

**'A GRISLY SCAVENGER HUNT THAT LEAVES YOU  
BREATHLESS FOR THE NEXT CLUE'**

**KARIN SLAUGHTER**

# FIVE

N47° 46'05" E013° 21'18"

**URSULA P. ARCHER**

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## About the Book

### **EVERY CORPSE IS A CLUE**

**N47° 46.605 E013° 21.718 A dismembered hand**

**N47° 48.022 E013° 10.910 Two severed ears**

**N47° 26.195 E013° 12.523 A mutilated corpse**

A woman is found murdered. Tattooed on her feet is a strange combination of numbers and letters.

Map co-ordinates. The start of a sinister treasure hunt by a twisted killer.

Detective Beatrice Kaspary must risk all she has to uncover the killer in a terrifying game of cat-and-mouse.

### **THANKS FOR THE HUNT**

## About the Author

Ursula P. Archer was born in 1968, and worked as an editor at a publishing house. After the success of her first young adult novel, she now dedicates much of her time to writing fiction. She lives with her family in Vienna. *Five* is her first thriller for adults.

Jamie Lee Searle's recent and forthcoming translations include Andreas Maier's *Das Zimmer* and co-translations, with Shaun Whiteside, of Frank Schätzing's *Limit* and Floridh Ilies' *1913*, which was Radio 4 Book of the week. She co-founded the Emerging Translators Network in late 2010, and has been a member of the UK Translators Association Committee since late 2013.

URSULA P. ARCHER

**FIVE**

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY  
Jamie Lee Searle

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## Prologue

The place where his left ear used to be was throbbing to the rhythm of his heartbeat. Fast and panicked. His breath came out in short, loud gasps. Nora was just a few steps away from him, leaning over the table where the pistol and knife lay. Her face was contorted, but she was no longer crying.

‘Please,’ he whispered, his voice hoarse. ‘Please don’t do it.’

Now she let out a dry, strangled sob. ‘Be quiet.’

‘Why won’t you untie me? We still have a chance ... please just untie me, okay? Okay?’

She didn’t respond. Her right hand wavered shakily over the weapons, which gave off a dull gleam in the light of the naked bulb.

His whole body convulsed with fear. He writhed around on the chair, twisting as far as the ropes would let him. They cut into his flesh, burning him, as unyielding as steel bands.

*But it’s not my fault, it’s not my fault, it’s not my ...*

He screwed his eyes tightly shut, only to open them again. He had to see what was happening. Nora’s hand was on the knife now.

‘No!’ he screamed, or at least he thought he did. ‘Help me! Why won’t anyone help me?’ But now, when he most needed it, his voice had abandoned him. It was gone, and soon everything would be gone, for all eternity. His breath, his pulse, his thoughts. Everything.

Tears he was unable to wipe away blurred his sight of Nora, who was still standing there in front of the table. She

gave a drawn-out wail, softer than a scream, louder than a groan. He blinked.

She had picked up the pistol, her right hand quivering like an old lady's. 'I'm sorry,' she said.

He wrenched his body backwards and forwards in desperation, almost tipping the chair over. Then he felt the cool metal against his cheek and froze.

'Close your eyes,' she said.

Her hand touched his head gently. He felt her fear, as great as his own. But she would carry on breathing, carry on talking, carry on living.

'No,' he whispered tonelessly, finding his voice again at last. He looked up at Nora, who was now standing right in front of him. He wished fervently that he had never heard her name.

N47° 46.605 E013° 21.718

The early morning mist enveloped her like a damp shroud. The dead woman was on her stomach, the grass beneath her soaked with dew and blood. The cows were taking care not to graze there, which was easy enough; the meadow was large, and the thing lying there in the shadow of the rock face unsettled them. A brown cow had ventured over shortly after sunrise, lowering her heavy head and licking the flaxen strands of hair with her rough tongue. But finding her discovery to be unpalatable, she had soon returned to the rest of the herd.

They kept their distance. Most of them just lay there, chewing the cud and staring out at the river. But even the ones that were still grazing avoided straying too close. The scent of death made them uneasy. They much preferred to stay where the first beams of sunlight were pushing through the mist, etching bright patterns onto the meadow.

The brown cow trotted across to drink from the trough. With every step, the clapper in her bell struck against the metal, producing a tinny sound. The rest of the herd didn't even swivel their ears. They just stared stoically at the water, their lower jaws grinding constantly, their tails swishing to swat away the first flies of the day.

A gentle gust of wind swept over the meadow, brushing the woman's hair aside and exposing her face. Her small, upturned nose. The birthmark next to the right-hand corner of her mouth. Her lips, now far too pale. Only her forehead remained covered, where her hair and skin were matted with blood.

The morning mist slowly frayed out to form isolated veils. These eventually wafted away, clearing the view of the meadow, the cattle, and the unwanted gift which had been left there for them. The brown cow's muffled lowing greeted the new day.

As always, Beatrice took the stairs two at a time. She skidded along the corridor, racing past the second door on the left. Just seven steps to go. Six. Reaching her office, she saw that no one was there but Florin. Thank God for that.

'Has he been in yet?' she asked, slinging her rucksack onto the revolving chair and her folder onto the desk.

'Good morning to you too!'

How did Florin always manage to stay so upbeat? She hurled her jacket towards the coat rack, missed and swore loudly.

'Sit yourself down and catch your breath. I'll get that.' Florin stood, picked her jacket up from the floor and hung it carefully on one of the hooks.

'Thank you.' She turned her computer on and hurriedly emptied the contents of the folder onto her desk. 'I would have been on time, but Jakob's teacher caught me.'

Florin went over to the espresso machine and started pressing buttons. She saw him nod. 'What was it this time?'

'He had a temper tantrum, and the class mascot caught the brunt of it.'

'Oh. Was it a living thing, dare I ask?'

'No. A cuddly toy owl called Elvira. But you wouldn't believe what a huge drama it caused - at least ten children in the class were in floods of tears. I offered to send a crisis intervention team across, but the teacher wasn't amused. Anyway, now I need to arrange a substitute Elvira before Friday.'

'That sounds like quite a challenge.'

He frothed the milk, pressed the button for double espresso and then crowned his work with a little dusting of

cocoa. Florin's calm demeanour was gradually starting to work its magic on Beatrice. As he put the steaming cup down in front of her, she realised she was smiling.

He sat down at the opposite side of their desk and surveyed her thoughtfully. 'You look as though you didn't get much sleep.'

*You can say that again.* 'Everything's fine,' she mumbled, staring intently at her coffee in the hope that Florin would be content with her brief response.

'No nocturnal calls?'

There certainly had been. One at half-past eleven, and another at three in the morning. The second had woken Mina, who hadn't gone back to sleep again for an hour afterwards.

Beatrice shrugged. 'He'll give up eventually.'

'You have to change your number, Bea, it's been going on long enough. Don't keep giving him the opportunity to wear you down. You *are* the police, for heaven's sake! There are steps you can take.'

The coffee was sublime. In the two years they had been working together, Florin had gradually perfected the ideal blend of coffee beans, milk and sugar. Beatrice leant back and closed her eyes for a few seconds, longing for just one moment of relaxation. However brief it might be.

'If I change the number, he'll be on my doorstep before I can count to ten. And he is their father, after all; he has a right to contact his children.'

She heard Florin sigh. 'By the way,' he said, 'Hoffmann's already been in.'

*Shit.* 'Really? So why isn't my monitor covered in Post-its?'

'I appeased him by saying you'd phoned and were on an outside call. He pulled a sour face, but didn't say a word. The good news is that we'll have some peace from him today because he's in meetings.'

That was more than good news, it was fantastic. Beatrice put her cup down, tried to relax her tensed shoulder muscles, and started to sort through the files on her desk. She would finally get a chance to work on her report about the stabbing; Hoffmann had been nagging her to do it for ages. She glanced over at Florin, who was staring intently at his monitor with an expression of utter confusion. A strand of his dark hair fell forwards, almost into his eyes. *Clickclickclick*. Beatrice's gaze was drawn to his hand as it clasped the mouse. Strong, masculine hands: her old weakness.

'Problem?' she asked.

'Unsolvable.'

'Anything I can help with?'

A thoughtful crease formed between his eyebrows. 'I don't know. The selection of antipasti is a serious matter.'

She laughed. 'Ah, I see. So when does Anneke arrive?'

'In three days' time. I think I'll make *vitello tonnato*. Or maybe bruschetta? Damn it, I wish I knew whether she's eating carbs at the moment.'

Discussing menu planning wasn't a good idea; Beatrice's stomach immediately made itself heard. Quickly thinking back over what she had eaten so far today - an inventory which amounted to two biscuits - she decided she was perfectly entitled to feel hungry.

'I'd vote for *vitello tonnato*,' she said, 'and a quick trip downstairs to the café.'

'Already?' He caught her gaze and smiled. 'Okay then. I'll just print this out and then—'

The telephone rang, interrupting him. Once he answered the call, it was only a few seconds before his dark expression told Beatrice to forget about the tuna baguette she had been dreaming of.

'We'll be there right away.' He hung up the phone and looked at her. 'We've got a body, female, near Abtenau. It seems she fell from the rock face.'

‘Oh, shit. Sounds like a climbing accident.’

Florin’s eyebrows knitted together, forming a dark beam over his eyes. ‘Hardly. Not unless she was climbing with her hands tied.’

The corpse was a bright stain against the green, flanked by two uniformed policemen. A tall man, bare-chested under his dungarees, looked at them curiously. He was standing in the adjacent field, holding a small herd of cows in check. He raised his hand, as if wanting to wave at Beatrice and Florin, but then lowered it again.

A rocky crag with an almost vertical twenty-metre drop towered over the meadow, jutting out in stark contrast to the idyllic landscape.

The forensic investigators, Drasche and Ebner, had clearly arrived just a few minutes before them. They were already clad in their protective suits, busying themselves with their instruments, and only nodded briefly in greeting.

A man was kneeling down right next to the pasture fence, filling out a form. He was using his doctor’s case as a makeshift desk. ‘Good morning,’ he said, without even looking up. ‘You’re from the Landeskriminalamt, I take it?’

‘Yes. I’m Florin Wenninger, and this is my colleague Beatrice Kaspary. Is there anything you can already tell us about the deceased?’

The doctor pushed the top back onto his pen with a sigh. ‘Not much. Female, around thirty-five to forty years old. My guess would be that someone pushed her off the rock face last night. Cause of death probably head trauma or aortic rupture – the neck wasn’t broken in any case. You’ll need to ask the forensic pathologist for more detailed information.’

‘Time of death?’

The doctor blew out his cheeks. ‘Between two and four in the morning, I’d say. But don’t hold me to that. All I’m supposed to do here is certify the death.’

Drasche trudged over, carrying his forensics kit. 'Did anyone here touch the body?'

One of the policemen spoke up hesitantly. 'The doctor. And me. But just to feel for a pulse. I looked for ID or a wallet too, but couldn't find anything. We didn't alter her position.'

'Okay.' Drasche beckoned to Ebner, who was poised with his camera at the ready. While the forensics team took photographs and collected samples, sealing them in small containers, Beatrice's gaze rested on the dead woman. She tried to fade out everything else around her: her colleagues, the traffic noise from the main road, the chiming of the cowbells. Only the woman mattered.

She was lying on her stomach, her head turned to the side. Her legs were bent out to the right, as though she had been paralysed mid-sprint. Her hands were behind her back, her wrists lashed together tightly with cable tie.

Eyes closed, mouth half open, as if death had caught up with her while she was still speaking.

Beatrice's mind instinctively filled with images. The woman being dragged along through the darkness. The precipice. She struggles, digs her heels into the ground, pleads for her life, but her murderer grips her tightly, pushes her towards the edge, waits until she can feel the depths of the abyss beneath her. Then, just a light push in the back.

'Everything okay?' Florin's hand touched her arm for a second.

'Sure.'

'I'm just going to talk to the others. I'm guessing you want to immerse yourself for a bit, right?'

That's what he called it. Immersing oneself. Beatrice nodded.

'Don't go too deep.'

He walked over to the two officers and engaged them in conversation. She took a deep breath. It didn't smell of

death here, just cow dung and meadow flowers. She watched Drasche as he pulled a plastic bag around the woman's hands. Ideally, she would have liked to climb over the fence to have a closer look at the body, but forensics wouldn't take too kindly to that; Drasche in particular could get very touchy. Without taking her eyes off the dead woman, she walked in a small arc along the pasture fence, trying to find another vantage point. She focused her attention on the woman's clothing: a bright-red silk jacket over a floral-patterned blouse. Expensive jeans. No shoes; the soles of her feet were dirty and speckled with blood, as if she had walked a long way barefoot. Amidst the dirt, there were dark flecks on each foot. Small, black marks. Or perhaps something else ...

Beatrice knelt down, squinting, but she couldn't see clearly from this distance. 'Hey, Gerd!'

Drasche didn't stop what he was doing for even the blink of an eye. 'What?'

'Could you take a look at the victim's feet for me?'

'Just a second.' He fastened the transparent bag with adhesive tape before moving down to look at the lower end of the corpse.

'What the hell?'

'There's something there, isn't there? Characters of some kind, am I right?'

Drasche gestured to Ebner, who snapped a series of close-ups of the feet.

'Tell me!' She lifted the barbed-wire fence and ducked underneath. 'What is it?'

'Looks like numbers. There's a series of numbers on each foot. Could you please stay where you are?'

Beatrice struggled against the temptation to go further forward. 'Can I see the photos?'

Drasche and Ebner exchanged a glance which betrayed both irritation and resignation.

‘Show her,’ said Drasche, clearly disgruntled. ‘It’s the only way she’ll leave us in peace.’

Ebner put his camera onto viewing mode and held it out for Beatrice to see.

Numbers. But not exclusively – the first character on the left foot looked like an N. Written in an unsteady hand, the oblique line tailed off in the middle before starting again. It reminded her of Mina’s handwriting back in kindergarten, the strokes leaning precariously against one another like the walls of a ramshackle old hut. The N was followed by a four, a seven and something that looked like either a zero or a lower-case o. Then another four, a six, another six, a zero and a five. Black, irregular strokes.

She zoomed in. ‘Are they painted on? With a waterproof pen maybe?’

She looked at the other foot. Again a letter first, then a series of numbers. An E with crooked horizontal lines, followed by a zero, a one, a three. Then another of the little circles. A brief gap, then five more numbers. Two, one, seven, one, eight.

‘No, they’re not painted on.’ Drasche’s voice sounded hoarse. ‘I’d say they were tattooed.’

‘What?’ She looked closer. Now that he’d said it, it suddenly seemed like the only plausible explanation. They were tattoos. But on such a sensitive part of the body, surely it was quite rare to have such a thing. So now the question was: did she already have them, or had they been inflicted on her by the killer?

She wrote the number combinations down in her notebook.

*N47<sup>o</sup> 46 605*

*E013<sup>o</sup> 21 718*

The pattern seemed familiar, but where from? It wasn’t anything connected to computing, nor were they telephone numbers. ‘I feel like I should know this,’ she murmured, more to herself than her colleagues.

‘You should indeed,’ said Drasche through his face mask. ‘And if you promise to leave me in peace, I’ll enlighten you.’  
‘It’s a deal.’

‘Those aren’t o’s, they’re degree symbols. Try putting the number combinations into your GPS. They’re coordinates.’

She wanted to tell Florin the latest developments right away, but could see he was in the process of questioning the farmer.

‘I came out at half-six to bring the cows in for milking, and that’s when I saw her. I could tell right away that she had to be dead.’

‘Were the cows in the meadow overnight?’

‘Yes. I bring them out after the evening milking and back in again in the morning. My farm’s only a few hundred metres away, so it’s an easy job.’

So the animals had been stomping around in the meadow all night long. That meant forensics were unlikely to get any usable footprints from the perpetrator. If there had ever been any, that is. She positioned herself next to Florin and held her hand out to the farmer.

‘Kaspary.’

‘Pleased to meet you. Raininger.’ He gripped her hand tightly, not letting it go. ‘Are you with the police too?’

‘Yes. Why?’

He gave a wry smile. ‘Because you’re much too pretty for nasty work like this. Don’t you think?’

The last sentence was directed at Florin.

‘I can assure you, Frau Kommissarin Kaspary is not only very pretty, but above all exceptionally intelligent. Which happens to be the deciding factor for our “nasty” work.’ His tone had become just a fraction cooler, but Raininger didn’t seem to notice. He carried on beaming at Beatrice, even after she had forcefully freed her hand from his grip.

‘I’d like to continue, if you don’t mind.’ Florin’s voice was like bourbon on ice: cold, crisp and as smooth as velvet.

'Did you notice anything out of the ordinary yesterday evening?'

'No. Everything was just the same as always.'

'I see. And did you happen to hear anything during the night? Any voices, screams?'

'No, nothing. So did the woman fall down from the crag? Or did someone attack her? There was an awful lot of blood on her head.' He sounded eager to know more. No wonder really; next time he met the other farmers for a beer they would be desperate to hear his story, so he had to know the details.

'We don't know yet. So is the crag accessible by road then?'

The farmer thought for a moment. 'Yes. It's easy to get to from the other side. There's a dirt track that goes almost right to the top.'

Beatrice saw Florin write in his notebook: *Tyre tracks*. All she had written in hers so far were the coordinates. Underneath, she scribbled in shorthand the information Raininger had given them.

'Does the woman look familiar to you?' she asked. 'Have you see her here before at all?'

The farmer shook his head vehemently. 'Never. And I've got a good memory for faces. I'm sure I would have remembered hers. Especially with that beautiful blonde hair. Is it natural?' He grinned broadly, revealing a toothless gap in the top left-hand side of his mouth.

'If you don't mind,' said Beatrice in a gentle but firm tone, 'we're the ones asking the questions.'

But the farmer didn't have any useful information left to offer. He set off reluctantly back to the farm, his cows in tow, glancing back over his shoulder after every few steps. Beatrice waited until he was out of earshot.

'The victim's feet,' she said.

'What about them?'

'They were tattooed. On the soles.'

He caught on right away. 'So you think the murderer left her some kind of memento?'

'Possibly. But I think it might be a message.' She showed him the two sets of numbers.

'These were tattooed on her feet?'

'Yes. The northern coordinate on the left foot, and eastern on the right.'

Florin immediately strode off across the meadow back towards the crime scene, completely disregarding the potential damage an encounter with a cowpat could inflict on his bespoke shoes. He stopped at the pasture fence and stared over towards the body, his head cocked to the side.

Beatrice had almost caught up with him when her phone started to vibrate in her jacket pocket.

'Kaspary.'

'I'm not going to let you mess me around any more.' Every last word was dripping with contempt.

'Achim. Now's not the time.'

'Of course not. It's never a convenient time for you, is it?' He was on the brink of shouting. 'Even when it's about the children, or—'

'The children are fine, and I'm hanging up now.'

'Don't you dare, you—'

She ended the call and put her mobile back in her bag.

Take a deep breath, she told herself. Focus on the job at hand. But her hands were shaking, she couldn't think clearly like this. *Shit!* Crossing her arms and tucking her hands out of sight, she walked over to join Florin.

'I'd like to know where her shoes are,' he pondered. 'If she lost them in the fall then they should be around here somewhere.' He paused and looked at Beatrice. 'Are you going to tell me why you look so agitated?'

She didn't answer, and Florin lowered his head knowingly. 'Achim, right?'

She pulled her shoulders back and straightened up. 'You were saying something about her shoes?' She tried to pick up on his train of thought, keen to deflect the attention from herself. 'I'm sure forensics will cover the crag too. If she really did fall, then we might find the shoes up there.'

But he was still staring at her intently. 'I'm such an idiot!' he exclaimed.

'Why? We can't be sure about the shoes. Who knows whether we're going to find—'

'Not about that. You still haven't eaten anything, have you? You must be on the verge of fainting.'

'Oh.' Tuning into her body for a moment, she registered a searing sensation in her stomach - which might have been hunger - but not the slightest hint of an appetite. 'No, there's no rush. Crime scene work always turns my stomach anyway.'

She left it at that, not wanting to get drawn into a discussion. A light wind picked up, making the thin plastic bag around the dead woman's hands rustle as if she was kneading it from the inside.

The pathologist's vehicle bumped along the country lane towards them. After it had come to a standstill, a stretcher and body bag were lifted out. Drasche nodded, giving the green light for the woman to be taken away. They lifted her up and the wind caught her hair one last time. Beatrice turned away.

Before the vehicle set off on its way to the pathologist, Florin leant over to the passenger-side window. 'Tell Dr Vogt I'd like the preliminary results today if at all possible.'

Beatrice's mobile began to vibrate in her jacket pocket. It was sure to be Achim again. This time though, she wouldn't pick up. But she took the phone from her pocket just to check, then sighed loudly. The call was from the school.

'He emptied the entire contents of his milk carton into the pot plants! It's just not acceptable, do you understand?

The plants belong to the whole class, and if they die you'll have to replace them.'

'Of course. Just let me know if that turns out to be necessary.'

'He's not an easy child, you know.' The teacher at the other end of the line sighed. 'Please speak to him again. It's high time he learnt that rules apply to everyone, including him!'

'Of course. Out of interest, did he say why he did it?'

The teacher snorted. 'Yes, he said that water is too thin and he wanted the flowers to have a proper drink.'

*Oh, Jakob, my sweet little Jakob.*

'I see. Well, then at least he didn't mean any harm.'

'I guess. But he's seven, for heaven's sake. At some point he simply has to learn to do what he's told.'

Beatrice suppressed the desire to shout down the phone at the woman.

'I understand. I'll speak to him.'

'Thank you. Let's hope it does some good.' The teacher hung up. Feeling overwhelmed with hopelessness, Beatrice tucked her phone back in her bag.

At Florin's insistence, they stopped off at Ginzkey's instead of driving straight back to the office. 'Vegetable curry helps to restore inner balance,' he informed her, ordering two portions. By now, Beatrice was starting to feel as if her stomach had been sewn shut. It was only once the aromatic plate of food was put down in front of her, and she had shovelled in the first mouthful, that her appetite finally kicked back in. She devoured the entire curry, then ordered some cake and hot chocolate.

'Sugar therapy,' she explained. 'It generates temporary feelings of happiness. By the time I feel sick I'll have forgotten about everything else.' She was relieved to see Florin grinning.

‘Will it spoil your appetite if we talk about the case?’ he asked.

‘Not in the slightest. Once we get back to the office we can go through the missing persons reports. Our investigations are just a stab in the dark until we know who the woman was.’

‘Well, that’s not strictly true. Thanks to your discovery.’

‘Do you really think the coordinates are connected to her death? The tattoos could be old. We should wait for the pathologist’s report first.’

‘Definitely.’ He drank his espresso down in one gulp. ‘But I’m still going to put the numbers into my GPS all the same. You never know, we might find something useful.’

Outside, the skies were clouding over. They hurried back to the office, where they were greeted by a message from Hoffmann asking to be updated on the new case. While Florin went off to look for their boss, Beatrice turned her computer on and loaded the page with the missing persons announcements.

A fifty-five-year-old woman with short grey hair who had gone missing from the local psychiatric unit. No. An unemployed twenty-two-year-old who had made suicide threats. Another no.

The third entry unleashed that subtle but familiar tug inside her, like a divining rod quivering and latching onto its target.

Thirty-nine-year-old female, blonde, green eyes, 170 centimetres, slim. A dark brown birthmark above the right-hand corner of her mouth. Special features: none. So no tattoos then.

*Name: Nora Papenberg*

*Place of residence: Salzburg, Nesselthaler Strasse.*

The woman had been reported missing four days ago by her husband. Beatrice only turned her attention to the

photograph after reading the statement through in full. It was a snapshot, and not really suitable as a missing persons photo, because the Nora Papenberg in the picture had been captured whilst laughing gleefully. Her eyes were half shut, and she was holding a champagne glass in her right hand.

Mouth open, eyes shut. Exactly the same as in the meadow, and yet so completely different.

Beatrice made a mental note of the corresponding features: the rounded chin, the snub nose and the birthmark at the corner of the mouth. Their corpse had a name.

She told Florin as soon as he came back from talking to Hoffmann. 'Nora Papenberg. I've already googled her. She was a copywriter in a small ad agency. There are some photos of her online, so we can be pretty certain it's her.' She passed a pile of printouts over to Florin's side of the desk.

'Right, let's get cracking then.' The vigour in his voice sounded false, and Beatrice knew why. Now came the hardest part of the job: informing the next of kin. Disbelief, tears, devastation. *That's not possible, it's not my husband, my wife, my child. There must be some mistake. There has to be.*

They got stuck in traffic even before they reached the Karolinen bridge. Stealing a glance at her watch, Beatrice realised she would never make it on time now. She pulled her phone from her bag and quickly dialled a number.

'Mama?'

'Bea! It's so lovely to hear from you. Are you already done for the day?'

'No, unfortunately that's why I'm calling. We've got a new murder case, and ...'

Her mother's sigh echoed down the line. 'And you want me to pick the children up from the childminder?'

'Yes. Please. I'll be as quick as I can, and you won't need to cook anything, I'll see to it when I get back.'

'Frozen pizza, I know.'

Beatrice closed her eyes. As if her guilty conscience needed any more ammunition.

'No. In actual fact I was planning to make a broccoli bake. That's quick too.'

If broccoli bake didn't win her mother around then nothing would.

'Fine then. I'll pick them up, but it would be nice if you could give me more notice next time. I do have other things to do, you know.'

'Yes. I know. Thank you.'

They turned off into Aigner Strasse, where the traffic finally eased up. 'You don't have to tell him.' Florin stared fixedly at the Audi in front of them. 'I'll handle that, okay? You just make notes. Unless I overlook something important, then speak up.'

She could have hugged him. He was voluntarily drawing the losing card. The way she sometimes did with the children, just for the pleasure of seeing them hop around giggling, overjoyed to have beaten her.

Did Nora Papenberg have children? As Florin parked the car opposite the house, Beatrice scanned the garden for telltale signs. No sandpit, no children's bikes, no trampoline. Just one of those Japanese Zen gardens with patterns raked in the sand.

'We're too early. He won't even be home yet,' said Florin as he turned the engine off.

They got out and rang the bell anyway. Almost immediately, the door was opened by a man wearing jeans and a checked jacket over a dark green polo shirt.

'Are you Konrad Papenberg?'

'Yes.'

‘We’re from the police.’

Beatrice saw the man flinch, saw how he searched their faces in vain for the trace of a smile, for a sign of the all-clear. Then she saw the realisation dawn.

‘My wife?’

‘Yes. I’m afraid we have bad news, Herr Papenberg.’

‘Come in, please.’ He held the door open for them, turning his ashen face to the side. Most people looked away at that moment, when nothing of finality had yet been said. It was about maintaining that state for as long as possible, drawing out these last seconds of merciful ignorance. He gestured for them to sit down on the sofa, then jumped up again and brought them water from the kitchen, unbidden. The glasses shook so violently in his hands that he spilt half of their contents.

Florin waited until he had sat down and was looking at them. ‘We have every reason to believe that we’ve found your wife. She was discovered this morning in a field near Abtenau.’

‘What do you mean, every reason to believe?’ His voice was surprisingly steady.

‘It means that we’ve identified her based on the missing persons photo. She didn’t have any ID with her.’

‘But she always has it on her ... in her handbag.’ The man swallowed, kneading the fingers of his left hand.

Beatrice made a note: *Bag missing.*

‘You will of course have the opportunity to identify her personally if you feel able to,’ Florin continued gently. ‘I’m very sorry.’

Papenberg didn’t reply. He fixed his gaze on a spot on the coffee table, moving his lips wordlessly, shaking his head in brief, abrupt motions.

*In ninety per cent of cases, the husbands are the murderers.* That was Hoffmann’s rule – and it was fairly accurate. But this man’s reaction was so faint. He didn’t yet believe it.

‘What – I mean, how ... how did she ...’

‘At the moment we have to assume that she was murdered.’

He breathed in shakily. ‘No.’ Tears filled the man’s eyes and he covered his face with his hands. They paused to give him time. Beatrice handed him a tissue, which he noticed only after a few seconds and took hesitantly.

‘You last saw your wife on Friday, is that right?’ asked Florin.

Papenberg nodded. ‘She went to a work dinner in the evening, by car. She arrived without any problems, but left early, at half-ten. I spoke to her colleagues; they said she told them she was coming home, that she had a headache.’

He glanced at Beatrice, looking strangely hopeful, as if she could create some equation from her notes, something that would give everything some sense. ‘Her colleague Rosa said that she received a call shortly before she left.’

That was important. ‘We’ll certainly be speaking to your wife’s colleagues,’ said Beatrice. ‘We didn’t find a mobile on her though. Do you know which model she had?’

‘A Nokia N8. I gave it to her ... for her birthday.’ His voice broke. His upper body doubled over, shaking with suppressed sobs.

They waited patiently for him to gather his composure.

‘Could you please give me your wife’s mobile number? We’ll check to see who she spoke to.’

Konrad Papenberg nodded weakly and pulled his phone from his trouser pocket. He opened his contacts and let Beatrice write the number down. ‘I phoned her at least thirty times that night.’ His words were hard to make out, his voice bloated with grief. ‘But she must have turned it off, it just kept going straight to answerphone.’

‘When you reported your wife missing, you said she had her car with her. Is that correct?’

He nodded without looking up, scrunching the tissue in his hand.

'A red Honda Civic?'

'Yes.'

'There's one more thing we need to know, Herr Papenberg.'

'Yes?'

'Did - does your wife have any distinguishing features?'

He looked up. 'Like what?'

'Scars, any obvious birthmarks, tattoos?'

His trembling hand moved up to his face and pointed to the right-hand side, just above his mouth. 'She has a birthmark here. It's her beauty mark.'

'Okay.' Florin cleared his throat. 'Nothing else? No tattoos?'

'No. She always thought they were tasteless.' A spark of hope smouldered in his eyes. 'Maybe it isn't Nora after all?'

Beatrice and Florin exchanged a glance.

'I'm afraid there isn't any doubt,' said Beatrice softly.

'And not just because of the birthmark.'

That was enough for now. 'We won't disturb you any further. Can we call anyone for you so you're not alone? If you like we can arrange for someone from the counselling team to come and see you.'

'My brother.' Papenberg's voice sounded strangled. 'I'll ring my brother.'

While he went to make the call, they left the room and waited in the hallway. There were some framed photos on a dresser: Nora Papenberg immortalised in all manner of situations. In a summer dress on the beach, looking tanned. In hiking gear in front of a summit cross on a mountain. Building a snowman with a group of friends while clad in a quilted jacket and bobble hat. In every single one, she was laughing and full of life, but unmistakably the same woman whose corpse they had seen that very morning.

'There were five days between her disappearance and the presumed time of death,' Beatrice pondered out loud.

'That's a long time.'

‘It certainly is. Which suggests she was held captive before her death. What are your thoughts on the husband? My hunch is that he’s being genuine.’

‘I agree.’

‘But we’ll still have to look into it.’

‘Of course.’

The door to the living room opened. Papenberg came out, his eyes red and swollen. ‘My brother will be here in twenty minutes. If you don’t have any more questions ...’

‘Of course. We’ll leave you alone now.’ They were already by the door before Beatrice realised that she was still holding the snowman photo in her hand. She felt her cheeks go red, and was just about to put it back on the dresser when Papenberg took it from her hand.

‘That was such a great day. Ice cold and clear. Nora said the snow was like icing sugar,’ he whispered. ‘She loves the snow so much, and nature, everything about it.’

‘I’m sorry,’ murmured Beatrice, simultaneously loathing herself for uttering the worn-out phrase. But the man wasn’t even aware of their presence any more. He nodded absentmindedly. His steadfast gaze was fixed on his wife’s face as she stood there amidst the blinding white, laughing for all eternity.

‘That’s a bunny rabbit, see? And this is an angel, it just drilled a hole in the cloud and that’s why it’s raining.’ Jakob held the drawing so close to the pan of broccoli that the paper started to buckle from the steam. Beatrice gently herded him over towards the fridge, where she pinned the picture up with two magnets. ‘It’s wonderful. Did you draw it at school?’

‘Yes. Frau Sieber gave me a star for it,’ he beamed. Beatrice squatted down to hug him. At least one of them had ended up having a good day. ‘And Mama, look.’ He wriggled out of her arms and poked two fingers into his mouth. A wobbly tooth.

'Great!' she marvelled, before hearing a hissing sound behind her. Boiling water was sloshing over onto the hob and from there down to the floor. Beatrice cursed inwardly, pulling the pan aside and turning down the heat.

'Go and play with Mina for a little while longer, okay? I'll call you when dinner's ready.'

'But Mina doesn't want to play with me,' moaned Jakob. 'She always says I'm a baby and that I don't know anything about anything.' Nonetheless, he trudged obediently back to the children's room, making loud engine noises as he went.

Beatrice wiped up the mess on the hob and floor, then diced the ham, peeled the potatoes and - once the bake was finally in the oven - sank down, exhausted, onto a kitchen chair. In front of her on the table lay a letter from Schubert and Kirchner, Achim's lawyers. She threw the letter unopened onto her hated 'To do' pile and pulled out her notebook.

*Ad agency: Who was at the party? Did anyone else leave at the same time as Nora Papenberg?*

*Phone call. How soon after it did Papenberg leave? What exactly did she say? Is it possible that she went to meet someone?*

*Find out caller's number.*

*Where's her car?*

*Five days before the murder - why so long???*

She flicked back through her notes to the ones she had made right after leaving the crime scene.

*Killing method - Why would someone choose to push their victim from a rock face?*

She read through the farmer's statement again - he hadn't heard anything, hadn't seen anything, the same as

always. Above it, she had scribbled the coordinates. Beatrice closed her eyes and summoned the image again – the victim’s feet lying sideways as if mid-stride, the digits lined up on the soles. The tattoos hadn’t been done by a professional, that much was clear. They had been done by an amateur. By the killer. Or the victim? Hearing the timer start to peep, she opened her eyes again. Time for dinner.

‘Are we going to Papa’s again this weekend?’ asked Mina, dissecting a broccoli floret into microscopic pieces.

‘Yes, that’s the plan. Why? Don’t you want to go?’

‘No, I do.’ A tiny green fragment had clearly found favour, and was being transported into her mouth on the fork. ‘He said he might be getting me a cat. If it lives with Papa, can I stay there more often?’

Beatrice almost choked. ‘We’ll discuss that when the time comes.’ *A cat!*

‘Me too, Mama, me too!’ mumbled Jakob, his mouth full.

‘Forget it, doofus, it’s my cat.’

‘Silly moo!’

Mina ignored him. ‘If Papa calls again tonight, can I speak to him?’

‘Me too!’ yelped Jakob excitedly.

‘No. We don’t make phone calls at night-time. Papa will soon realise that.’

She got the children ready for bed and let the CD player read them the bedtime story she had no energy left for today. Then she sat down on the balcony with a glass of red wine and read back through her notes. Again and again, she kept coming back to the coordinates.

Letting the wine swill around in her mouth, she tried to taste the notes of blackcurrant and tobacco touted by the label on the bottle, but didn’t succeed. So she drank the glass down in one long gulp instead. Tiredness pulled at her with its heavy hands.

She turned her mobile off and unplugged the landline from the wall. Achim would have to find another way of amusing himself tonight.

Three yellow Post-its, full of Hoffmann's indecipherable scrawl, were waiting for her the next morning on her computer monitor. A reminder about the reports. She rolled her eyes.

'We'll give Stefan the files, he needs practice anyway. Report writing is character building. Oh, and he's already checked out the list of Nora Papenberg's phone calls - and guess what!' Florin was standing at the espresso machine in a get-up that was very unusual for him - cargo pants, T-shirt and hiking shoes - and was just finishing off his cocoa-powder-dusted masterpiece for Beatrice. 'The call that we suspect lured her away from the party came from a telephone box on Maxglaner Hauptstrasse. I've sent forensics there, although I'm pretty sure they won't find anything.' He looked up. 'Speaking of telephone calls - how was last night? Did you manage to get any peace?'

'I did actually, but only because I unplugged or turned off anything that could possibly have rung. So I had seven outraged messages from him on the answerphone this morning, telling me he was out of his mind with worry about the kids because he couldn't get through.' She took a sip of coffee. It tasted wonderful.

'Well, the important thing is that you were able to get some sleep. Listen, the pathologist's report isn't in yet, so I suggest we concentrate on another aspect of the case first.'

'The coordinates?'

'Exactly.' He waved his mobile in the air. 'I've just installed some new navigation software. It looks like we're heading off into the sticks.' He spread out a map and pointed his finger at a section of forest near the Wolfgangsee lake.