

BAANTJER

DeKok
and Murder
by Installment

Translated by H.G. Smittenaar

De Fontein

1

Inspector DeKok pulled the report closer and started to read. His face was creased with anger. He always considered the writing and reading of reports a waste of time. DeKok's long-time assistant and colleague at Amsterdam's notorious Warmoes Street police station took care of whatever reports were required from the team, but he still had to read them. In the old days, when reports were handwritten, DeKok's were masterful at brevity and succinctness. And they always resulted in a single-sheet conviction, with one carbon copy. With computers, which were supposed to reduce the amount of paperwork, as many as seven or eight copies were produced for every bagatelle.

DeKok never bothered with bagatelles. He solved problems on his beat with a word, a gesture, a hint, and, sometimes, a threat, both as a young, uniformed constable and now as a seasoned inspector in the homicide division. He and Vledder were the only representatives of the homicide division in the station house. The rest of the division was spread out over the other stations, with two, three, and, sometimes, as few as one member of what used to be called the 'Murder Brigade.'

The report he was reading concerned a just-closed case. It had been a strange and messy one. There was no murder at first. A man had died of natural causes, but those around him wanted to make it appear that he was still alive... for personal gain, of course. The murders started after he died, to protect the secret of the death.

With an exasperated sigh he pushed the papers away from him.

Vledder looked up from his computer screen at the desk next to DeKok.

‘Something wrong?’

‘No,’ growled DeKok. ‘It’s just fine. You spelled my name correctly, and as far as I’m concerned you can just finalize it and tell me where to sign.’

‘But you didn’t read it all?’

‘Why should I? I know what happened, and I’ve never known you to make a mistake in a written report.’

‘That’s because you never read them all.’

‘Well, if you had made a mistake, I’m sure the *commisaris* or the judge advocate would have let me know.’ He tossed the papers on Vledder’s desk. ‘This mess has to go.’

Vledder shrugged and sorted the papers, glanced over them, and then did something on his keyboard. Multiple copies started to flow out of the printer.

‘You know,’ said DeKok, ‘I was just thinking. In the old days we wrote reports by hand.’

‘Yes,’ said Vledder, who had heard it all before. ‘Those were the days.’

‘Indeed,’ agreed DeKok, ignoring the sarcasm. ‘The world was less complicated. People generally got along a lot better.’

Vledder stood by the printer and started to take the copies out of the tray. He arranged and stapled the sheets together, then started filling the pre-addressed, inter-office envelopes with the report copies.

‘But there were murders then, too,’ Vledder remarked.

‘Sure,’ agreed DeKok, ‘but not as many. People were still shocked by murder. It was front-page news, day after day. Now a murder gets six lines on page four, third column.’

Vledder smiled.

‘Well, don’t worry about it. The job is done.’ He gathered the completed envelopes and tossed them into his out basket.

Jan Kuster, the watch commander, entered the detective room and walked over to DeKok’s desk.

‘Downstairs I have an eighteen-year-old boy with two ten-ounce packages of cocaine.’

‘So,’ said DeKok, looking at him. ‘That’s a job for narcotics.’

Kuster sighed deeply.

‘I know that. But you’re the only detectives here – and besides the cocaine, he has some rolls of money, a hundred thousand Euros altogether.’

DeKok looked surprised.

‘What?’

‘He’s carrying a hundred thousand Euros in four plastic bags, each with twenty-five thousand. The cops who arrested him on Seadike found the money when they frisked him at the station. It was taped around his waist.’

‘Strange.’

‘That’s what I said,’ nodded Kuster. ‘But according to him it was the best way to defeat pickpockets.’

‘What else did he have on him?’

‘There wasn’t anything out of the ordinary... a wallet with a few hundred in it, a driver’s license, and the registration papers for a Porsche.’

Vledder whistled.

‘That’s an expensive, fast car.’

‘Is that like the cars the state police use?’ asked DeKok, who professed to know little, or nothing, about cars.

‘Yes,’ answered Kuster, ‘barely six months old.’

DeKok rubbed the side of his nose.

‘The money... is it real? I mean, not counterfeit?’

Kuster shook his head.

‘No way it’s fake. These are blemished bills. They’ve been a circulation for a while, and are undoubtedly genuine.’

‘And how does he explain the money?’

The watch commander hooked a chair with his leg and sat down.

‘He doesn’t explain it. He refuses to say anything. But there has to be something wrong. I mean, eighteen years old! That’s no age to –’

‘Is he a dealer?’ Kuster shrugged.

‘I don’t think so. And he doesn’t look like a junkie, either. I checked with headquarters. No record. He’s never been in contact with the police or the courts.’

DeKok shook his head.

‘A boy with a clean record has a hundred thousand on his stomach. In this crazy business you run into all sorts of things.’ He leaned back in his chair and sighed deeply. ‘All right, bring him up... with his cocaine and his money. We’ll look into it and see what we can find out.’

The young man was neatly dressed. He wore a sporty, dark-blue blazer and a light-blue, sharply creased pair of trousers. His blonde hair was cut into a crew cut, and his slightly tanned face was dominated by a set of clear blue eyes.

The gray sleuth leaned forward; his lips formed a smile.

‘My name is DeKok,’ he said in a friendly tone of voice, ‘with a kay-oh-kay. With whom do I have the pleasure?’

‘Casper, Casper Hoogwoud. It’s already in the report they filled out downstairs.’ It sounded like an accusation.

DeKok raised his hands in defense.

‘Please, spare me the mention of reports.’ Then he smiled again. ‘Casper Hoogwoud,’ he repeated, ‘a nice name.’

‘You think so?’

DeKok nodded agreeably.

‘Yes, it sounds nice. I always feel that a nice name means a nice person.’

The compliment did not get the reaction DeKok had hoped for. Casper Hoogwoud did not seem to soften. He looked suspiciously at the inspector.

‘Surely you don’t expect me to be *nice* to you?’

‘But why not?’

The young man shook his head resolutely.

‘I don’t feel the need. I have been robbed abruptly of my freedom and they have taken my money away.’

‘Your money?’

‘Certainly.’

‘How did you come by that much money?’

Casper remained obstreperous.

‘I didn’t steal it.’

DeKok spread his hands, asking for understanding.

‘There are many ways, apart from stealing, to obtain money illegally. The law books are full of them.’

The young man waved nonchalantly.

‘I’m not interested in your laws,’ he said haughtily. He pointed at the bags of money on the desk. ‘That’s my property. You are free to think I have obtained it in some criminal manner, but unless you can prove that, the money is mine.’

DeKok smiled.

‘You forget the inquisition.’

Hoogwoud looked momentarily confused.

‘What inquisition?’

‘The Belastingdienst. Taxes, Casper. They still maintain the inquisition principle of reverse proof. You’re guilty until you prove yourself innocent.’

The young man frowned.

‘You mean that I would have to prove to them how I obtained the money?’

‘Yes, and you can count on a sizeable assessment.’

Casper Hoogwoud moved in his chair.

‘I made it gambling.’

‘Illegal gambling?’

‘Yes.’

DeKok pursed his lips.

‘I presume that you will not, as a matter of principle, tell me the name of the illegal gambling house?’

‘You presume correctly,’ grinned Hoogwoud.

DeKok rubbed his face with his hand. The question-and-answer game amused him. The young man was not

unsympathetic. On the contrary, he felt Casper Hoogwoud, despite his tender years, showed a refreshing amount of maturity.

‘Are you an addict?’

‘No.’

DeKok pretended surprise.

‘What about the cocaine?’

‘It’s for my brother.’

‘He’s an addict?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why doesn’t your brother buy his own drugs?’

‘Marcel is ill.’

DeKok again pursed his lips.

‘Too ill to buy his own drugs?’

Casper did not answer immediately. For the first time he seemed to lose some of his confidence. His tongue touched dry lips.

‘Marcel has AIDS.’

With Casper Hoogwoud squeezed into the back seat, the battered police VW pulled away from the station house. Vledder was driving, as usual, and DeKok was slumped in the seat next to him. He turned to look at the young man in the back seat. Casper had regained his self-confidence and stared back without expression.

‘I protest your keeping my money.’ His tone was even. ‘I don’t think it’s safe. It wouldn’t be the first time something disappeared from a police station.’

DeKok made a helpless gesture.

‘I have kept strictly to the letter of the law and the regulations. I’ve given you a receipt for the money *and* the

cocaine. Tomorrow I will contact the judge advocate or, rather, my commissaris will do it. In any case the judge advocate will decide what happens next with the money. I can't take your statement about gambling profits seriously. For the moment I will have to assume the money was from, or meant for, drug dealing.'

'That is merely an assumption... and the wrong one at that,' replied Hoogwoud.

'Exactly, it's an assumption and it may very well be the wrong one. Regardless, based on that assumption, I obtained a warrant to search your house. The narcotics laws don't even require me to do that.'

'You think you'll find drugs in our house?' grinned Casper.

DeKok shrugged his shoulders.

'I cannot exclude the possibility. But in fact, I'm more interested in the medical condition of your brother, Marcel. And perhaps I'll have an opportunity to speak to your parents.'

Casper Hoogwoud momentarily pressed his lips together. His attitude became one of protest.

'My brother and I don't live at home, any longer. My father is an old-fashioned patriarch with outdated ideas about raising a family. My brother could no longer live under his regime.'

DeKok noticed the bitter tone. His face showed a sudden interest.

'And what about you?'

'What?'

'Were you also unable to live any longer under your father's regime?'

Hoogwoud lowered his head slightly.

‘Father is a despot. When it became possible to move in with my brother, I did. Only my sister still lives at home.’

‘And your mother?’

The young man stared into the distance with a dreamy look in his eyes.

‘Mother passed away long ago,’ he said softly. ‘She died when I was still very small. I have no conscious memory of her. In fact, I only know her from a photograph. It shows her as a fragile little woman in the doorway of our house.’ They drove on in silence. DeKok faced forward and slumped back in the seat, his much abused little hat pulled down to his eyes. He glanced out of the window from underneath the brim and recognized the arcade of Town Hall Street. He did not feel comfortable in this new position and pressed himself upright. Then he turned again toward Casper.

‘How old is Marcel?’

‘Thirty-six.’

‘Quite a bit older than you.’

Hoogwoud nodded vaguely.

‘But we get along just fine. He treats me like an adult... not like his kid brother, in case that’s what you’re thinking.’

DeKok ignored the remark.

‘Does your brother know you walk around with all that money?’

‘Yes, he does.’

DeKok feigned surprise.

‘And he doesn’t object?’

Casper Hoogwoud lifted his chin defiantly.

‘It is *my* money, *my* behavior, *my* business. Marcel respects that.’

DeKok nodded to himself, but he couldn't think of an explanation for such a large amount of cash. He had still not succeeded in breaking through the stiff reserve of the young man.

'Shouldn't Marcel be treated in a hospital?'

The young man sighed.

'That would indeed be better for him, but Marcel doesn't want it. He doesn't like hospitals, or doctors. He mistrusts what he calls "those murderers in white coats."'

'Murderers?'

'One of Marcel's expressions,' smiled Casper.

Vledder stopped the car at the side of the road.

'We're not there yet, but I have a parking spot here.'

They exited the car and closed the doors. DeKok pulled up the collar of his raincoat. The evening air was chilly, and it had started to rain.

When they reached the house, Casper took a key from his pocket and opened the door.

He preceded the inspectors through a long, wide corridor to a spacious room with a high ceiling. A man reclined on a sofa. His eyes were closed. Casper walked toward him.

'Marcel, here are two gentlemen from the police.'

DeKok looked down at the man on the sofa. The expression on his face and the pallor of his skin concerned him.

Casper shook the man's shoulder.

'Marcel.'

There was an undertone of fear in his voice. He again took the man by the shoulder and shook more vigorously.

DeKok took him by the arm.

'Leave him,' he said softly.

The young man looked up at him. There was confusion in his bright blue eyes.

'Marcel,' he whispered.

DeKok's face expressed compassion.

'Marcel is dead,' he said.

Copyright © A.C. Baantjer

Copyright © 2023 for this edition: Uitgeverij De Fontein, Utrecht

First published by Fulcrum Publishers, Wheat Ridge, USA

Original title *De Cock en moord op termijn*

Translated by H.G. Smittenaar

Cover design De Weijer Design, Baarn

Cover photo De Weijer Design / Unsplash / Yoav Aziz

Typeset by Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 90 261 6917 5

ISBN e-book 978 90 261 6918 2

www.uitgeverijdefontein.nl

Uitgeverij De Fontein considers it important to handle natural resources in an environmentally friendly and responsible manner. The paper edition of this title was therefore produced using paper whose production was certain not to have led to forest destruction.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.