

A cosy murder mystery novelette

HINK #1



The Dead Dancer

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by Anna Emm

BOOK ONE in the HINK series.

(The series consists of 30 titles.)

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Translated from Afrikaans by Desirée Tesner-Smith

CHAPTER 1

The report is on the second page of the *Agrippa Journal*. It wouldn't have caught his attention were it not for the photo, because the heading is nothing special. Just one more suicide. One more person for whom the city has become too much... But the photo next to the short report is that of the old Steygger building where he lived during his first two years as a young policeman. His flat was on the 19th floor – high enough to jump from had he really wanted to. But at 23 the idea would have never entered his mind. Back then, life was a dream, after all.

Alexander Hinkel stuffs his pipe while he leans forward over the newspaper. Sitting here at his regular table on the sidewalk outside the Mockingbird Café, he now looks at the report with more interest. Lost in thought, he scratches his dark beard while reading:

AGRIPPA – Drug lord Joe Pakki's fiancée committed suicide on Tuesday evening by jumping from her flat in the Steygger building. The 26-year-old Christina Bossa, a former dancer, was often seen with Pakki at social events, and in March the couple announced their engagement. Pakki, who was out of town at the time of the incident, could not yet be reached for comment. According to her brother, Christina Bossa had a history of depression. The police do not suspect foul play.

A young waitress appears next to the table with a pot of coffee.

“Refill?”

Hinkel puts his pipe in his mouth, nods and merely pushes his empty cup in her direction. He can see the girl wants to strike up a conversation. With one hand, he rubs over his short, shaved hair and looks out over the street while she pours. It's peak hour between 07:30 and 08:30, and there are few people in the Mockingbird Café at this time of the morning. Maybe it's too noisy.

He prefers it that way.

The waitress has finished pouring. “The usual?” she asks. Once again, Hinkel only nods and she walks back to the kitchen.

He is just about to continue paging through the newspaper when he spots a familiar face on the other side of the café’s low wall.

“Thought I’d find you here!” Captain Robert Flint, a well-built man with red hair in his late thirties exclaims. He climbs over the wall. “Howzit, Hink!”

Alexander Hinkel eyes the captain suspiciously. “And what do I owe this honour to, Flint?”

“Am I not allowed to look up an old friend for coffee?” the policeman asks jokingly and pulls out a chair. He sits down without an invitation. “Must be nice to be able to sit and read the paper this time of the morning! Us working people don’t have that luxury.”

Hinkel looks at him. “And yet, Flint, here you are ... for coffee with an old friend, as you claim.”

Flint laughs. “OK, busted! I’ve come to see you because I need your help. Or rather, your advice.”

The waitress returns with a cup for the policeman as well. She fills it and asks, “Breakfast?”

Flint smiles. “Why not?”

“Same as Hink?” she asks and glances in Hink’s direction. He just sits drawing on his pipe.

“Sounds good. Thanks, Lucia,” Flint says.

When she walks away, Hinkel chuckles. “You know the girl’s *name*, Flint? I thought working people like you don’t have time to hang out in places like these.”

“How the hell do you *not* know her name, Hink?!” Flint laughs. “Lucia has been serving you every morning for years!”

Alexander Hinkel puts his pipe in his mouth again and his eyes follow a taxi that comes weaving noisily through the morning traffic.

“What you need, Hink, is a woman. You are turning into a sour old man before my very eyes. And you aren’t even thirty-four yet.”

“I had one, or don’t you remember?” Hinkel mumbles. “It was a nightmare.”

For a moment, Captain Robert Flint silently meets the gaze of the man next to him. “When last have you heard from Macey?” he asks cautiously.

Hinkel sighs, puts down the pipe and picks up his coffee. “So, which is it?” he asks. “Help or advice?”

“Excuse me?”

“Do you want my *help*, Flint, or my *advice*? Which of the two? The one will cost you. The other is free.”

“I see. Which of the two is free?” When Hinkel again doesn’t answer – something Flint is

used to by this time – he says, “Fine, I’ll put it on the books... *If* you can help. I’m getting stuck with the Myburgh case. I take it you know the details?”

Hinkel nods. “Mrs Myburgh was found dead in the cottage in their yard, if I remember correctly? She moved out of the main house and in there while she and her husband were getting divorced. She was shot at close range. At the time of the incident, Mr Myburgh himself was a mere 50 m from the cottage, but he didn’t hear the shot. Neither did the neighbours. So, it’s suspected that the murderer used a silencer.”

Flint nods. “Thing is, we *know* Myburgh shot his wife. The divorce would have left him coughing up millions, so there’s motive. And get this, two weeks before her death Mrs Myburgh had burglar proofing fitted in front of all the cottage windows and she had a camera installed above the front door...”

“She was scared,” Hinkel nods pensively and sucks his pipe.

“Exactly. And it gets better: Mr Myburgh owns a pistol. *With* a silencer...”

Hinkel looks at him with surprise. “So why don’t you arrest him? Forensics will surely be able to determine whether the weapon corresponds with the bullet?”

“They would have been, yes, were it not for the fact that the weapon disappeared without a trace. And Myburgh pleads not guilty. Claims he can’t remember when last he saw the weapon.”

Hinkel frowns. “It doesn’t sounds like the guy cares whether he looks guilty or not...”

“He’s toying with us,” Flint nods. “He *knows* we know he’s guilty, but he also knows we can’t prove it. We don’t have a murder weapon and we have no idea how he got in. Burglar bars in front of all the windows and the door was locked from the inside. The key was still in the lock.”

“And Mrs Myburgh’s surveillance camera?”

“The footage shows nobody went in *or* out through the door. If we can’t prove how Myburgh did it, we have nothing.” Flint pulls a thick brown envelope from his inside jacket pocket and puts it on the table. “Look through the crime scene photos. Maybe you’ll see something I missed. I must submit my report tomorrow. You’re my last hope...”

“Where have I heard that before?” Hinkel grins and picks up the envelope.

Lucia returns with their breakfast. “Anything else?” she asks and smiles sweetly at Hinkel. But he pulls the plate towards him and ignores her. He doesn’t answer.

Flint smiles apologetically. “That’s all for now, thanks, Lucia.” As she walks away, he gives Hinkel an unbelieving look. “Don’t tell me you’re not seeing it, Hink?!”

“Not seeing what?”

“The effect you have on women!”

Hinkel merely snorts. He unrolls his cutlery from the serviette.

“It’s *true*,” Flint laughs. “Everywhere you go, they fall over themselves to catch your eye. And all the while you’re doing your damndest to be a rude jerk. Shame on you, Hink! Do you have any idea how hard it is to get a date in this city? If I had only half your looks, I would long be happily married.”

Hinkel picks up the salt shaker and starts seasoning the fried eggs on his plate with a vengeance. He's not in the mood for this discussion. But Flint seems unwilling to drop the topic. "It is the leg?" he nudges.

Hinkel shoves a forkful of bacon and eggs into his mouth.

"Is that why you are like this, Hink? Because of your leg? Because, let me tell you, not one of these girls mind that you have a slight limp. If you ask me, it makes you all the more attractive and mysterious to them, you lucky bastard."

"It's not the leg," Hinkel says with his mouth full of food, "and it isn't Macey either – in case that was your next question. I'm not interested in complications. I prefer being alone. Can we eat now?"

For a few seconds, Captain Robert Flint observes his ex-colleague in silence. Then he gives up and pulls his plate towards him. Whatever Alexander Hinkel's problem with the fairer sex is, isn't worth cold bacon and eggs.

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CHAPTER 2

In his studio flat above the Mockingbird Café, Alexander Hinkel pushes the heavy weights to one side. He uses a towel to wipe the sweat from his neck. The pain in his right leg tells him that he's had enough exertion for one day. He picks up his water bottle and gets up, but when he puts weight on his leg, it gives way under him. He swears and grabs on to the low window sill to steady himself. For a second or two, he stands there. Then he limps to the bench and sits down on it.

Hink. The irony of his nickname isn't lost on him. In his mother language, it means to limp. But the name was there before the leg, and now there is nothing he can do about it.

He looks out through the large windows while catching his breath. The sun has just gone down over Agrippa's high buildings and it will soon get dark and cold here in the open studio space with its bare walls.

The flat used to be a storeroom for the shops on the ground floor. Later the owner of the Mockingbird Café had a small bathroom installed so that he could move in on a temporary basis. It is however still more a glorified warehouse than an apartment and when the restaurant's new owners took over four years ago, they were not sure what to do with the space. Hinkel, already a regular at the time, offered to buy it from them. He's been living here since. It isn't fancy, but it's large and close to everything. The simple amenities are good enough for him and he had fashioned the large open part into a bedroom, office, gym space and open plan kitchen. It isn't the Hilton, but it works.

Hinkel gets up slowly from the bench again. He will have to get into a hot shower, otherwise the leg is going to give him hell. Limping, he walks to his large wooden desk and switches on the reading lamp. The light falls onto the crime scene photos he had laid out on the desk earlier the afternoon. He had looked through them carefully, but couldn't see anything that explains how Mr Myburgh could have gotten access to the cottage. Flint isn't

going to be too happy.

There is a loud knock on the steel sliding door that separates his apartment from the building's upper landing.

"Mr Hinkel?!" a woman's voice calls out.

Hinkel sighs quietly, but doesn't move from where he's standing. He is determined to ignore whoever it may be.

"I know you're here, Mr Hinkel! I saw the light going on! My name is Janke Lofstat! I must speak with you urgently!"

He feels the irritation rise in him. "My office hours are on the door!" he calls back. "Come back tomorrow!"

"I need only a few minutes of your time! It won't take long!"

Hinkel knows this type of woman. Dull, middle-aged housewives who suspect their husbands of cheating, and now they want to pay him to get the evidence. All of them *always* say it's urgent. But how urgent can your crumbling marriage be if you only wake up once your husband already has one foot out the door?

He flicks the towel over his shoulder and walks stiffly towards the steel door – ready to tell the woman exactly what he thinks of her and her sob story.

He lifts the lock and pushes the door open. But when his eyes land on her, it is *he* who is caught off guard. She is young – too young to be a disgruntled housewife. Her dark hair is caught on both sides of her head in two messy ponytails. Her small mouth is thin and cheeky, her eyes wide awake. She wears a purple T-shirt with some or other heavy metal logo on the chest. She's attractive, in an unusual way. Not the trophy wife type he usually gets. Her bare forearms are muscled and she has the calves of a gymnast, in spite of the fact that she's small – almost a whole head shorter than him. Yet everything about her spells trouble. If this woman does indeed have a husband who cheats on her, Hinkel is happy that he's not in that guy's shoes.

Her gaze travels over his sweaty torso. "Sorry to bother you so late," she says and an attractive dimple appears in her left cheek.

Hinkel is now feeling even grumpier. "It's too late now to say you're sorry, don't you think?" He glares at her, but that doesn't seem to put her off.

"It won't take long, but it's ... um ... confidential. Can I perhaps come in?"

"What's it about?" he asks curtly.

She leans forward slightly until he can see the yellow specks in her dark eyes. She looks at him so intensely that he has to suppress the urge to take a step back. There's something familiar about her, he suddenly realises.

"The murder of Christina Bossa," she says.

"Bossa?" Hinkel frowns. "Are you talking about the story in this morning's paper? At the Steyggler building?"

"That's right," she says, and before he can prevent it, she steps past him into the flat.

He turns around to stop her, but as he turns, he puts weight on his leg. Pain shoots

through his body. He swears and grabs the door for support. When he looks up, she is standing next to his desk. Her eyes shift to his leg.

“You’ll have ice that,” she says.

He steps closer, limping painfully. “I just missed a step, that’s all. Now ... you have five minutes, Miss ... eh...”

“Janke Lofstat.”

“Speak,” he says and folds his arms over his chest. He’s trying his best to look intimidating, but he fears that, between the sore leg and the bare torso, he’s failing miserably. “You say you’re here about the Bossa incident?”

She nods. “Christina is ... was one of my clients. I own a boxing club and Christina started coming to me two weeks ago for self-defence classes. I have reason to believe she’s been murdered.”

“I see.” *The boxing club explains the muscled arms...* “That she took self-defence classes doesn’t mean she was murdered,” he says. “According to the papers the police doesn’t suspect foul play.”

She waves a hand. “You know how it is, Mr Hinkel, the police have their hands full with all the crime. They just want to put the case away as soon as possible. But I am a good judge of character, and Christina Bossa is the last person who would have taken her own life. Someone threw her off that building, mark my words.” She leans against the side of the desk, folds her arms over her chest and then notices the crime scene photos. He sees how she lets her eyes go over them with interest.

If his damn leg didn’t hurt so much, he’d jump forward stuff the photos in the drawer. But he doesn’t dare make so sudden a movement.

“This isn’t a good time for me, Miss ... eh...”

“Lofstat. Janke Lofstat.” She cocks her head to one side. “I thought you would have been more interested, Mr Hinkel. Riddles like this one are your thing, aren’t they?” Their eyes meet and there is a charged silence before she speaks again. “Christina was afraid of heights. She could never have jumped from that balcony.”

“People do strange things when they’re desperate.”

“There’s a loft space at my club. It’s barely two metres above ground. Christina never even wanted to go up there. Her palms started sweating when I once suggested it. So, say she really wanted to commit suicide, why jump? She told me she had a firearm – a pistol – so why not just shoot herself? Why not take pills? There were other options. To jump when you have a terrible fear of heights just doesn’t make sense.”

He gives her a questioning look. “What is your interest in the case, Miss Lofstat? What does it matter to you whether she was murdered or not? You said Christina Bossa was merely a client.”

For the first time since she stepped inside, Janke Lofstat looks slightly uncertain. “I *liked* Christina. She wanted a better life and was willing to put in the work to get it.” Her gaze travels over the apartment, from the weights to his unmade bed, over the worn out old couch and boxes of messy files and papers standing around the desk. “It’s something to

be admired, don't you think? Someone who is willing to make difficult choices in the interest of a better life?"

He assumes it's a rhetorical question. "So, what exactly do you want *me* to do?"

"The police will sweep this case under the rug, Mr Hinkel. You know that just as well as I do. Whoever is responsible for Christina's death, will get off. I want to hire you to ask a few questions, that's all. Just look through the report. Talk to Christina's neighbours. Find out what really happened."

Their eyes meet and a strange premonition starts forming in his body. Once again, he gets the sense that their paths have crossed before.

"I don't work for free," he says. "And I don't think you can afford me."

She lifts herself off the desk. "I'm offering you an exchange." She smiles confidently. "I know how he did it, Mr Hinkel..." She gestures over her shoulder to his desk and then walks past him towards the door. "How about I offer you my murderer ... in exchange for yours?"

It takes him a few seconds to register what it is she's talking about, but by that time she'd already gone down the stairs. And his damn leg is too sore for him to run after her.

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CHAPTER 3

Mill Street is walking distance from the Mockingbird Café, but his leg still hurts after yesterday evening's workout and Hinkel decides to rather take the Golf. The morning traffic is still heavy when he parks in front of the *Red Rooster Fight Club*.

Yesterday evening after he had showered and rubbed ointment on his leg, he Googled Janke Lofstat. It took him exactly three minutes to find out that she is the youngest daughter of wealthy property magnate Joos Lofstat. She has an older brother, Mike, and a sister, Debbie – both high up in the property sector. Janke herself has a less impressive CV: She never finished school, and before she turned twenty she'd already been arrested twice for possession of illegal substances.

Maybe that's why he'd thought she looked familiar. Maybe her photo ended up in a docket on his desk back in the day...

Hinkel must admit, in spite of his irritation with her self-confident attitude towards him yesterday, he is ... interested. During his six years as policeman and the four years he spent freelancing thereafter, he learnt that there are actually only a few kinds of people. There are patterns of human behaviour, and certain personalities follow certain patterns. Mix that with certain circumstances, certain backgrounds, and it's very easy to predict how those personalities will behave. It is seldom that he meets someone who breaks free from those patterns. And in spite of Janke Lofstat's unsavoury past, her obviously strong personality, her exceptional intelligence and the pressure that comes with her family status, she has, according to Google, managed to get her life in order. That doesn't

happen often. And he finds it interesting. His gut tells him she's hiding something.

Hinkel walks into the boxing club. Inside, it is surprisingly spacious. In front of him is a boxing ring and to the right a large training area with weights, mats and equipment. At the back of the club are several punching bags. There is a wall with lockers and two doors indicating change rooms. He can see from here that the lockers are marked with letters, not numbers. To the left, against the wall, is a narrow staircase that rises to the open loft area that she spoke of yesterday evening. It looks like office space.

Hinkel is just about to ask the muscleman behind the counter where he can find Janke Lofstat, when he spots her. She comes through one of the doors at the back. He makes use of the few seconds before she sees him to openly study her.

Her hair is again tied in two ponytails (of maybe still, because they look even messier now than they did last night) and she wears a wide pair of denim shorts with suspenders that are fastened over her shoulders over a white gym top. Her legs are bare, except for the clunky black boots on her feet, and those calf muscles are on full display. She reminds Hinkel of a cat, moving so effortlessly in her body. He feels a little sting of jealousy when he thinks of his own leg. Back then, before that bullet hit him, he was in top condition. He could run rings around any of the other guys, and that while carrying a 20 kg bag on his back.

She looks up and smiles when she sees him standing at the counter. She doesn't look surprised to see him here.

"I wondered whether you were going to show up here," she smiles. "Have you been able to find out anything?"

As discreetly as possible, he shifts his weight onto his left leg.

"Maybe."

"Ah, I see. I show you mine, then you show me yours?" she teases.

"I'm not the one who suggested this little game, Miss Lofstat," he says coolly.

She smiles smugly and nods. Then she turns to the muscleman behind the counter. "Hugo, bring us two coffees, will you? Mr Hinkel and I are going to have a little chat upstairs in my office." Her gaze drifts back to him. "Shall we?"

Without waiting for an answer, she turns around and walks ahead to the stairs. Hinkel's heart drops.

The leg's going to give him trouble.

At the stairs she waits for him. He knows he limps and she must surely remember about his leg from the previous evening, but she doesn't ask whether he's okay with the stairs. She waits until he catches up with her and then she starts climbing. He follows. Going up isn't so bad, he realises. He manages surprisingly easily if he pulls himself up by the railing step by step. He'd rather not think of getting back down now.

The office space at the top is a mess, with documents, small weights and boxes taking up the chairs, floor and couch.

Janke clears some space on the couch and gestures for him to sit. Then she pulls up a chair and takes a seat opposite him. "Ask what you want to ask," she says. "I'm all ears."

He hesitates. "Why me?"

She raises her brows slightly. "Why *not* you?"

"I know about your past, Miss Lofstat, of your scuffles with the law, and I'm sure you know that I used to be in the police. It is therefore quite possible that our paths have crossed somewhere before. Surely you understand that it makes me wonder what your motives are here..."

She waves a hand. "I see where this is going. Let me put your mind at ease, Mr Hinkel: Our paths have crossed, you're right. But not in the way you think. In 2015 you arrested a man by the name of Bennie Price..."

"The gang leader?" Hinkel frowns as he recalls the image of a well-built, tattooed gang leader. It was one of his big arrests, one of the cases that put him in the running for making captain.

She nods. "Price and I were ... in a relationship – on and off. *On* at the time of his arrest."

Hinkel looks at her, shocked. "You do realise that none of this puts my mind at ease in the slightest, don't you? If I sent your boyfriend to jail, I have very little reason to trust you."

Her thin mouth pulls into an attractive smile. The dimple dents her cheek. She leans back in her chair and puts her black boots on the coffee table between them one by one. "Firstly, my ex-boyfriend. And secondly: I am the one who sent him to jail, not you. Well, maybe the two of us did it together. Your information, my testimony."

He stares at her, and then he suddenly remembers: *The skinny girl in the witness stand...*

"You gave evidence against Price."

She nods. "That's right. He was sent to jail for fifteen years and I haven't seen him since. We were history before he was locked up. To tell you the truth, I hoped that someone would catch him one day so that I would be free of him. It's ... he would never have let me go. Bennie Price is bad news. I don't know where I would have been today if he were still around."

Hinkel doesn't know why, but he wants to believe her.

"So," he asks again, "why me?"

She lifts her dark gaze to meet his and he feels an unexpected fluttering in his stomach. An excitement the likes of which he hadn't felt in years. He can't tell whether it's a warning, or attraction. Or maybe it's both. But he is quite sure it spells trouble.

Janke shrugs. "Your name stuck in my head. Over the years, I followed your cases. You see things the others don't see. You don't care about formalities. Your instincts are sharp."

"And yet..." he says slowly, "I clearly missed something? In the Myburgh case?"

She smiles. "Don't feel bad, Mr Hinkel. It's my gift – detail. It's just how my brain works. I see things – trivial things – and I remember them. I only saw something about the Myburgh case in the papers once or twice, but at first glance I could see that there were spring blossoms outside the window in the garden and I remembered that the Myburgh murder

was in September. I could see the keychain lying on the kitchen counter had the number 16 on it ... and I remembered that the house was at number 16 Akasia Street.”

“What is your point, Ms Lofstat?”

“I’m sure your buddies in the police are pulling out their hair trying to figure out exactly how Mr Myburgh got into the cottage to murder his wife. *That’s* how the photos ended up on your desk at the last moment, not so? Well, I can help. I know how he did it.” She smiles smugly. “But tell me first, will you take my case?”

Her eyes challenge him. Neither of them look away.

“I’m not in the habit of letting myself be blackmailed, Miss Lofstat,” he then says. “But let’s just say I’m interested. The Bossa case also caught my attention.”

“Of course it did,” she smiles.

His eyes search hers to see if she’s teasing him, but all he finds is a trace of admiration. He sighs and strokes a hand over his hair. “As long as you realise the possibility is still there that Christina Bossa did indeed commit suicide,” he says.

“She didn’t.”

He grins and sits forward. “So? Don’t hold me in suspense any longer. How did Myburgh get into the cottage?”

There are footsteps on the stairs and Hugo appears carrying two coffee mugs.

“Saved by the bell, Miss Lofstat,” Hinkel says.

“What do you say we drop the formalities? Seeing that we are now going to be partners?” She extends a hand to him. “I’m Janke. And they say your friends call you Hink.”

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CHAPTER 4

Captain Robert Flint is busy pouring himself a cup of coffee as Hinkel steps into the office. When their eyes meet, Flint can see there’s news. He takes out a second coffee mug and waits for Hinkel to come closer. As usual, the presence of his former colleague causes ripples through the office – especially among the female officers.

Alexander Hinkel has, apart from his looks, a reputation among the younger guys. They see him as a Sherlock Holmes of sorts. In this case, also, Flint believes his friend’s openly grumpy attitude and the limp, of course, contribute to the mystery and adoration he is viewed with.

Hink is good, but he isn’t Sherlock Holmes.

“Please tell me you’ve got something?” he asks as Hinkel joins him.

“That for me?” Hinkel points to the second coffee, and Flint holds it out to him. The two of them step over to Flint’s office and the captain closes the door behind them. He turns to

Hinkel.

“So?” he asks.

“There’s a secret door in the cottage.”

Flint’s eyes widen. “There’s a *what?*”

Hinkel nods. He puts the coffee mug down and then takes out the stack of photos. He pages through them until he comes to one of the fireplace, which he holds out to Flint.

“Do you see how the ornaments above the fireplace all face directly forward? And they’re perfectly spaced.”

Flint frowns. “And?”

“Whose shelves look like that? And look here, the little rug in front of the fireplace is moved to one side. If you look at the whole scene, it looks as if the rug should be in front of the fireplace, but it isn’t.”

Flint studies the photo. “I suppose it’s possible...” he says.

“The fireplace is also too shallow, see?” Hinkel holds a second photo out to Flint. It’s a photo of the cottage from the outside. “Where’s the chimney?”

“Bloody hell...”

Hinkel grins. “It’s a false panel, Flint. And I’m sure if you guys open it, you’ll find Myburgh’s fingerprints, possibly the weapon too.”

Flint whistles softly. “Myburgh had the cottage built before they were married, as an office for him. I don’t believe his wife knew of that entrance.”

“There’s only one reason why anyone builds an office with a secret entrance, Hinkel says. “If you do a bit of digging, Flint, you might just find signs of a few suspicious transactions and unsavoury clients. But that won’t even be necessary. You now have enough to put him away for murder.”

Flint looks up. “I owe you one...”

“Yes, you do,” Hinkel says. “And that brings me to the second reason for my visit.”

The captain looks surprised, but then he nods. “What do you want?”

“What do you know about the Bossa case?”

Flint frowns. “You mean Christina Bossa? Not much. Frank handled it. It was suicide. The case is closed.”

“Can I see the docket? I want to look around a bit. I’ve a client who alleges there was foul play.”

“What client?”

Hinkel doesn’t answer and Flint sighs.

“I can give you 24 hours,” he says. “That’s all. And it stays between us. You don’t discuss it with Frank.”

“When are you going to stop being scared of your warrant officer?” Hinkel teases.

“I’m not in the mood for arguments today. Take the docket, but you stay out of my guys’

hair, are we clear? I have a murderer to arrest.”

“Thanks.”

“And, Hink?”

“Yes?”

“We’re even now.”

Hinkel merely smiles. As usual, the captain has to go without an answer from him.

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He finds a parking space at the small shopping centre on the opposite side of the street from the Steyggler building. The place is busy. There are people queueing in front of the ATM. Before Hinkel gets out, he picks up the dossier and opens it. He lets his eyes roam over the contents. It’s a single page with Warrant Officer Frank Oelofse’s signature at the bottom.

Christina Bossa ... aged 26 ... suicide at 22:52 Sunday evening.

According to Oelofse’s report, George Bossa, brother of the deceased, flew to Agrippa in order to identify his sister’s body. He had said to the police that his sister had a history of depression and that she often took medication for it.

There are very little other details in the report. Only that the flat’s door was locked at the time of the incident and there had been no sign of forced entry. The police had searched the apartment, but found nothing suspicious.

Christina Bossa had sent two Whatsapp messages – one to her brother and one to her mother – in which she said that she was sorry, but that she no longer had the strength to keep on living. According to Oelofse that was sufficient to classify Bossa’s death as a suicide. He had not conducted any further interviews.

It does appear as if he spoke to the building supervisor, but he could not provide any additional information, except for the fact that the deceased’s fiancé, Joe Pakki, had paid her rent in advance for six months. The supervisor had a set of spare keys for the apartment, but at the time of the incident, it was safely in a drawer in his apartment. As far as he knew, no-one had ever come asking for it. Currently, Bossa’s brother, who has to clear out the apartment, is in possession of the keys.

Hinkel locks the car and crosses the road. On the ground floor, he knocks on the supervisor’s door. He knocks twice, but there is no sign of life. As he turns away, a short, chubby girl comes down the stairs.

“He isn’t here,” she says. “He plays bowls on Thursdays.” Her gaze travels over Hinkel and he sees a slight blush spread over her cheeks. “Is there perhaps something I can help you with, Mr ... eh...?”

“Alexander Hinkel. Do you have any idea when...?”

“Hinkel the *detective*?” Her eyes widen. “Are you here about what happened to Chrissie? The police had already been here, you know?”

“I’m just taking a look around,” he says. “I want to make sure the police has all the

information. Sometimes, when things go so fast, one can miss things.”

“I know what you mean,” she says. “They were in and out so quickly. And nobody spoke to *me*. I would have been able to tell them a thing or two...”

Hinkel takes a fresh look at the girl in front of him. She bites her lip and comes closer. “If they had asked me,” she says. “But no-one did. They only spoke to the supervisor. But Dirk doesn’t know of everything that goes on around here.”

“And you do?”

She smiles. “Chrissie and I were friends! We were close.”

“I see.” But he has his doubts. Girls like Christina Bossa – dancers and fiancées of drug lords – aren’t friends with chubby little tarts like the one standing before him now.

“I was hoping to perhaps get access to Miss Bossa’s apartment,” he says. “There wouldn’t perhaps be someone else who has a key?”

Her round little face brightens up. “I can unlock the flat for you! Chrissie gave me a spare key so that I could water the plants for her when she isn’t here. I mean ... when she *wasn’t* here.” She frowns. “Is that okay?”

“Perfect,” he says, and for the first time he smiles at her. “I’m sorry, I didn’t ask your name?”

“Bubbles,” she smiles back, blushing. “You can call me Bubbles.”

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CHAPTER 5

Christina Bossa’s neighbour, it seems, has quite a lot to say. Bubbles talks incessantly in the lift up to the 10th floor, without pausing once to draw a breath. Hinkel follows her down the passage. Her own door is opposite 10F, the flat from which Bossa reportedly jumped.

“She was such a lovely person!” Bubbles says. “It’s a pity I couldn’t get to know her better. Maybe I could have done something to prevent his whole thing, you know? But Chrissie wasn’t here a lot. Most of the time she was with that ex of hers, jet-setting all over. And he bought her the fanciest clothes and jewellery.”

Hinkel frowns when she says the word “ex”. “Do you mean Joe Pakki?”

For a moment, Bubbles looks a little rattled. “I *think* that’s his name,” she then says. “For a while, they were also engaged. You should have seen that ring!”

“I wasn’t aware of the fact that the engagement had been called off?”

“Well,” Bubbles says, “it’s not that I *know* it for a fact, and Chrissie herself never said something like that, but I know the signs. She didn’t wear the ring anymore, for starters, and there were other signs too.” She turns towards her apartment’s door, crouches down and lifts the mat. She picks up the key and unlocks the door with, chatting all the while. “Chrissie was suddenly here over weekends. It had been almost a month since she last

asked me to look after the plants. Maybe she forgot that I still had a key.” She pushes her front door open. “Sorry, I’m just getting it quickly.”

Hinkel remains standing in the passage. He sees her taking a key from a hook on the wall.

She turns towards him. “That fiancé of hers was here once, about a week ago. Quite a good looking man! Anyway, he was very chilled and Chrissie looked happy to see him. She even gave him a hug before they entered the apartment. He was there with her for a long time too, and then later he left on his own.”

“And how do you know all of this?” Hinkel asks.

Bubbles closes her apartment door again and gestures towards the peephole in the wood. “Someone has to keep an eye. Us girls must stick together! There’s enough scum in the area.” She gives him a look and Hinkel gets the impression that she’s referring to a specific piece of scum. But before he can ask her about it, she steps past him and unlocks the door to 10F.

At first glance, there’s nothing unusual about Christina Bossa’s apartment. The furnishings aren’t particularly luxurious, but neither are they sparse. There’s an open magazine on the coffee table and a pair of jogging shoes and dirty socks on the carpet. The plants Bubbles spoke of are in pots standing in the corners of the open plan space.

Hinkel walks into the small open plan kitchen and lifts the lid of the dustbin. Inside are pieces of glass, probably from a broken flower pot, because there are also wilted flowers in the bin. Nothing else. On the fridge are a takeaway menu, a flyer for a cabaret at the Agrippa Art Theatre, and a business card. Hinkel moves closer. It’s a card of the *Red Rooster Fight Club* with the amount of 'R1600' written on it.

Pretty pricy for self-defence classes, he thinks.

There is yellow police tape in front of the sliding door that leads to the small balcony. He steps closer and peeks out. The balcony is narrow and he doesn’t have to peek out far in order to see the street far below.

“Do you know whether Miss Bossa had a fear of heights?” he asks distractedly.

“I ... eh ... don’t know.” Bubbles sounds uncertain behind him.

“What exactly happened Tuesday night?” he asks and turns around. He looks straight at her. “Did you perhaps see or hear anything suspicious?”

“Oh, I wasn’t here when it happened,” Bubbles says quickly. “I was out. And when I got back at about eleven, it was crawling with police, lights everywhere. It was only then that I heard what had happened.”

That explains why no-one took her statement, he realises.

“What time did you go out, if I may ask?”

She thinks. “Just before seven.”

“I see. So, anyone could have entered your apartment between seven and eleven, taken the spare key for 10F from the hook and got in here that way?”

She looks shocked. “Oh, no. My flat’s door was locked!”

“And the key was under the mat?”

Bubbles opens her mouth to protest, but then she frowns and closes it again as the realisation dawns on her.

“Who else knows that you keep your key under the mat?” Hinkel asks.

“No-one. I ... I mean, except for...”

“Except?”

“Chrissie once locked herself out and phoned me. But I was at the shop and then I told her my key was under the mat. She opened up and took her key to get into her flat...”

“She could have told someone that,” Hinkel says.

Bubbles looks at him with wide eyes. “But why would she?”

Hinkel thinks about it. Why, indeed?

“When you came back Tuesday evening,” he asks, “did you notice anything out of the ordinary? Your mat, perhaps, that was skew, or the key in your flat that wasn’t hanging from the right hook?”

She is now visibly pale. “It’s ... I ... I mean, I didn’t really pay attention. I was upset about what had happened.”

“You mean about Miss Bossa’s death?”

“That too. I mean, *of course*. What happened was terrible. But I was tired and a little upset because my date left me sitting alone at the restaurant the whole evening. He never pitched, see. I was stood up! Can you believe it?”

Hinkel’s gaze scans her. “Hmm,” he says. “And tell me, were you aware of the fact that Miss Bossa was taking self-defence classes?”

She frowns. “Self-defence classes? Eh ... no, I didn’t know. But I suppose it makes sense.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, a girl like her. Suddenly single ... in a place like this. Men can be pigs, Mr Hinkel, let me tell you that. I’d also want to learn how to defend myself if I were Chrissie.”

Once again Hinkel gets the impression that it’s a specific pig she’s talking about. And he also gets the impression that Bubbles is itching to point a finger.

“Did you see someone pestering Miss Bossa?” he asks.

“Well,” she responds without thinking, “there was Alex Flock. He lives down the passage. He kept his distance while she was engaged, but once Chrissie was single, he started cornering her at every turn. And then he started pawing her. She reported him to Dirk, that much I know, because I heard her tell Alex that. But I doubt whether anything came of it.” She snorts. “We all know men stick together.”

Hinkel lifts an eyebrow. “Miss Bossa complained to the supervisor about a man who was harassing her?”

Bubbles nods. “Alex Flock,” she repeats, like a tattler child wanting to make sure the right one gets scolded.

He wonders why the fact that Christina Bossa was harassed by a resident wasn't in the report. Either Warrant Officer Frank Oelofse was keen to dismiss her death as suicide, and didn't want to complicate the investigation, or this Dirk supervisor didn't breathe a word of it to the police.

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When Hinkel goes to knock on the door lower down the passage, a man in a white vest and slightly dirty jeans opens the door. He has a beer tin in one hand and looks like he might have just woken up.

"Yes?" he asks impatiently.

Ah ... Hinkel thinks. His favourite type of suspect.

"Mr Flock?"

"What do you want?"

"I'm investigating the death of Christina Bossa, and I'm told by other residents on the floor that there's been a view altercations between the two of you."

Alex Flock's gaze sweeps over Hinkel with open contempt. "Who said that?" he barks.

"I understand Miss Bossa reported you to the supervisor?" Hinkel asks without answering his question. "She complained that you harassed her. Is that true?"

The man laughs. "That bitch was so full of it. Complained about everything. One just had to look her way for her to report you. I did nothing to her! She was a snob, that's all. One hell of a snob."

"There are witnesses who allege you were all over her, Mr Flock."

"Yes, well, they're lying."

"Or..." Hinkel smiles, "you're lying."

The man swears and moves to close the door, but Hinkel takes a step forward and stops him. "Where were you Tuesday evening, Mr Flock?"

"I was here! The whole evening. Minding my own business!"

"And did you see Ms Bossa that evening?"

"I was in my flat the whole time," he says curtly. "And I didn't see anybody."

Hinkel nods. "I'll confirm your story with the other residents," he says. "And did you perhaps hear anything that struck you as strange?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know, an argument. Strange voices in the hallway?"

"No. Nothing." He glares at Hinkel. "Can I go now? I worked night shift and I still have a few hours of sleep before I have to go to work again."

Hinkel smiles. "Just one more question, Mr Flock. How did you know Christina Bossa and Joe Pakki had broken off their engagement?"

Alex Flock stares at him.

“You *did* know, didn’t you?” Hinkel asks again. “Because according to a witness, your interest in Ms Bossa came suddenly – right after Mr Pakki disappeared from the scene.”

Alex Flock spits with indignation. He takes a step forward and looks down the hall to Bubbles’s door. “Is it that fat bitch? She must learn to keep her mouth shut about other people! I’ll slap her silly if she...” But he gets no further, because Hinkel grabs the man by the neck in one smooth movement and pushes him up against the wall.

“Now you listen to me, Mr Flock,” he says threateningly. “I’m not the police. I don’t have to protect your rights. If you lift so much as a finger against anyone in this building again, I will make sure you are the worse off for it. Do we understand each other?”

Wide-eyed and shaken, the man nods.

Hinkel lets him go and he grasps his throat, gasping.

“I’ll ask you one last time,” Hinkel says and straightens his own jacket. “How did you know that Miss Bossa and Mr Pakki had broken off their engagement?”

Alex Flock swallows hard. His fingers flutter to his throat where red finger marks are appearing. “She came to ask me whether I knew where she could sell a ring,” he then says.

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CHAPTER 6

As Hinkel enters through the Mockingbird’s doors, he sees Janke Lofstat sitting at the counter of the noisy restaurant. He stops in his tracks and considers making a U-turn, but then she sees him too. Her face brightens into a wide smile. “I saved a seat for you!” she calls out and points to an empty bar stool next to her.

He walks up to her. “I don’t have time to socialise,” he says curtly. “I have an appointment.”

She ignores his protests and gestures to the waiter behind the counter to come over. “Make it two coffees, please, Andreas.” She smiles sweetly at Hinkel and taps her hand on the bar stool’s seat. “Five minutes, Hink. It won’t kill you, if you’ll pardon the pun.”

Aware of the curious glances of the people around them, he sits down reluctantly.

“I thought that, if you and I are going to work together,” Janke says, “we have to put our cards on the table.”

“You and I are absolutely *not* working together, Miss Lofstat.”

“Janke,” she smiles.

“You’re my client, not my colleague. I work alone.”

“Hmm, and how’s that working out for you so far?”

“Well. Very well. Great, actually.”

“You mean, except for the Myburgh case?”

The waiter puts down two coffees in front of them and Janke pulls hers closer. The

muscles in her forearm draws his attention and for the first time Hinkel notices a small tattoo between her thumb and index finger. A small circle with a star drawn through it.

“Nice tattoo,” he says sarcastically. “If I’m not mistaken, that tattoo is a mark of the Bad Boys crime syndicate.”

“All in the past,” she says and takes a sip of her black coffee.

“Really?” He looks at her questioningly. “Because if I remember correctly, loyalty is very important to these guys. Once a member, always a member.”

Janke looks up at him, a slight smile on her thin lips.

“I sort of broke that whole loyalty thing back when I testified against Bennie. Once a snitch, always a snitch.” She lifts her hand and studies the tattoo. “Thought I should maybe have a boxing glove tattooed over it, what do you think?”

He doesn’t answer. “How did you get into the club?” he asks instead.

She picks up her coffee again. “It’s mine. Has been for more than three years now.”

“And what will I find if I go looking for a deed of sale? Or if I go and draw the records of its previous owners?”

“I think you’ll find that the *Red Rooster* belonged to Ters Govender before I took it over. I trained with him and later became one of his coaches. We were close. When he retired, he gave me the club, that’s all.”

Her eyes challenge him and the impact of that gaze makes his stomach flip. What the hell is the matter with him? Being so close to her unsettles him.

“Gave it to you?” he pushes back.

“Not that I see how this has anything to do with your investigation, Hink, but, yes, he gave it to me. We had a good relationship, Ters and I.”

“A romantic relationship?” The words are out before he can stop himself and he regrets it instantly.

“Jealous, Hink?” she teases.

“You’re the one who said we should put our cards on the table,” he says.

“Ters was my mentor. If it weren’t for him, I don’t know whether I would have had the guts to testify against Bennie.”

“Why did you?”

She shrugs her shoulders. “I was tired of being scared.”

Hinkel studies her silently while she drinks her coffee. She folds both hands around the cup and smiles while she stares into space. “I know what you think,” she says.

“Oh?”

“You asked what my interest was in Christina Bossa’s death, and afterwards I realised how this must look to you. That’s why I’m here. I can see how it must look to you – someone like me who would want to stick out my neck for someone like her. But *that’s* why, Hink. Because I know how it feels to live in fear every day of someone bigger and stronger than you. I know how it feels to be trapped. When Christina came to ask for self-

defence classes, I saw myself in her. I wanted to help her. Now she's dead, and the idea that the person who did that to her is going to win..." Determination and vulnerability shine from those dark eyes simultaneously and for a couple of seconds Hinkel finds it so fascinating that he can only look at her.

"What?" she asks quietly.

He sighs and scratches his beard. "I think what you're doing is dangerous. I think you're right, Christina Bossa was murdered. And I think the guys who are involved are not the type to play games."

"You think Joe Pakki has something to do with this?"

He gives her a surprised look. "And you don't?"

She shrugs. "It's true that he's a gang leader and I'm not sure he's someone you would want to cross. But Christina wasn't scared of him. When she spoke of Joe, she always looked happy. I think she really loved him."

"Did you know that they had broken off the engagement?"

"I suspected it," she says, "but I didn't want to pry."

Hinkel shakes his head. "And you still don't think Pakki had something to do with her death? They'd been together for a long time. She must have seen things, heard conversations. If she knew something that could expose him it gives him motive."

"Christina wouldn't have done anything to get Joe into trouble."

"Isn't that what *you* did? Throw your boyfriend under the bus?"

Janke looks at him fleetingly before taking another sip of coffee. "Joe Pakki isn't Bennie Price, Hink."

"You sound quite sure of yourself," he says. "And yet, Joe Pakki is a notorious gang leader with many underground dealings. How can you be so sure that he's innocent?"

"How can you be so sure he's guilty?"

Hinkel hesitates. "Christina Bossa had a lot of jewellery that she got from Pakki, among other things an engagement ring that was worth roughly R800 000, I would guess."

Janke looks at him questioningly. "And?"

"Apparently she started asking around shortly before her death about selling the jewellery. I spoke to the police and there was no sign of the jewellery in her flat. Neither was there any cash. We checked her bank accounts. No large deposits. Which can actually only mean one thing."

Janke looks at him with wide eyes. "Someone stole the jewellery...!"

"Or the money."

"That's motive!" she says excitedly. "But surely that rules out Joe Pakki, doesn't it? He doesn't need the money."

Hinkel shakes his head. "On the contrary, I think it gives him a strong motive. I'd say he's have a problem with his ex-fiancée making a load of money from jewellery he gave her. And if it had been stolen jewellery on top of it all ... well, that gives him even more

motive.”

Janke bites her lip and looks into the distance.

“Look,” he says and pushes his cup away, “I have to go. I have an appointment with George Bossa, Christina’s brother. Maybe he knows what became of the jewellery.”

She looks up quickly. “Can I come with you?”

What?” He frowns. “No.”

“Why not?”

“So, my whole speech about the potential danger of the investigation made absolutely no impression on you?”

“You are concerned for my safety!” she grins.

Hinkel feels the heat rise in his neck. He looks away. “I don’t want you under my feet, Miss Lofstat, and that’s not a request. It’s for your own safety. Do we understand each other?”

She doesn’t answer. He turns around and walks out. She calls after him: “Hey, partner?! Tell Bossa there’s still some of his sister’s stuff at the gym that he must come and get!”

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CHAPTER 7

Christina Bossa’s brother waits for him in the lobby of the Four Seas Hotel in Coast Avenue. He gets up when Hinkel enters. George Bossa is dressed neatly in a navy suit, white shirt and a tie. As Hinkel shakes his hand, he smells expensive cologne.

“Shall we go sit in the restaurant?” Bossa suggests. “I don’t have much of an appetite, but perhaps we can drink something?”

They go through into the hotel’s large restaurant. This time of the afternoon, the place is empty, and the waiters are already setting the tables for dinner. They take a seat at a small table by the window. George Bossa orders a coffee and Hinkel a Coke. The coffee he had with Janke still feels heavy in his stomach.

“I won’t keep you long, Mr Bossa. I can imagine that you have a lot on your plate. Like I said on the phone, I only have one or two quick questions.”

George Bossa looks a little worried. “I’m not quite sure why you’re here, Mr Hinkel. Is there a problem with the investigation? From what I understand, the police already...”

“I’m just making sure we have all the facts. As you probably know, your sister was in a relationship with Joe Pakki. He is a man of interest to the police, and we have to make sure that there was no foul play.”

George Bossa looks slightly relieved. He smiles faintly. There are dark circles under his eyes. He looks wrinkled and bereft, as if he hadn’t slept much recently. “I suppose that’s understandable,” he then says. He sighs and sits back in his chair. His hands are shaky

and he folds them on his lap. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid it will always be a shock – this type of thing. No matter how often one has to go through it."

Hinkel looks at him questioningly. "How often?"

"This isn't the first time," Bossa explains. "There have been previous attempts. This time, unfortunately, my sister succeeded in taking her own life." He exhales slowly.

Hinkel studies the man silently. "I realise the police have already spoken to you, Mr Bossa, but would you mind telling me again where you were on Tuesday evening when the incident happened?"

The waiter brings their drinks and when he walks away, Bossa says: "I was at my flat in Noorderant. I worked late when the call came. My poor mother..." He wipes a hand over his face.

"What is it that you do? For a living?"

"I'm an architect. I started my own firm a while ago and it's a very difficult time for me to be away from the business. But what can one do?"

Hinkel doesn't answer. "What was your relationship with your sister?"

George Bossa hesitates. "Good," he says then. "Christina was two years younger than me. It hit her hard when our father died years ago. She's always been ... sensitive. After that ... I think she was looking for a father figure in the wrong kind of relationships, if you know what I mean?" He looks up, but Hinkel doesn't respond. He waits for Bossa to continue.

"When she wasn't in a relationship, she would get depressed, and then she got derailed. There had been two previous suicide attempts. It was very hard on my mother and it certainly had an impact on my relationship with Chris. Each time, I had to leave everything to come and help her. And then, once she was back on her feet, there was my mom ..." He takes another sip of his coffee. So, perhaps I should rather say our relationship was complicated. But I loved her. Her death ... I think it's only catching up with me now."

"Did you know that she and Pakki have called off their engagement?"

"She phoned me one night," Bossa nods. "I must say, I was relieved. It's not the type of company I wanted for my sister. But ... of course I was immediately afraid that she would break down again, that she would get depressed."

"And did she?" Hinkel watches him steadily.

"I thought she was fine... She sounded good, said they were still friends and that Joe had even paid for her flat six months in advance until she was on her feet again. Otherwise she would probably have been out on the street. Christina used to be a dancer at the Agrippa Arts Theatre. A permanent job that paid well. She gave it up just like that to jet around with Joe." He sighs. "But that's what my sister did, Mr Hinkel. Time and again she would give up everything for a man and then, when it ended, she had to start all over again."

"You say she took it well that the engagement ended?" Hinkel frowns.

"It sounded that way, yes. Of course now I realise she didn't. I should have seen the

signs, should have intervened and convinced her to come to Noorderant with me.” He sighs again. “Then she would have been here still.”

“When you and your sister chatted, Mr Bossa, did she ever mention to you that she was harassed by someone in her block of flats?”

George Bossa frowns. “Harassed?”

“Yes, pestered. That someone had perhaps made her feel unsafe?”

“Um ... no. Why?”

Hinkel ignores the question. “Did you know that your sister took self-defence classes?”

Now George Bossa looks a little flabbergasted.

“The *Red Rooster Fight Club*. She never mentioned the name to you?”

Bossa frowns. “It’s ... possible that Christina mentioned joining a boxing club. I remember something of the sort. Where is this place?”

“Mill Street.”

“And you suspect that’s why she committed suicide?” Bossa frowns. “Because someone made life hell for her?”

“Like I said, I’m just making sure we have all the facts.”

“Of course...”

“Just one last thing, Mr Bossa: Do you have any idea what became of your sister’s jewellery?”

The man looks stumped. “Jewellery?”

“The jewellery she got from Pakki. Her engagement ring, among other things.”

“Well, I would assume that she’d given it back to him.”

“We have reason to believe she didn’t,” Hinkel says. “You had access to your sister’s flat, if I understand correctly. Did you find any jewellery there?”

Bossa shakes his head. “I must admit, Mr Hinkel, I haven’t yet had the courage to go through everything. But I will look out for the ring tomorrow when we pack up the place. I’ll let you know if I find it.”

Hinkel smiles. “That would be great.” He pushes his chair back. “I think I’ll be on my way then. If anything else comes up, I’ll contact you.” He hesitates and then turns back. “Oh, yes, you didn’t by any chance find a pistol in the flat, did you?”

George Bossa’s eyes widen. “No, I ... I don’t think she had one. As far as I know. Why do you ask?”

“Just something one of the witnesses mentioned,” Hinkel says. “I’m just wondering. But let me say goodbye, Mr Bossa. Thank you very much for your time.”

They say goodbye and Hinkel walks out of the building through the lobby. He’s lost in thought. Something about the man’s story bothers him. He’s always had a very good instinct for when a witness is lying, and he has a feeling that George Bossa lied to him about something. He’s just not sure about what.

He phone rings just as he's about to get into the Golf. It's Flint.

"We got the surveillance footage from the ATM across the street," the captain says, "and you were right, Hink. One can see the doors to the Steyggler building on it."

Hinkel stops in his tracks. "And?"

"The quality isn't great, and the traffic in the street mostly obstructs the doors, but we could nonetheless pick up two familiar faces on the footage."

"Who?"

"The neighbour's story checks out," Flint says. "She left the building at around 19:00, and she did only return after the incident. She was telling the truth."

Hinkel nods. "Who else?"

"Half an hour before Christina Bossa jumped, a Mr Karel Olivier entered the building. He's one of the dancers at the Agrippa Arts Theatre where your vic used to dance. The theatre manager confirmed that it's Olivier on the footage."

"That can't be a coincidence..."

"That's what I also thought. But there's more: The theatre manager also let it slip that Olivier apparently had a thing for Miss Bossa. Sulked like a puppy when she resigned."

"Sounds to me like the manager isn't exactly a fan of Mr Olivier," Hinkel grins.

"You know how those artsy types are, Hink. On the surface it's all smiles and hugs, but as soon as the camera isn't looking, they stab each other in the back."

"Yes, well, in this case, unfortunately for Karel Olivier, the camera was looking," Hinkel says. He glances at his watch. It's 16:25. If he hurries, he can still miss the worst of the traffic. "Do you guys have an address for Olivier?"

"I'll send it to you."

"Oh, and Flint? Could you check for me with the airlines and confirm that George Bossa had flown in when he said he had? And see if you pick up anything of Pakki's movements at the airport. I don't believe for a minute that he can't be reached. His ex-fiancée is dead, and he knows nothing about it? Bull."

"Will do, but it'll cost you."

Hinkel smiles. "Tomorrow morning's breakfast is on me."

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CHAPTER 8

It wasn't too difficult to track down Karel Olivier. One of the girls in the student house where he lives informed Hinkel that the dancer presents a fitness class between 16:00 and 17:00 at the gym just around the corner from the house.

The sun is already setting by the time Hinkel enters the gym. The place is packed. He asks the girl at reception where he could find Karel Olivier and she directs him to one of the large exercise rooms at the back of the gym. He approaches just as the class finishes.

Hinkel waits until everyone has left and then steps inside. Karel Olivier is on the low stage, busy putting his towel and water bottles in a bag. When he straightens up and sees Hinkel standing behind him, he jumps.

“Guilty conscience, Mr Olivier?” Hinkel gives an amused smile.

The man’s face turns pale. “Who are you? What do you want?”

“I’m a friend of Christina Bossa’s,” Hinkel says. He hands the man his card.

“Hinkel?” the dancer frowns, clearly tense. “The detective?”

“I’m investigating Ms Bossa’s death, Mr Olivier, and we have a witness who places you at the scene half an hour before the incident.”

He sees the last bit of colour drain from the man’s face. “I had nothing to do with Chris’s death!”

“Then you have nothing to hide.”

There is a moment of silence while the men size each other up. Then Karel Olivier drops his bag onto the floor and slowly sits down on the edge of the stage, as if his legs can no longer support him.

“I ... I was in love with Chris, Mr Hinkel. But if you’re here, you probably already know that. It wasn’t a secret. I heard that she and Joe Pakki had broken off their engagement, and I wanted to go and hear if she’s okay...”

“You mean you wanted to go and make use of the opportunity to come on to her.”

Karel Olivier looks at him sharply, and for a moment, Hinkel sees a flash of aggression. But it’s gone just as quickly.

Maybe Flint was right about these artsy types...

“I was in the area,” Karel Olivier now says. “I came from having dinner with friends and realised I was within walking distance of her flat. I had too much to drink ... and...” He looks up, almost pleading. “Don’t we all sometimes do silly things, Mr Hinkel?”

Hinkel doesn’t answer. “And? Was she home?”

Karel Olivier nods. “But I didn’t see her. I swear! I went all the way up until I was right at her door. Then my courage failed me.”

Hinkel crosses his arms. “So, you expect me to believe that you went all the way right up to Christina Bossa’s door, full of alcohol, like you just admitted, and then simply turned around and went home?”

Karel Olivier looks embarrassed. He stares ahead blankly.

“Mr Olivier?”

“There was someone with her, okay? She wasn’t alone.”

Hinkel lifts his brows. “And how would you know that, Mr Olivier? If you didn’t knock on the door?”

“I could hear their voices. Through the door. There was a man with her.”

“And were they fighting?”

Olivier looks up, surprised. “How did you...?”

Hinkel smiles. “I used to live in that building myself. That time of the evening, it’s a noisy place. The front doors are fairly sound proof. There’s no way you would have heard voices from the hallway, unless they were loud voices.”

Olivier hesitates, then he nods.

“Could you hear what the fighting was about?” Hinkel asks.

“No ... I ... I was self-conscious. I just wanted to get away as quickly as possible before the door maybe opened and they saw me there.” Again the embarrassment, the bitterness.

For some or other reason, Hinkel believes the man. There are many things one can fake – especially if you do performance art for a living – but the embarrassment of someone who doesn’t love you back, that’s an emotion that’s not easy to pretend.

That’s something Hinkel knows all too well...

“And why haven’t you come forward with the information, Mr Olivier?”

“Why would I? No-one knew I was there. The last thing I need now is to be dragged into a murder case.”

“Who said anything about a murder, Mr Olivier?” Hinkel asks.

Shocked, the man stares at him. “Well ... I... it’s...”

“The newspapers reported that Christina Bossa had committed suicide. But you just called it a murder case? Is there something you know that you’re not telling me, Mr Olivier?”

The dancer now looks scared, panicked, as if he’s been painted into a corner.

“I assumed ...” he finally says weakly, “that if they sent *you* ... they probably suspect she’s been murdered.”

Hinkel studies the man before him intently. “I think it’s more than that, Mr Olivier,” he then says. “I think you heard something through the door that convinced you that Christina Bossa didn’t jump, but that she was pushed.”

He sees the man in front of him hesitate. “I wasn’t sure *what* I had heard, Mr Hinkel. The next morning, I even wondered whether I had imagined the whole thing, of whether maybe I had stood at the wrong door!”

“But you hadn’t, had you, Mr Olivier? You didn’t imagine it. There had been someone in the flat with Christina Bossa before her death. And there had been an argument.”

Olivier nods slowly.

“Did you recognise the voice?” Hinkel asks, but before the answer comes, he already knows that he’s grasping at straws, that he won’t be getting anything more out of this witness.

“I only know it was a man,” Karel Olivier says, and with that, the interrogation is over.

Maybe it was Karel Olivier's pathetic lovesickness that made Hinkel decide not to go straight back to his flat. Maybe it was coming face to face with his own self-pity that made him drive aimlessly through the streets. How his route had taken him to in front of the *Red Rooster Fight Club*, he can't explain. But when he saw the light in the loft office burning, he parked the Golf in the shadows across the street.

He's just about to get out when the door to the *Red Rooster* suddenly opens and two figures appear. Janke Lofstat he recognises immediately from the two chunky ponytails, but it takes him a second or two longer to identify the second one. As the man steps onto the sidewalk and his face is lit by the streetlight, Alexander Hinkel sits up straight.

What the hell...? What's that jerk doing here?

He can only vaguely make out their voices, but from what he can hear, the conversation is light-hearted and good-natured. They say goodbye and he sees Janke giving the man a hug before he turns and slips into the shadows between the buildings.

For a moment, Hinkel doesn't move. As Janke turns around and goes back in through the door, he makes up his mind. He gets out and locks the Golf. Then he crosses the street. He feels grumpier with every step he takes.

He shoves open the door to the club just as Janke is halfway up the stairs to the loft. Frightened, she turns around and when she sees Hinkel, she pales.

"Hink? What are you doing here?"

His breath is laboured and his leg aches from walking so fast. He glares at her. "Are you playing me for a fool, Miss Lofstat? Do you think I'm stupid?"

"I ... I'm not sure what you're talking about."

When the words come out, his voice is so loud, that even he gets a fright: "What the hell is Joe Pakki doing here?!"

*

CHAPTER 9

Back in the day there were a few times when, as a young warrant officer, Alexander Hinkel's path crossed that of gang leader Joe Pakki. During more than one of Hinkel's investigations, clues pointed to Pakki's involvement in some or other criminal activity, but there had never been enough evidence to arrest him. These days, however, the gang leader plays both sides – as an instigator of violence, but also as an informer helping the police catch the trouble makers. He leads the protest against the media, but, when it suits him, he plays the charming celebrity in front of the cameras.

Hinkel has no time for the guy, although he must admit he admires his ingenuity. Joe Pakki is one of those people who go through life without ever being caught with his hand in the cookie jar, while he leaves an undetected trail of destruction in his wake. George Bossa was right about one thing, at least: It's not the type of company one wants a girl like Christina to keep.

“What’s Pakki doing here?” Hinkel repeats when Janke doesn’t answer. “The police are looking for him all over.”

Janke hesitates, then gives a slight smile. “Just because he doesn’t want to talk to the police it doesn’t mean he doesn’t want to talk to me.”

Hinkel is now truly out of patience. “I don’t have time for games! Talk, or I’m out of here. And I’m warning you, Miss Lofstat, that will be the end of this so-called investigation.”

“Wait,” she stops him. “I’m sorry. I suppose I should have let you know. But it happened so quickly. I was busy locking up, and the next thing I knew, the man came waltzing in here.”

“How do you know each other?” It takes an effort for Hinkel to keep his voice calm.

“We don’t *know* each other. We’ve never met before, but Christina had told me about him, and she had told him about me too. Bottom line, Hink, Joe knows Christina and I were close and that’s why he came here. He heard about what happened and he came to ask me if I had more information.”

Hinkel shakes his head. “Sorry, I don’t buy that. If Joe Pakki wants to hide from the media and the law, he won’t walk into a boxing club in clear sight just because his ex-girlfriend trained there once or twice.”

Janke slowly comes down the stairs. “You’re right. But he found out that I asked him to investigate the matter and…”

“How the hell did he find that out?”

“It’s not a state secret, Hink,” she says innocently. “How should I know? Maybe he has a contact in the police, or someone at the flats told him. That’s not the point, though, and…”

He interrupts her: “You do realise the fact that you’re meeting here alone with this man at this time of night doesn’t look good? And I need half an excuse to walk away from this case.”

“You won’t,” she hits back. “Why do you think I asked you? I know once you suspected Christina Bossa was murdered, you wouldn’t be able to let it go. You’ll keep digging till you get to the truth. No wonder Pakki calls you The Bloodhound.”

“I couldn’t care less about anything that scumbag says,” Hinkel snorts. “But I’m going to tell you one last time *not* to interfere with my investigation, Miss Lofstat.”

“Janke,” she corrects him. “And I thought it was *our* investigation?”

He glares at her. “I don’t know what game you’re playing,” he then says, “but I’m not playing along. It’s late. I haven’t eaten yet. I’m going home and tomorrow morning I will hand over the information I have to the police. You can speak to them going forward.”

He turns to leave.

“Don’t you want to know what Pakki said?” she tries to stop him.

“No.”

“Because Joe says he gave the jewellery and engagement ring to Christina to sell. And I believe him.”

Hinkel turns back quickly. "Then you're very naïve, or just very stupid. Why would a man like Pakki simply walk away from jewellery of R2 million?"

"Because he loved her," Janke says.

"Oh, yes, I forgot," he says sarcastically, "you have a sixth sense."

"For when a man is crazy about a girl, yes," she says, and her eyes hold his just a few seconds too long. Just enough to make him uneasy and mess with his hormones.

Flint is right. Everywhere he goes, girls fall at his feet. It's been that way all his life, but it got worse after what happened with his leg. But he sees through all of them, and he's not interested. It just that this one ... with her cheeky looking-to-pick-a-fight attitude and her masks, this one he can't read. And maybe, Hinkel now realises, it's the first woman after Macey that he wishes he *could* read.

He looks up and catches Janke's gaze on him. "You're a cynical man, Hink," she says. "But let me tell you, I'm a good judge of character and I believe Joe Pakki's story. When he talks about her, you can see it in his face. He really cared for Christina. He doesn't believe that it was suicide."

"Then why doesn't he go to the police? Why hide?"

She waves a hand. "The police will hold him for questioning and you know it, *just* because he has a link to the case."

"And whose fault is that? The man has a record a mile long." Hinkel sighs and strokes over his hair. "You will have to excuse me now, Miss Lofstat. This case has already taken up too much of my time." He starts turning away.

"Joe says George Bossa has a gambling problem," she says quickly. "Apparently he owes the whole world money. It could be something to look into, don't you think?"

"No!" he says and shakes his head. "What it sounds to me, rather, is that Pakki's looking for a scapegoat. You know, I agree with you – Christina Bossa was thrown off that balcony. And it was your friend, Mr Pakki, who did it because she wanted to sell the jewellery he had given her!" His voice is loud in the quiet night.

He doesn't know why he's so angry. No, he knows, he realises. He knew the moment he saw that scumbag walk out of here earlier. It's because he's sick and tired of women who lie to him, who go behind his back and...

"If I were you, I'd stay away from that man, Miss Lofstat," he says, now somewhat in control. "Joe Pakki is trouble."

He turns around again and this time he leaves.

*

CHAPTER 10

Alexander Hinkel sits in the tattered lazyboy chair in his dark studio apartment. He sits looking out over the city and he thinks. The only light is the red glow of his pipe every time he draws on it. Somewhere a tap is dripping. In the street below a car drives past.

When he came back from the boxing club he took some leftovers from the fridge, but after heating them he realised that he had lost his appetite. Now the bowl of pasta stands forgotten on the countertop.

His anger and frustration has subsided in the meantime, and made space for sober logic. His brain has started sifting through the events of the day like laying out a jigsaw puzzle piece by piece – whether he wanted to or not.

That Janke Lofstat is lying to him about something is certain. He can smell a lie or a half-truth a mile away. And yet, he can't help feeling that her need to solve Christina Bossa's death is sincere. And the past couple of minutes he even came up with an interesting theory: Maybe it is because Janke Lofstat herself had escaped a controlling relationship and built a better life for herself that she feels a kind of connection with Bossa. Maybe she has some or other vigilante streak – which could be the reason why she testified against Price that time, and which is why she's now looking for justice for the dead dancer.

And yet ... Janke sides with Pakki, a self-acclaimed gang leader and quite possibly Christina's murderer. Why? The way the two of them behaved on the sidewalk in front of the boxing club, was not like strangers.

Did Janke perhaps during her time with Bennie Price, become friends with Pakki? It's possible. But why wouldn't she admit it?

There is more than one witness who alleges that Christina Bossa and Joe Pakki parted on friendly terms. And he had paid in advance for her flat, *that* Hinkel has been able to confirm in the meantime. It's just that Hinkel knows from experience that guys like him have no loyalty when it comes to money. If the jewellery was at stake, would a guy like Pakki have spared his ex-fiancée?

Hinkel sighs. He fears they will now never find that jewellery. It will remain a mystery, like Christina Bossa's last few minutes on this earth.

According to Karel Olivier there had been someone with her in her flat – a man – and there was an argument. That's if Olivier is talking the truth. It's a pity that Bubbles, the neighbour, wasn't there. She would definitely have heard the argument and would have been able to describe it in detail. She would perhaps even have recognised the voice...

Suddenly Hinkel lowers his pipe. He frowns. Then he sits up straight in the chair. He gets up and quickly goes through his pockets until he finds the scrap of paper that Bubbles wrote her cell number on for him earlier.

He takes out his cell phone and dials her number.

"Alexander Hinkel here," he says when she answers.

"Mr Hinkel! Do you have any news on who poor Chrissie's...?"

"Can you tell me who the man was that you went to meet on Tuesday evening?" he interrupts her. "It's very important. The man who didn't show up?"

He hears her hesitating. "I couldn't say, Mr Hinkel. It was a blind date, see? We've never met. It's that app, you know? Agrippa Love Connection – maybe you have it? It's a really cool app. It was Chrissie who had helped me load my profile on it."

“And this man, is he on the app?” Hinkel asks.

“That’s how we met.”

“I see. What is his name, if I may ask?”

“No idea,” she says. “His username is Arch99.”

“Do you perhaps have a photo?”

“He did send me one, yes... But I don’t understand what...?”

“Forward it to me. Right now, please. It’s very important.”

Bubbles starts to say something more, but Hinkel has already lowered the phone and ends the call absentmindedly. His heart is now beating fast in his ears and, like a bloodhound on the trail, all his senses are sharper.

The phone startles him when it rings in his hand. It’s Flint.

“No sign of Pakki on any airport surveillance. No flight ticket in his name.”

“Of course not,” Hinkel says distractedly. “It was a wild shot.”

“But your friend Bossa did show up, Hink. And guess what?”

“He didn’t only fly in on Wednesday morning...” Hinkel says.

“Nope. Tuesday morning, to be precise. So that means George Bossa was in Agrippa when his sister fell from that balcony.”

Hinkel swears softly. “So, Pakki told the truth...”

“Pardon?”

“Nothing. I’ll explain later. Flint, I’m almost certain Bossa murdered his sister for the money.”

“What money? Are you going to tell me what’s going on?” Flint asks.

“It’s just that ...” Hinkel says and frowns, “I don’t think he has the money. Otherwise he wouldn’t be here anymore. He would have gotten out of here long ago. No, George Bossa can’t leave before he has the money. *That’s* why he was so nervous this afternoon...! He...” He suddenly keeps quiet.

“Hink?”

“Christina hid the money somewhere, Flint. She knew, or maybe suspected, that her brother would show up and...” He takes a breath. “I have to go.”

“Hink!”

“Meet me at the *Red Rooster Fight Club*, Flint, and bring backup.”

“What? Now?”

“Yes, now!”

Hinkel ends the call and swears softly. And then his screen lights up again as a message comes through. It’s Bubbles who sent him the photo. Before he opens it, he knows whose face he’s going to see.

*

The lights in the *Red Rooster Fight Club* are off when Hinkel hurries across the street limping slightly. He goes up the stairs and his heart sinks when he pushes against the door and it swings open.

“Miss Lofstat?!” he calls out. “Janke?!”

In the darkness, there’s a movement on the stairs and when he looks up, he sees her coming from the loft room.

“I know who it was!” he says breathlessly. “I know who murdered Christina Bossa! And I think I know where the money is!”

She doesn’t answer. And then a figure appears behind her on the stairs.

“That’s really good news, Mr Hinkel,” George Bossa says, “because your friend here swears high and low that she has no idea what my dear sister did with all the cash.” He shoves Janke forward down the stairs and now Hinkel sees the pistol he keeps trained on her.

“I see you found your sister’s pistol,” Hinkel says.

Again Bossa shoves Janke and she almost stumbles down the stairs. She grabs at the railing to keep her balance.

“Stay calm, Mr Bossa...” Hinkel says and raises his hands. “There’s no need for another accident, is there? We can work out this little issue between the three of us.”

They’ve reached the bottom of the stairs and Bossa forces Janke forward towards Hinkel. She meets his gaze. There’s no trace of fear in those lively eyes. Rather, there’s a challenge, a look that says: *I told you so...*

“Where is it?” Bossa asks and raises the pistol. “Where did she hide the money? I know Chris sold the jewellery. She told me that over the phone, was literally bragging about all the money she got for it. Said she was going to start her own dancing club... And not for a moment did she offer to share it with me!”

“That must have been very hard for you,” Hinkel nods. His eyes search the dusky space for a weapon, something within reach he could use, should the man decide to do something stupid. “You were the one looking after your mother all these years, and helping Christina get back on her feet every time... And here she lands herself a small fortune and she refuses to give you a cent.”

George’s eyes are wild and full of fear. It’s the eyes of an addict, of a man who has nothing left to lose.

“She owes me!” he hisses.

Hinkel watches him steadily. “I suspect you stayed over in Christina’s flat one night while she wasn’t there, not so, Mr Bossa? While she was on one of her trips with Joe Pakki? That’s how you knew of the spare key in Bubbles’s flat. I guess it so happened that Bubbles was also not home, so Christina told you to get her key from under the mat, didn’t she? She didn’t think she was doing anything wrong. She merely wanted to arrange a place for her brother to sleep for the night. She didn’t think that that little piece of information would come back to bite her in the ass.”

George Bossa grins. "It's a security risk," he says, "to let keys lie around like that."

"I agree," Hinkel nods. "It was careless of the two ladies. But, granted, in that stage your sister and Pakki were still an item and there was no Alex Flock harassing her. She didn't have reason to think anyone would want to kill her. Least of all her own brother."

"I didn't want to kill her, I just wanted to talk!" George Bossa's hands are now clutching the firearm. "I thought if I flew down and came to speak to her face to face, I would be able to convince her. But then she wouldn't cooperate. She taunted me – my own sister! She told me she hid the money somewhere in a locker so that I would not be able to find it!"

Hinkel nods slowly. "The argument got out of hand, didn't it, Mr Bossa? Christina held a pistol on you – the same pistol you're now holding. Did you shove her? And then she fell against the coffee table? Is that how the flowerpot broke? Or did you use the flowerpot to hit her over the head with?"

"It was an accident!" George Bossa shouts.

"Of course it was," Hinkel says calmly. "But what happened afterwards, wasn't. Christina was unconscious and you realised that that was your chance. She had a history of depression, had broken off her engagement to Pakki. If she should jump, everyone would assume that it had been suicide. You remembered that there was a spare key in Bubbles's flat and realised you could take the cash, let yourself out with it and replace the key without anyone noticing. No-one would even know that you were there."

"But how did you know Bubbles wasn't home?" Janke frowns. "Or was that a coincidence?"

"It was not a coincidence at all," Hinkel smiles. "You see, Mr Bossa here knew – possibly his sister had told him – that the neighbour is a busybody who knows what's going on in all the flats. He kept his wits about him and realised he would have to get Bubbles out of the flat before visiting his sister."

Hinkel looks at George Bossa. "Christina quite possibly also told you about the dating app she put Bubbles on, am I right, Mr Bossa? So, you found Bubbles there, and arranged a bogus blind date with her on the exact night that you wanted to go see your sister." Hinkel clicks his tongue. "It was so easy, and everything would have worked out too, had it not been for *one* thing: The money wasn't in the flat."

George Bossa's eyes are flashing. "No, because it's *here*. Christina said she'd hid it in a locker and when you spoke about the boxing club this afternoon, I knew it had to be here. I drove past the club this evening and saw the lockers through the window. And luckily your friend was here so that she can open Chris's locker for me."

Janke shakes her head. "I'm telling you, I don't know which one was hers! The members choose a locker themselves and lock it with their own codes. We would have to break open every single locker and..."

"Then that's exactly what we'll do," George grins and raises the pistol. He gives Janke another shove. "Come on!" he says. "Move!" He gestures to Hinkel to walk with them to where the lockers are

"Wait," Janke says and comes to a standstill. "There's one thing I don't understand..." Bossa stops behind her, the pistol trained on her.

What the hell is she doing?

“If the whole thing was an accident,” Janke continues, “if you didn’t mean to kill your sister ... why go to all the trouble beforehand to make sure the neighbour wouldn’t be there? Because to me that sounds like ... premeditated murder, or what do you think, Hink?”

“Walk!” Bossa shouts and again shoves Janke forward.

This time she moves quickly. She ducks and swings around, and as she turns, her fist hits George Bossa on the ribs. The pistol falls clanging to the floor and Hinkel snatches it up quickly. Bossa is now bent double in pain, quite possibly because of a broken rib. As he tries to come upright, Hinkel raises the pistol and opens his mouth to give a warning, but Janke is fast on her feet and stands with her fists raised. A hard right-hand punch connects squarely with Bossa’s face and he collapses in a heap on the floor.

At that moment a car stops out front in the street and blue lights flash through the gym. It illuminates Janke’s face for a second and Hinkel sees a smile of absolute ecstatic gratification. For a moment he isn’t sure whether it’s from the thrill of the catch, or the thrill of the punch.

The latter, he suspects. Because he himself is suddenly aware of a jab of envy in his chest. There was a time when he could land such a right-hand punch. And how great didn’t it feel this evening...

*

CHAPTER 11

Captain Robert Flint stands next to Hinkel and Janke watching his men accompany George Bossa out of the *Red Rooster*.

“To think we would have let that guy go free,” Flint says with a touch of bitterness. He turns around. “That’s why I need you, Hink. You’re the last buffer. You see to it that I don’t let anything slip through the cracks.”

Hinkel snorts. Then he says: “As noble as that may sound, I’m afraid I can’t take the credit. It was Miss Lofstat who insisted that the case be investigated again.”

Flint looks at the brunette. “Hell of a shiner you gave Bossa,” he grins. He looks around him in the gym. “Your club?” he asks.

Janke nods. “Been mine for more than three years now.”

“I see,” Flint says, and it looks like he wants to say something more. “And what exactly was Bossa doing here?”

“He thought his sister left the money she got for the jewellery here. In one of the lockers.”

“And?” Flint asks. “Did she?”

Janke shrugs. “I don’t know. I have no idea which locker is hers. If she even had one.”

The captain looks at the lockers. "I'll send my men tomorrow morning with a warrant to come and open all the lockers."

Janke sighs. "Great..."

"We'll try to be gentle," Flint grins. "But, hey, time for me to be off. We have to go and book that guy and then someone has to write the docket. You don't happen to be in the mood for a bit of paperwork, do you Hink?"

Hinkel shakes his head. "One of the few things I don't miss at all, thanks."

Captain Flint mumbles something about having your bread buttered on both sides, then he turns and leaves. They both watch him get into the police car and driving off. Then Hinkel turns towards Janke.

"I may be able to save you tomorrow's onslaught on your lockers," he says.

She looks at him questioningly, but he steps past her. She follows him to the wall at the back. Hinkel looks at the two rows of lockers against the wall. As he noticed earlier, each is marked with a letter of the alphabet.

He didn't make the connection before.

"There was a business card from the *Red Rooster* on Christina Bossa's fridge," he says, "with the amount of R1600 written on it. I thought it was the membership fee..." He gives Janke a quick glance. "And I was worried about the fact that you exploit your members like that, Miss Lofstat." His mouth curls into a smile at the expression on her face. Then he turns to the lockers. "But now I'm thinking..."

"Do you think it was her code?" Janke asks.

"Only one way to find out."

Hinkel walks up to the locker with the letter 'R' on it. It's locked with a combination lock – four rollers with numbers on them. He feels the door. It's locked. Then he starts turning the rollers. One by one he turns the numbers into place: 1 ... 6 ... 0 ... 0. He tugs at the door and the locker swings open.

A large sports bag is stuffed inside. Hinkel pulls it out. He puts it down on the bench and he and Janke bend over it. He pulls open the zip.

"Bingo!" Janke whispers and looks up. A big smile spreads over her face.

"You do realise it's quite possibly black market transactions on stolen jewellery, don't you?" Hinkel says. For a moment he's caught off guard by her closeness and the attractiveness of her cheeky dimple. "The police is going to confiscate all of it."

Janke reaches into the bag and takes out a jewellery box that was stuffed in on one side next to the cash. She opens it. It's the ring. With a rock of a diamond.

"Hmm," Hinkel says. "She didn't sell it after all. I wonder why? It must be worth almost more than the cash in the bag."

Janke's gaze meets his. "Maybe ... she really did love him."

The moment between them stretches out, and by the time Hinkel realises that he should look away, he had already been looking too long.

“We make a good team, you and I,” she says softly and for a moment her gaze travels down to his mouth. When she looks up again, her cheeks are flaming.

“We’re not...” he starts, but suddenly she lifts her hand and pulls him closer. When she plants the kiss on his mouth, he’s so startled that he jumps back. He stares at her, shocked, while his heart hammers in his chest and his ears start ringing. And then something else takes over, a feeling Alexander Hinkel doesn’t have a name for. He leans forward and kisses her back.

She sits back first, and pushes her tousled hair behind her ears. “Is think we should celebrate this, what do you think?” she says without making eye contact. “We caught Christina’s murderer *and* found the money. So, what about breakfast tomorrow? My flat is just across from here. Carmello Close 102. Let’s say ... 08:00? I make a mean bacon and eggs.” She looks up for the first time and smiles self-consciously.

Everything in him is saying that this isn’t a good idea, that women are fire and that he’s been burnt once already. But, in spite of himself, Hinkel is interested.

“Okay,” he says. “08:00.”

It’s only later, when he walks into his studio flat that he remembers having promised Flint breakfast at the Mockingbird.

*

“I thought you were going to chicken out,” Flint laughs when Hinkel phones him just after 07:30 the following morning to let him know that he won’t be able to make breakfast. “But perhaps it’s better that way. Janke Lofstat let us know last night that she’d managed to open Christina Bossa’s locker and found the money.”

The sound of her name causes Hinkel to think about their kiss the previous evening, about that attractive, seductive mouth and the dimple... His stomach turns and he looks at his watch. He must go.

“My guys have already gone to collect the money,” Flint continues. “So now I’ve got even more admin than I thought.”

Hinkel frowns. “And the ring?”

“Only cash as far as I know. Oh, and by the way, Hink, I did a background on that club. The *Red Rooster*? And guess what? It used to belong to our old friend, Bennie Price. The gang leader – remember? Last night I thought the name rang a bell, so I checked it out.”

The words hit Hinkel like a fist between the eyes. “What? No... She got the club from a guy named Ters Govender – the previous owner.” His head’s spinning and he feels dizzy. He feels the nausea rising in his stomach.

“Yep, that paperwork I found,” Flint says. “But Ters Govender was one of Bennie Price’s laundering covers. Only a front. A false identity. There’s no-one by that name. Price is in lock-up. The club is legally in her name. I just thought I’d let you know. Quite a coincidence, wouldn’t you say?”

Coincidence my ass, Hinkel thinks.

His leg has started to throb. His head too. And his stomach's rumbling.

"On second thought, Flint," he says, "I think I'll meet you for breakfast downstairs at the Mockingbird in about ten minutes after all. You can write docket later."

"You sure?"

"Dead sure."

"Well ... okay. But I might be a minute or two late if I run into traffic. Tell Lucia to bring me a coffee so long. Be there as soon as I can."

"Who's Lucia?"

Flint laughs. "No wonder you're single, Hink. Seems to me you know next to nothing about women."

Clearly I don't... Hinkel thinks bitterly, and ends the call.

THE END

(for now)

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by Anna Emm

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About the author...

ANNA EMM is a South African author who lives in London. She has written more than 3,000 children's stories, 21 short romance novels, 38 detective novellas, 5 suspense novels, and various stage productions. In South Africa she has often appeared on TV and radio, speaking about the therapeutic power of stories.



Born Anna Margriet Strydom, she gained popularity in South Africa under the pseudonym, Anna Emm. Through her indie-publishing company, Anna Emm Productions, she wrote and recorded thousands of original audio stories for children. During a television interview in 2019 Anna admitted that the children's stories were born out of her years as primary school teacher, but that it wasn't necessarily her genre of choice. Instead, she sees herself as a versatile storyteller who is equally comfortable in almost any genre or format, adapting like a chameleon to the age and circumstances of her readers.

For more information about Anna Emm or her books, visit www.AnnaEmm.com or sign up for her monthly newsletter at news@annaemm.com