a BMW M1 and smoke comes from the chimney on the roof. The men of the arrest team have spread around the house.

Jozef puts his Peugeot behind the BMW and walks to the front door. He asked Ellen and Brian to stay in the car. There is an immediate response to the sound of the doorbell. Jozef hears a slamming door and footsteps. The man who opens the door is nicely dressed and looks friendly. He seems to be surprised by Jozef standing in front of him.

'I was expecting someone else, a customer,' he says.

'I am not a customer. My name is Jozef Laros and I am from the police in Deventer. I want to ask you to come to the police station to answer a number of questions.'

The man's face stiffens.

'Po, po, police?' he stammers. In panic he tries to slam the door, but Jozef is just ahead of him putting his foot between the door. The man turns around and runs to the other side of the house. Jozef runs after him, followed by an agent of the arrest team. The man leaves the house through the back door, but is caught by two other agents.

'Take him to the office,' Jozef says.

'Ellen and Brian, do you want to stay here until there is reinforcement? This house must also be fenced off and examined. I will send someone who will take you back to Deventer.'

When everyone is gone, Ellen starts to laugh.

'You are locked up in a cellar and you are standing guard in front of the house of a murder suspect. The detective profession is dynamic, I can recommend it to everyone.'

Brian laughs too.

'You're kind of light hearted about it.'

'I have to. Otherwise I allow myself and others to believe that I have a trauma. What else can we do here?'

Brian shrugs his shoulders.

'Shall we just browse around? That is useful anyway.'

At that moment the door bell rings. Ellen opens the door. It's a man in a suit.

'I'm coming for Maarten, he expects me,' the man says and is about to step inside.

'I'm afraid your appointment has been cancelled. Mr. Wolff was taken to the police station for an interrogation.'

A worried look appears in the eyes of the man in suit.

'Where, eh, for what?'

'We can not say that now.'

'So, uh, you do not know when he's back again?'

'No, regretfully we can not say anything about it.'

After the client has left, Ellen and Brian hurry upstairs. The office of Maarten Wolff occupies more than half of the attic. In the middle of the room there is a large desk and on both sides there are tall cupboards, filled with binders.

'I will first call Jan de Roos one more time,' says Brian and takes a seat at the office of Maarten Wolff.

'Good afternoon, you are speaking to Brian Jansen, detective in Deventer. I got your name from your former colleague Anton Termunten.'

Brian puts the device on the loudspeaker.

'He told me the story,' says the man with a heavy Groningen accent.

'So you know what I'm calling for?'

'About Guido Landgraaf right?'

'To be precise about the case Gerben Wolff, the student who died in 1968, possibly as a result of maltreatment during the ragging week of Sint Martinus, of which Landgraaf was then the president. I heard from your colleague Termunten that this case was investigated twice. First after declaration by his parents and then again after an anonymous letter. Both investigations did not lead to criminal prosecution.'

'Correct. There were a few vague indications that Landgraaf had indeed had gone beyond the pale. But that was part of being and becoming a member of Sint Martinus, was the general opinion. In addition, the commissioner did not want to burn his fingers at it. And that was no different the third time, when it was dropped on my desk.'

'Exactly. That's what I'm interested in.'

'A few years later, a man who wanted to revoke his earlier statement reported at the police office. He had stopped his studies and was no longer a member of Sint Martinus. Although I always distrust such regrets, I have invited him to tell his story. My interest was awakened. The man confirmed the contents of the anonymous letter. He considered Guido Landgraaf guilty of mistreatment with death as a result. I replied that the chance was small that the case would be reopened on the basis of his story. Then he came up with something else. He said Gerben Wolff had a twin brother, Maarten.'

Brian looks at Ellen.

'That brother was also on the introduction camp, but had gone home one day before the closing of the introduction period. Since Maarten did not become a member of the association he was not on the list we had received from Sint Martinus. The man at my desk said that Maarten had been the one who had dealt with his brother the hardest. He had not done this out of his own will, but because Guido Landgraaf told him to do so. 'So Maarten Wolff mistreated his brother Gerben on behalf of Guido Landgraaf?'

'That was what that man told me.'

'But why had nobody told this during the earlier interrogations?'

'That was the bizarre thing about the story. The man said that Guido Landgraaf had asked all members not to mention the name Maarten Wolff. Not to plead for himself, but out of compassion for the parents of the late Gerben. He insisted that the death of Gerben Wolff was an unfortunate coincidence, but he realized that other lectures were conceivable. In view of this he did not want to tell the parents of Gerben Wolff that their one remaining son was partly responsible for the death of their other son. Out of piety with the parents of Gerben and Maarten Wolff, he called on the members to be cautious with information, especially with regard to Maarten's involvement.'

'And what about Maarten? Why didn't he report later?'

'I understand that. He had anyway been partly guilty of assaulting his brother. What would happen if the entire case became public?'

'Landgraaf would designate him as guilty and play down his own role,' Brian replies.

'Exactly. Moreover, he would be blamed for not standing up to Landgraaf.'

'That sounds logical too. This is really important information.'

Brian sees Ellen nodding hard from the corner of his eye.

'I am glad that I could contribute to your investigation and I am curious about the outcome.'

'When we're done, will I call you to report?'

'I would really appreciate that,' Jan de Roos concludes.

With a sigh, Brian falls backwards in the luxurious office chair of Maarten Wolff.

'Jozef was right,' says Ellen. 'The core of the facts corresponds to the story of Landgraaf, but the facts itself do not at all. I tend to believe the latest version.'

'To be honest, I gives me the creeps,' says Brian.

A shiver pulls down Ellen's back.

'I try to imagine what that meant for Maarten Wolff,' she says. 'He loses his brother, is branded as the only culprit and has no possibility to defend himself. That is inhuman.'

'It's murder of the spirit,' says Brian, clearly affected.

'Hello, is there someone?!' a voice comes from below. It is Piet van Gestel.

'You here?' asks Ellen. 'I thought you were at Geert Hadeking's house.'

'And I thought you'd be at home. Four men are working to comb out the house of Hadeking. I do not necessarily have to be there.'

'And I do not necessarily have to be at home. I've had enough rest in that cellar.'

Piet van Gestel pats Ellen on the shoulder.

'My idea,' he says laughing. Finally, someone who is not concerned, Ellen thinks.

'Is there anything else to do here?'

'We arrested Maarten Wolff. He is probably the one who killed Marieke van Boxbergen.'

Brian summarizes what they have just heard from Jan de Roos from Groningen.

'In short, we are actually waiting for someone to take us to Deventer.'

'Okay, I propose to spent the time that we have to wait useful,' says Piet while pulling out the drawers from Maarten Wolff's desk.

Ellen stands up laughing, walks to the cupboard with binders and pulls them out one by one. Meanwhile, Brian calls Jozef to pass on the latest information. A little later they are all leafing through folders, cash books and stacks of loose papers.

'Bingo!' says Ellen after fifteen minutes and puts a folder on the desk.

'Look what's on the back, **Settlement account**,' she says and shows it to Brian and Piet.

She unfolds the folder on the first page. A plastic file contains an article from a magazine. **"I have been welcomed with open arms and I'm going away with applause"** is the head line. The folder contains articles, newspaper reports, prints from internet pages. All about Guido Landgraaf.

75 Saturday, December 30, 4:00 pm

Hot faced Ellen, Brian and Jozef walk to the room of Gerard Maas. They interrogated Maarten Wolff for three hours. Jozef continuously, and Ellen and Brian taking turns.

'He has confessed,' says Jozef when they enter the district chief's room.

‘The murder of Marieke van Boxbergen?’

‘The rest as well. He was the principal of Harry Beerenkamp.’

‘Was it indeed a revenge for his deceased twin brother?’

Jozef nods.

‘Sit down. Will I get coffee?’ Gerard asks.

All three of them shake their heads.

‘It is a tragic individual,’ Jozef starts his report. ‘I think, only now it is slowly dawning on him what he has done.’

‘I presume he was of the fact that he committed a murder?’

‘Even there, he doubted a few times. A psychologist can probably better explain it than I do, but I got the impression that he had released part of his life and his head for just one goal: revenge on Guido Landgraaf. And that part was completely separated from the rest of his life, in which he built up a normal and fairly successful career.’

‘A schizophrenic?’

‘An expert will undoubtedly be able to put the right mark on it. For us, only the committed facts are important. And there are no doubts about that. He has made a full confession.’

‘Did he also tell us exactly what happened during that ragging at Sint Martinus?’

‘In fact he told us the same story as we heard from the Groningen detective. Maarten and Gerben Wolff came to Groningen as somewhat naive boys from the countryside and were both overwhelmed by the atmosphere at Sint Martinus. They responded differently, however. Maarten drowned his uncertainty by shouting through and did not want to be inferior to anyone. Gerben did not know how to conceal his embarrassment and because of his timid attitude he quickly became the target for jokes. Under pressure from the group, Maarten also participated.’

‘What role did Landgraaf play in this?’

‘At one point, he noticed that one brother was making life of the other brother difficult. He called Maarten and ordered him to wake Gerben every hour of the night and leave him outside for five minutes.’

‘And that's what Maarten did?’

‘Yes, because Landgraaf threatened not to allow him to become a member. In addition, he had expected it to be a one-time test. The opposite turned out. Landgraaf demanded more and more. He forced Maarten to eat Gerben's food so that he had stomachache after every meal and Gerben went hungry. After three days he had reached his limits. He stepped down at Landgraaf and asked him to stop belittling and abusing Gerben. Landgraaf laughed at him in his face. The membership of Sint Martinus was not an obligation. If he did not like it, he was free to go home. Maarten left immediately.’

‘So he left voluntarily. He was not expelled, as Landgraaf suggested.’

‘No, he definitely did not want to become a member of that club.’

‘But he did leave his brother behind,’ concludes Gerard Maas.

‘Maarten could not remember whether he had spoken to his brother before he left. He was especially angry. Angry with Sint Martinus, angry with Landgraaf and angry with himself. In any case, he was not there on the morning that Gerben spent the fatal hours in the cold water.’

‘A week later his brother died.’

‘Of course Maarten went to call Landgraaf for account. However, Landgraaf did not accept any responsibility and threatened to publicly designate him as his brother's murderer. There were enough witnesses that would confirm that. Everyone had seen that Maarten had publically bullied his brother numerous times. Landgraaf also threatened to go to his parents with that story.’

Gerard Maas frowns his eyebrows.

‘Then you really have no conscience at all.’

‘A normal person could not even think of it like that. Any possibility to deal with this painful story was blown out of Maarten Wolff's hands.’

‘Did he therefore write that anonymous letter?’

‘That was a desperate act that he immediately regretted. The fear that his parents would find out that he had been involved in the assault of his brother was an unbearable burden. He decided to let it all rest and wait for an opportunity to take revenge on Landgraaf.’

‘Was he the one who reported to the police a few years later as a former member regretting the things he did?’ asks Gerard Maas.

‘No, he didn't know that. He neither had any idea who it could have been. For twenty years he has followed Landgraaf without doing anything.’

‘Except for creating that hotmail address.’

‘That was later. After the death of his parents in 1995, his plans to deal with Landgraaf became more concrete. From the beginning it was clear to him that he did not want to kill Landgraaf. He wanted to strike Landgraaf the same way Landgraaf had struck him, thus spiritually. In 1998 he created that email address, but at that moment he had no idea what to do with it.’

'Did he make any more of those preparations during that time?'

'Not that we know of. His plans gained momentum when he read that Landgraaf had bought the Lankbergen estate, less than ten kilometers from his own home. That was the signal for him that the time was right to settle for good with his brother's murderer.'

'So it was only his arrival to Deventer and not the fifty million?'

'It was only about the past.'

'Did he immediately know that he was going to kill Marieke van Boxbergen?'

'Yes, that was the essence of his plan. Kill her and make sure that Landgraaf is convicted.'

'And that fussing about on the estate?'

'If a customer had not accidentally told about Harry Beerenkamp, he probably would not have thought of it. The description of Beerenkamp as completely immoral hooligan gave him the idea of approaching the man using the address of Guido Landgraaf and ask him to mess things up. So purely as a diversionary maneuver.'

Gerard whistles between his teeth.

'How crazy can a man be?' he sighs.

'And smart. Because he was very close to not getting caught,' adds Ellen.

'More important for Wolff was the gathering of evidence against Landgraaf. Therefore he needed help from someone in the immediate vicinity of Landgraaf. And he found it in the person of Geert Hadeking,' says Jozef.

'The gardener, whom Landgraaf always praised.'

'Wolff did need a number of interviews to make Geert Hadeking realize that he had become a slave of a criminal. During these conversations, more and more pent-up frustrations came out. Hadeking slowly became convinced that he had actually been abused for forty years. The arrival of Guido Landgraaf was the drop that caused the bucket to overflow. The ease with which Landgraaf offered him to raise his salary by fifty percent felt like a knife stabbing for Hadeking. That made Hadeking, according to Wolff, eager to cooperate, only to teach Landgraaf a lesson.'

'Did Hadeking know that Wolff wanted to kill Marieke van Boxbergen?'

Jozef shakes his head.

'Wolff only asked him to provide a cloth with blood or other body material from Landgraaf.'

'Did Wolff know that Hadeking was dead?'

'I told him at the end of the interview. After he got the bag of bloody clothes and bandages, he did not speak to Hadeking anymore. He knew that Hadeking had faked an accident with the chainsaw, but not that he had been multi-champion chainsaws.'

'And what about Landgraaf a false alibi?'

'That too was simple according to Wolff. A phone call from a journalist, which appealed to both Landgraaf's vanity and his fear of making mistakes, was enough to lure him to a closed café in Nunspeet.'

'That corresponds with the story of Landgraaf himself,' concludes Gerard Maas. 'The end of year article in De Telegraaf was a brilliant idea. That explains the urgency.'

'That afternoon there would be no one to bother Wolff, allowing him plenty of time to tinker the remains of skin and blood under the nails of Marieke van Boxbergen and to bury the murder weapon in the garden.'

All four are silent.

'Does that explain the suicide of Hadeking?' Brian asks.

Jozef shakes his head.

'Hard to tell. I can imagine that he was in shock when he learned that he had contributed to the murder of Marieke van Boxbergen. But is that a reason to commit suicide?'

'Considering yourself a slave is something else than being complicit in a murder. Moreover, I can imagine that the prospect of spending the rest of his life in a cell is unbearable for an outdoorsman like Hadeking,' says Ellen.

'I think we will never know,' Jozef concludes and looks at Ellen and Brian.

'Suppose Rob Meier did not have the misfortune to bump into John Brooks. Would we have solved the case?' asks Ellen.

'Through Rob Meier we found Harry Beerenkamp and at Beerenkamp we discovered the hotmail address and that led us to Maarten Wolff,' says Jozef, and pensively taps his pen on the edge of the desk.

'I think we can talk about this for a long time,' says Gerard Maas. 'Can I persuade you to do that elsewhere? I suggest drinking a beer in the Heks.'

Gerard Maas does not wait for the answer and stands up to put on his coat.

'What are we waiting for?' he asks enthusiastically.

It is busy in the Heks. Gerard Maas pushes himself forward and returns grinning, with four glasses of foamy Meerbron tripel.

'I would like to invite you to celebrate the turn of the year with Margot and me. Don't feel obliged if you already have other plans,' says Jozef to Ellen and Brian when Gerard Maas indicates that it is time for him to go home. Brian remains silent and waits for Ellen's answer.

‘Actually we planned to go to the Ardennes for a few days after Christmas, but unfortunately circumstances changed. I think Norman wouldn’t mind spending this new year in Deventer.’

‘I’m happy to accept that invitation,’ says Brian.

‘Well, I expect you all at five o’clock. I take care of everything.’

76 Sunday 31 December 22:00

John Brooks starts the engine and joins the line of cars that drive at the pace of the boat. The moment the wheels of his car hit the ground of the Irish Republic he is no longer John Brooks. He is Tom Nolan again, named after his grandfather, a poor sheep farmer and potter in the deserted hills of Connemara. The sale of illegal whiskey enabled his grandfather to keep his family of thirteen children alive.

Tom Nolan is now driving along the Dun Laoghaire quay in the direction of the center of Dublin. Although he has slept several quarters of an hour on the boat, he is still tired. Yet he does not feel inclined to find a hotel in Dublin. He would rather put the car by the side of the road later if he can no longer stay awake. Before people go out on the streets to celebrate the turn of the year, he wants to have left Dublin behind.

He follows the signs to the N4 and the N6, the two roads that run from Dublin to the west. After three quarters of an hour he says goodbye to the last buildings of the Irish capital. It is dark everywhere. Here and there a light burns in the distance. He seems to be the only one who is still on the road. Everyone is sitting at home or in the pub waiting for midnight. Beyond Kinnegad, where the N6 direction Galway splits from the N4 towards Sligo, he loses the fight against the sleep. After he woke up a few times without having an idea how long his eyes had been closed, he parks his car in a parking lot just outside Rochfortbridge and puts on his coat. Within ten seconds after he has closed his eyes he falls asleep.

77 Sunday 31 December 24.00 hours

Ellen embraces Norman and kisses him on his mouth.

‘A very happy and healthy year,’ she says.

‘Let’s make it a great year together,’ he adds. She kisses him one more time, but can not stop thinking about Max at the same time. Where does he spend the New Year? In three weeks he will leave for Brazil. She hopes she can see him again before his departure. She releases Norman and walks to Brian, who is somewhat lost.

‘Brian, a happy new year and a good cooperation,’ she says and kisses him three times.

Jozef and Margot also join in and the best wishes are exchanged over and over again.

With the five of them they go outside and from all sides the New Year’s wishes come to them. Arm-in-arm Ellen and Norman watch the flares bursting above the town of Deventer. It has been a fantastic evening. Jozef had spent the day in the kitchen making snacks based on the traditional dishes of the island of Réunion, a combination of French and Creole-Indian cuisine. Of course Jozef was not satisfied with everything, but the result would not be out of place in a star restaurant. In a pleasant way there was room for Ellen to tell her story. That way she could share how much she was struck by the life of John Brooks, aka Tom Nolan, his permanent fear, his beautiful play on the tin whistle and the sympathy she had received for him.

‘What are we doing?’ Jozef asks after a while. ‘Are we still drinking something?’

Nobody says no to that. It is almost five o’clock when Ellen and Norman walk home through the Papenstraat. There are still poppings here and there.

78 Monday, January 1 6.30

Tom Nolan dreams that he is transported blindfolded in the backseat of a swinging and thumping car. Every time the car drives through a hole or a bump in the road, he hits his head hard against something hard. "Stop, stop," he yells, but the car is going faster and faster. He hears men laughing. They make jokes about him. They say that his father was also such a swank. It was his own fault that the old man was ambushed. The same thing will undoubtedly happen to him. Tom tries to pull the blindfold, but that is prevented by the man who is sitting next to him. An iron grip embraces his wrists. The driver threatens to knock him unconscious if he does not keep his ease. Suddenly the car stops and the journey ends. He gets thrown out of the car and ends up with his face in the mud. Without knowing where to go, he begins to crawl. He cuts his hands and knees to sharp stones. "Down, down, heads down!" shouts a voice in the distance. He hears a loud bang next to him. He looks aside and sees a burning car. The door of the car opens and a person tries to leave the car. Two meters away the person falls down, blackened. There is a boy in the back seat of the car. The boy looks at him with wide open eyes. In the flames the boy’s face changes into a bird, a male blackbird with a yellow beak. The blackbird starts to whistle. Tom recognizes the melody. The blackbird whistles his song of fear.

The beautiful tones of the bird are roughly interrupted by a hard banging. Tom wakes up. He looks straight into the eyes of an angry looking man. He tries to move in vain. His body is stiffened by the cold. When he managed

to open his door, the man starts to scold at him. Tom Nolan does not understand everything the man says, but it is clear that he can not stay here. He hears a few times the word drunk from which he concludes that the man thinks he has fallen asleep drunk. He quickly starts his car and drives away. On the clock in the dashboard he sees that it is already eight o'clock. He has slept a long time.

Slowly it dawns. The sky is cloudy and it looks like it can start raining every moment. That happens when he has passed Ballinasloe. It is a drizzle that can last for hours. The surroundings disappear behind a gray curtain that only releases contours and vague colors. It makes him melancholy. Where does that feeling come from? Is it because he comes home after a long journey? Or because he is a stranger here, lonely and lost? He could have gone anywhere. Why exactly to Ireland, the country he left for good twenty years ago? John Brooks is in his passport, born in Hull, England. Tom Nolan died, died during a flight for the police. Why is he driving here? If his mother is still alive, she is seventy-one. More than twenty years ago, he slipped away from her life. He chose to hurt her. After she lost her husband, she also lost her son. For exactly the same reason: the battle for the Irish Republic. She thinks he is dead. Why does he want to disturb her peace? Does he want to please her or only himself?

At nine, he enters Galway. He still knows the way by heart. As a young talented flute player, he often played here. The pubs were happy to offer him a stage for his music. Galway, the city that burst with good musicians. The streets are empty, but here and there a pub has been opened. He parks his car at the Eyre Square and enters the center. His heart beat faster when he notices that O'Malley's Bar is open. That is the bar he used to play the most. What happens if someone recognizes him? Then he will tell that he has worked abroad for many years. Nervously he steps into the café. The bartender wishes him a happy New Year and asks what he wants. The other guests in the cafe pay no attention to him. Tom orders a coffee and a sandwich. Nothing unusual. The man next to him hums a tune that he has often played. He is one among equals here. For the first time since he got off the boat, he feels somewhat at ease. Suppose he lived in Galway and would play every evening in one of the thousand pubs in the city. No, he knows that is not possible. They would recognize him and the IRA would find him. With a feeling of regret, he pays the bill and returns to his car.

From Galway he takes the road to Headford. He chooses the beautiful secondary road to Ballinrobe. A friend of his, a good violinist, used to live in Cross. Ballinrobe has not changed. The narrow main street with parked cars on the left and right side of the road still forms an obstacle to through traffic. From Ballinrobe he has to drive along the Lough Mask. How often did he not fish there? With the fly catching trout, an art that he never properly mastered. In Partry to the left, to Tourmekeady and just before the village on the right into the mountains. A few more kilometers. He has a tendency to turn around. It was a wrong decision to go back. Yet he does not stop. He drives on the winding road full of holes at walking pace. He recognizes every turn and every stone. He walked this track daily. First to the primary school in Tourmekeady, later to the bus that took him to high school in Castlebar.

In the bend where the color of the rock changes from gray to brown, the house where he grew up is located. Is his mother still at the window? He walks cautiously over the gravel path that leads to the house. His heartbeat rises and he gets warm when he discovers a silhouette behind the curtains of the kitchen window. He recognizes the contours of his mother. It is her. There she was, as if nothing changed since he left. He can no longer stop his tears and he stands crying. His mother does not notice anything. He can still turn around. He continues. Then a man appears in a black suit from behind the shed next to the house. The man points a gun at him and shoots. The first bullet that hits him in the chest feels like a pin prick. He no longer feels the second and third. As he collapses, he sees that his mother looks up and slaps the hand in front of her mouth. He is dead when she comes out crying and throws herself on his body with a beastly cry.

79 Monday 8 January 2.30 pm

Ellen is staring out of the window. On the screen of her computer is an article from the Western Journal, the largest regional newspaper of the Irish province of Mayo. A man in his mid-forties was shot dead in front of his mother at a farm just outside the village of Tourmekeady. It is Tom Nolan who has been without trace since 1987. Several sources say that the man was recruited by the IRA in that year and was responsible for several attacks in Northern Ireland in subsequent years. In the early nineties the man seems to have crossed over to the British, after which he served for years as secret informant. The death of the man is therefore seen as a settlement. Nobody has claimed responsibility for the murder.

80 Wednesday 10 January 11.00

Guido Landgraaf stands in the middle of the lawn and looks around. The sight of the imposing country house makes him sad. Why did he move here? What did he expect to find here? It was not just Marieke's wish. He wanted it himself. In this place, where an ancient history is tangible in everything, he would find himself again. Here the contact between him and the world would be restored. He would spend the last part of his life in

harmony with nature. In all modesty he would adapt to the course of the seasons and with respect he would continue the work of his predecessors at Lankbergen.

The tragic events do not necessarily mean the end of that dream. Because of the death of Marieke, he has lost his connection with this area, with this environment. He is now a stranger and an outsider. In addition, Geert Hadeking has taken all practical and historical knowledge into the grave. If he continues to live here, he is completely alone.

He peers at a broken tile on the roof of the mansion, at black paint flakes on the wooden door of the barn next to the house, at the cracks in the sandstone platform, at the half decayed plants in the borders around the lawn, at the five immense chestnut trees that seem to stand in the way. With all these things something has to be done sooner or later. But what? And when? And who should do that? Some time ago Geert mentioned subsidies for avenue planting or agricultural nature management. Was that important? Should he do something with that? If he wants to stay here he has to appoint a successor of Geert Hadeking as soon as possible.

That thought palls on him. He has contracted people all his life, told them what to do and checked if they were doing well. That must be finished. He does not want any problems anymore. Writing a book, that's what he wants. But for that he does not need more than a desk, a computer and a comfortable chair. And perhaps a quiet, inspiring environment. In any case, no estate that only costs energy. Their old house in Bloemendaal was actually perfect.

It is clear what he is going to do. Tomorrow he will call the broker to put the estate on sale. He will probably lose one or two million, but he does not care. He just wants to get out of here.

Suddenly he hears a whistling sound behind him. He turns around in alarm. Against the edge of the forest is a figure in a long brown coat. It is a man who raises his hand. Guido has a tendency to walk away and flee into the house. But why would he? What else can he do? What is he afraid of? Maybe it's someone who wants to kill him. If he flees now, the person will try again later. He walks confidently onto the man with the long coat. Then he recognizes him.

'Good afternoon,' he says. 'How can I help you?'

'I still get money from you. One and a half tons to be precise. You gave me an assignment. I have successfully completed it. That some fool then stabbed your wife is painful for you, but does not detract from our deal.'

'Robert Devenijns,' says Guido Landgraaf.

'To serve you.'

'How can you be so sure that you have fulfilled your assignment? You have taught Harry Beerenkamp a lesson. He indeed did not bother me anymore.'

'Thank you for understanding me.'

'But that does not mean that you have fulfilled your assignment. Harry Beerenkamp only acted on behalf of Maarten Wolff. If you had done your job well, you would not have taken Beerenkamp but his client.'

'Then we have a difference of opinion. You wanted me to put an end to the bullying, as you called it yourself. I have done that. The murder of your wife did not belong there.'

'What do you want exactly?'

'The agreed reward.'

'And if I do not give it?'

'Then I am forced to take measures.'

'Such as? Will you also work me with a knife? Then the police will find you. Or do you hire a bailiff? Then we will see who is right. Yet, I am not a bad guy. Although you did not do your job well, it did cost you time and effort. As far as I am concerned, you send me an invoice for hours and expenses incurred. I do not look at an hour or more or less.;

Without waiting for an answer, Guido Landgraaf turns and walks to the back entrance of the house. Robert Devenijns remains standing for minutes. Then he turns around and trudges across the narrow forest path to the hole in the fence through which he has entered. In the car he lights up a cigarette and puts a Johnny Cash CD in the CD player. **I'm a solitary man**, the powerful voice of the man in black reverberates through the Renault.

