

BAANTJER

DeKok
and the Kiss
of Death

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De Fontein

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To Roxanne Degenaar it all seemed completely pointless.

At first, she had been very excited, had even looked forward to the fun she had imagined it would be, but she had not had a night off since she entered the world of municipal politics. She glanced at her watch and saw that it was just over half past eight. Roxanne thought about pouring herself another glass of wine before Albert arrived but allowed her better judgement to prevail. She needed to stay lucid; what she had to discuss with Albert was difficult enough. He wanted to talk about the party program. Terribly boring, but extremely important, according to Albert, who was terribly boring himself. According to him, people needed to know what they were voting for. Diversity, whatever that was supposed to mean. She hated that kind of garbage; politics was all about personalities. Of that she was certain. And that was why she was on the poster, and not that loser Albert.

She looked at the poster she had hung in the right-hand corner of her window earlier that evening. She had brought a cardboard tube of them home from the party office. Matthias would find it terribly ugly, an opinion she shared, but that was just the price they had to pay for her position as party

leader. Still, she was quite proud of it. GRANDMA, LIST 12. VOTE ROXANNE!

GRANDMA stood for Grand Mission for Amsterdam, a name that had been coined long before she became involved in the party. GRANDMA... whose brilliant idea had that been? The name of the party was the reason she had categorically rejected the idea of them using a photo of her on the poster. And that was not an issue at all, because everyone in Amsterdam knew Roxanne. She walked over to the kitchen island and switched on the coffee machine when the doorbell rang. She sighed in annoyance. In addition to everything else, Albert was also too early. They had agreed to meet at nine. Well, the sooner the conversation was over, the sooner she could enjoy her wine. She walked to the front door, set it ajar, and then pressed the button to open the outside door. She walked back to the kitchen and pulled a can of grape Fanta out of the fridge. Grape Fanta was for kids, but it was the only thing Albert would drink. She decided to make herself a cappuccino. It would be her last for the evening.

A few seconds later, she heard footsteps in the living room. She turned around and, seeing who had entered the room, her lips opened to exclaim angrily, but her anger was replaced by horror as a hand slowly emerged from her visitor's coat pocket and pointed a gun at her. She stood as if frozen, desperate to say something, to scream, but no sound would come out of her throat. Then she turned and clawed at the knife block standing on the kitchen island. But it was too late. A shot sounded, a single shot.

A single shot Roxanne never consciously experienced.

Detective Jurre DeKok entered the lobby of the police station on Warmoesstraat and knocked the raindrops off his old

felt hat. He had been conducting a brief investigation into a young German woman who had been found dead in an old warehouse. An overdose. A sad case of the sort he dealt with less frequently in recent years than early in his career in the Warmoesstraat, fortunately enough. Back then, it had been an almost daily occurrence. Still, despite his years of experience, he had never gotten used to cases like this one. The sight of the young woman and her sad fate earlier in the evening had left him depressed.

As he shuffled wearily toward the stone steps, the watch commander poked his head around the corner of his desk. 'DeKok! Put your hat back on. The control room is just coming through with a case for you in PC.'

'P.C. Hooftstraat? Can't Lijnbaansgracht take care of it?'

'No capacity. Those guys have their hands full.'

DeKok sighed. 'Fortunately, we apparently don't...' He put his hat, limp and shapeless from the rain, back on his head.

'And Dick?'

'Coming.'

Behind him, on the stairs, he heard the quick footsteps of his loyal lieutenant.

The flashing lights of the police cars and ambulance made a carnival-like impression in the normally posh P.C. Hooftstraat, where during the day Porsches and Bentleys lined up bumper to bumper in the parking spots that were now occupied by police cars. DeKok looked up at the building the team was combing for evidence. Above a clothing shop on the ground floor, the building had two more floors, the lower of which was brightly illuminated by the lights that had been placed there by the forensics department. A poster hung in the window

on the left side of that floor, an election poster by the looks of it. A young officer lifted the cordon tape to give DeKok and Vledder access to the crime scene.

DeKok climbed the narrow staircase carefully and entered the first floor. He immediately noticed the luxurious look of everything in the apartment. The carpeting, the furniture and the art on the walls all told the story of a successful life. A wall that had once separated the kitchen and living room had been removed and a kitchen island had taken its place. Only half of the kitchen island was visible now, however. The body of a dead woman was draped uncomfortably over the other half. Apparently, that spot was where the successful life had come to an abrupt and unfortunate end.

Dr. Den Koninghe was standing over the body and looked up for a moment when DeKok appeared in the doorway. ‘The lady of the house is no longer with us,’ he remarked dryly.

‘I was afraid of that,’ the gray-haired detective replied.

It was his second death of the day, and this corpse was just as unpleasant a sight as the other had been. The woman was dressed in a long dress fashioned from a light fabric adorned with busy, colorful print. Her bare arms stretched across the kitchen island and her right hand lay next to a toppled knife block. Had she tried to grab a knife? Had she wanted to use a knife to fend off her attacker? At the pathologist’s direction, the photographer took pictures of the victim’s head. Clumps of congealed blood were visible in her blond hair and rusty brown spots were splattered across the kitchen countertop.

The pathologist removed his gold-framed glasses and polished the lenses with the pocket square he had pulled from his breast pocket.

‘Shot from behind in the head. There’s an obvious entry

wound, but it doesn't really look like a targeted shot. The bullet came back out here.' He pointed to a spot on the other side of the head. 'A little to the left and the bullet would only have grazed her head. Case of bad luck I guess. Anyway, I'm going home. I've seen enough death for one day. Bye.'

DeKok looked around the room and tried to imagine what had happened. He saw no signs of a struggle, so he assumed the woman was in the kitchen at the time of the murder. The espresso machine was on and there was a cup under the spout. The cup was empty. Had she intended to make a cup of coffee? Next to the machine stood a can of grape Fanta. Was someone visiting? Someone she knew?

'Were there any signs of forced entry?' he asked a forensics expert shuffling around the room in his white plastic suit.

'There is only one way into this room and that's through the front door.' He pointed to the door through which DeKok himself had just entered the apartment. 'And there are no traces of forced entry there. Nor are there any downstairs on the outside door either.'

'That means she must have opened the door for her killer.'

'Or he had a key.'

DeKok grinned. 'You've already solved the murder, I hear.'

The forensics expert smiled back. 'Apple pie, DeKok,' he replied before resuming his work.

Suddenly, DeKok heard raised voices coming from the stairwell.

'I have to get upstairs!'

'No!'

The raised voices were followed by the sounds of a struggle.

DeKok nodded his head. 'Dick.'

Vledder put away his notebook and ran to the door. What

was going on in the stairwell was quickly apparent to him.

‘It’s the victim’s husband,’ he panted, trying to catch his breath. ‘He wants to come upstairs.’

‘Yes, I understand that, but there can be no question of that, not while the men are busy here. And he better not see his wife in this condition, either.’ He gestured towards the ambulance workers who were waiting to be told that they could remove the body.

‘They need to be able to do their job first.’

He glanced around the room one more time and then decided there was little he could do there for the moment. Forensics would be there for a while.

‘Let’s talk to him.’

The man stood in the archway in front of the entrance to the clothing shop anxiously puffing on a cigarette.

‘Damn it, I haven’t smoked in five years!’ Aiming carefully, he tossed the cigarette butt into the gutter in front of the shop. ‘Can I see her now?’

He was a handsome man, with a strong jaw line, his face bronzed by the sun and a pair of brown eyes that peered solemnly at the two detectives. He wore a pearl-gray tailored suit that DeKok had no trouble matching with the interior of his apartment. It breathed money.

‘I’m afraid not. My colleagues from forensics are still working in the apartment and no one is allowed to go in.’

‘And who are you?’

‘My name is DeKok, kay-oh-kay. And this is my colleague Vledder. We’re from the Criminal Investigation Division.’

‘Can you tell me what happened?’

‘Unfortunately not. We haven’t had a chance to investigate

yet, or to speak with anyone who may have seen or heard anything. We were just called to the scene minutes ago.'

The man did not seem to have heard the answer. He rubbed his hand nervously over his cheek and chin. 'What could have happened? I mean, dead... I can't believe it.' He looked up at DeKok. 'It's just unbelievable, isn't it?'

'Mister...?' asked DeKok with a questioning gaze.

The man gazed back for a moment in puzzlement before responding. 'Oh yes, of course. Sorry. Degenaar.'

'Mr. Degenaar, I'm afraid your wife has been killed.' DeKok tried to deliver the message as gently as possible.

For a moment, the man appeared not to have heard or not to have wanted to hear DeKok's announcement and continued to stare out into the street in front of him. Slowly, however, reality dawned on Mr. Degenaar.

'Has been killed? Killed...? Are you saying she was murdered?'

'I'm very sorry, but yes, that is indeed what I'm trying to say.'

The man's eyes darted nervously from side to side, as if an answer could be found on the street before him. 'But how... how ...?'

'That will be investigated in due time.'

'Jesus...'

'We'll need to speak with you, but perhaps it would be best to put that off until tomorrow.'

'Yes... yes...'

'Can we call a doctor for you?'

'What? No... no, I'm... I'm fine.'

'You won't be able to return to your home tonight. Do you have somewhere else you can go?'

The man looked at DeKok as if he did not understand the

question; his mind was clearly elsewhere.

‘Do you have somewhere else to sleep?’

‘Yes. Yes, there’s a hotel not far from here.’ He gestured in the general direction of the hotel. ‘I’ll get a room at the Hilton.’ He slumped over for a moment, but raised his head suddenly when he heard a voice. ‘Albert!’ He detached himself from the two detectives in the archway and walked with great strides toward a man with a sad expression on his face standing next to a young officer across the street. Degenaar grabbed the man by his lapels. ‘She’s dead.’

The sad man sighed deeply. ‘I know. I just heard about it. A robbery.’

Degenaar fell silent and then looked over his shoulder at DeKok. ‘Robbery?... How do you know it was a robbery?’

‘I inquired immediately, of course, when I understood that Roxanne...’ He pointed to the officer. ‘They think it might have been a robbery.’

DeKok intervened. ‘I beg your pardon, but did you know the woman?’

‘Yes, I did. I knew her well in fact.’

‘Were you here for any particular reason?’

The man looked at DeKok with a dumb expression on his face, as if he did not understand the question. DeKok turned to Degenaar. ‘We need to have a word with this gentleman, if you don’t mind...’ Vledder walked Degenaar back to the archway.

‘What, mmm... what do you mean?’

‘Are you here for a reason or did you just happen to be passing by here when the police arrived?’

‘Well... I live around the corner, in Van Baerlestraat, and I heard the sirens and I saw the cars racing down the street. And as an *Amsterdammer*, of course I want to know what’s going on

in my neighborhood, where the fire is so to speak.' The man smiled modestly. An ordinary man, a neat, tidy, bourgeois man wearing a beige raincoat over a dark blue sportscoat and gray flannel trousers. 'I'm in Amsterdam politics, that's why.'

'Could I have your name please?'

'Koppen, Albert Koppen of Grand Mission for Amsterdam.'

The name meant nothing to DeKok.

'Could you tell me a bit more?' the man asked.

'About what?'

'About what happened. You understand...'

'The investigation has just started, sir. We know as much as you do.'

'Yes, yes... they think she was robbed.' He pointed again to the young officer, who was now talking to a young woman who had stopped to find out what the commotion was all about.

'A robbery cannot be ruled out,' DeKok replied neutrally, turning away from the man.

Suddenly Degenaar's voice sounded from the archway. 'Don't allow yourself to be fooled, DeKok. This was a liquidation, a political assassination!'

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