

# SACRIFICE



# HANNA WINTER SACRIFICE



MANILLA



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*For James*



‘Memories make life more pleasant;  
forgetting makes life more bearable.’  
HONORÉ DE BALZAC







# 1

*Berlin, Sunday evening, 8th May*

The rain ran down her face, her quick, springy footsteps bounced on the wet tarmac and her sweaty T-shirt clung to her back like a second skin. Dusk had already fallen when Lena Peters got back from her run and reached her front door in Boxhagener Street. Out of breath, she dropped to her knees for a brief rest. With her thoughts already on her meeting the next morning, Lena pulled her front door key out of the pocket of her tracksuit bottoms, then jogged through the inner courtyard lit only by the windows of the surrounding flats. Just a few metres from her ground-floor flat, she suddenly stopped in her tracks. A man in an anorak was standing by her bedroom window.

*What the hell . . . ?* Lena's pulse began to race. Gingerly she stepped closer and watched as the man peered into the lit-up room. He stepped over the terracotta planter into the small, bare plot behind the flat, which according to the estate agents was supposed to constitute a garden, despite its lack of plants. The man went over to the patio. Lena briefly considered calling the police, but then decided to deal with the situation herself. Just as she had always done.



Carefully, she picked up the small trowel that was leaning against the wall near the sandpit, and crept up behind him. The man seemed not to notice her, even though she was now close. He was about to slip his hand into the gap in the slightly ajar patio door when Lena struck him with the flat side of the trowel, square in the face.

‘Get out of here or I’m calling the police!’

The man staggered back, groaning with pain and clutching his face as he fell backwards to the ground.

‘Jesus, are you out of your mind?!’ he snapped angrily at Lena, holding his bleeding nose. ‘*I am* the police!’

Lena realised that she knew him.

‘Herr Drescher? Volker Drescher?’

Horried, Lena dropped the trowel and stepped closer. Shielded by the hood of his anorak was a slender man, in his mid-forties, with a gaunt look and a pointed chin. When he got to his feet, he was barely a head taller than Lena.

‘For goodness sake, how was I supposed to know you’d—’

Drescher leaned against the wall, groaning as he set his glasses straight. He stared at Lena. ‘For a woman of your build, you pack quite a punch!’

His response was no surprise; Lena knew people didn’t expect much strength from her.

‘Can I ask what you’re doing here in my garden?’

‘I rang the bell, but there was no answer. And when I saw that the light was on—’

‘I never turn the light off when I go out.’

Drescher looked at her, surprised, but said nothing.

‘Your nose – is it broken?’ asked Lena, genuinely concerned.

He touched the bridge of his nose. ‘No.’



Lena held her hand out to him, but Drescher ignored it. She watched as he composed himself and brushed the dirt from his anorak.

‘Come on, I’ll get you a plaster,’ she said quickly. She turned to open the front door.

*Shit! Shit! Shit! Did I really need to floor my new boss?!*

‘And perhaps a whisky, if you’d like – to help with the pain,’ she added, waiting for Drescher to follow her.

Lena had chosen her small apartment primarily for the affordable rent. It was in an old building, but the flat hadn’t been renovated and needed a lick of paint. The kitchen was right by the front door. Then there was the small dining room, which connected to the sitting room. At the end of the long corridor were Lena’s bedroom, the bathroom and a tiny study. Apart from a few pieces of furniture, there was nothing to indicate what sort of person lived here. No family photos, postcards or holiday souvenirs. Not a single clue about her past.

Lena slipped off her damp trainers in the hallway, piled high with mostly unpacked boxes. Still a little dazed, she greeted her tabby tomcat, Napoleon, who wriggled between her ankles impatiently, meowing. Lena picked him up and gave him a little stroke.

‘A nice place you’ve got here,’ said Drescher. He pulled his hood back to reveal his light brown hair.

‘Everything’s a bit makeshift. I still haven’t quite got round to unpacking.’

She put the cat down and led Drescher into the bathroom. In truth she couldn’t imagine spending the next few weeks or months between these four walls. Although she had moved often, more or less of her own volition, she still found it hard to get used to new surroundings. But in the next few weeks she



would probably only be coming home to sleep; the investigation into the ongoing series of murders – to which Drescher would be welcoming her tomorrow as the new criminal profiler, and which would keep them on their toes around the clock – was already keeping her pretty busy. Lena had been swotting up on the case; for days she'd barely had anything else on her mind.

'Where on earth were you, anyway?' Drescher asked, as Lena reached for a bottle of iodine, cotton wool and a plaster from the mirrored cabinet above the sink.

'I went for a run.'

'Damn it, Peters – I've been trying to call you. Didn't you have your mobile on you?'

Drescher was now standing right behind her. Lena, who was long accustomed to the curt tone taken by the police, turned around.

'No,' she said and dabbed his bloody nose with cotton wool doused in iodine, trying not to show that she was feeling nauseous and short of breath.

It always happened. Even just a few drops of blood evoked the memory of that day. Of the burning wreck of the car where she and her twin sister Tamara had been crushed in the back seat.

Blood.

Blood everywhere.

And smoke.

And shards of glass from the shattered windows.

Her mother lying unconscious on the passenger seat beside her father. And all the time the firefighters were trying to free Lena and Tamara from the wreckage, Lena clung to her mother's bloodied hand. She refused to let it go. Not even as the flames



burst up around her mother. No sooner had the firemen dragged Lena from the debris, than the car exploded.

Help had come too late for her parents. The accident was around twenty years ago and yet, even after all this time, Lena still saw the blood on her hands.

‘Why not?’ asked Drescher, staring at her over his small glasses.

The question brought her abruptly back into the here and now. ‘We agreed that I would come to HQ tomorrow morning and—’

‘Tomorrow, tomorrow! Tell that to our killer!’ He flinched suddenly. ‘That stuff burns!’

Lena stopped dabbing and looked him straight in the eye. ‘Another victim?’

Drescher’s sigh spoke for itself.

‘Tonight?’ she asked.

‘What, do you think this maniac only kills during office hours?’ Drescher shoved his glasses up onto his hair, took the cool flannel that Lena handed to him and pressed it against his red, swollen nose.

‘No, of course not . . .’ she said calmly.

She couldn’t afford to slip up again, if she wanted to preserve her last scrap of authority in Drescher’s eyes. She suspected that Volker Drescher was the sort of policeman who had had to be persuaded to bring a profiler in on a case – because doing so proved that the investigation had reached a dead end. In most cases, Lena was only hired if the lead investigator had utterly failed to get anywhere, when the team’s nerves were frayed and bringing in someone new was an act of desperation. She was quite used to being received with a mixture of suspicion and





curiosity. This time, too, she knew she would be facing her new colleagues' glares boring into her neck as they tracked her every move, a critical eye on how she went about her work. But she'd developed a thick skin and enough confidence in her ability to shrug it off. At least that's what she told herself.

'Give me five minutes. I'll have a quick shower and be right back.' She handed Volker Drescher the plaster.

Drescher held up three fingers. 'Three minutes,' she heard from under the flannel. 'And if your offer still stands, I'd be glad of that whisky now.'

Lena stood smiling in the doorway. 'Help yourself. The bottle's on the kitchen table. There should be a glass somewhere.'

With that, she closed the bathroom door as Drescher headed towards the kitchen.

Moments later, Drescher placed two generously filled whisky glasses on the coffee table in the living room and sat down on the brightly coloured sofa, noticing as he did that it still had the crinkly protective covering on it. Drescher looked at his watch as the patter of the shower came from the bathroom. Eventually he picked up his glass and got up to look around. Bare walls, naked light bulbs, more removal company boxes. He peered into the open rooms as he walked past. A futon bed, an oversized desk with a laptop on it. The bookshelf was lined with hefty tomes about sex crimes and analysis of historical cases and court proceedings. He allowed himself a patronising grin when he spotted his latest book. *Let's see if she's got what it takes . . .*

Lena kept her eyes closed as she felt the warm water relax her neck. *Yet another victim. The intervals between the killer's attacks*





*are getting shorter and shorter, she thought as she turned off the water.*

*First there was a new victim every few weeks, then weekly, and now it's been barely three days since he last struck. With today's victim, that makes twelve women cruelly mutilated. She stepped out of the shower and dried herself quickly. What is he trying to tell us? She slipped on some clean knickers and a T-shirt, then pulled on her jeans. Is he just flexing his muscles? Or is he getting carried away?*

Lena looked at the confused-looking woman in the mirror and quickly combed back her wet hair. She picked up her mobile, which she had left on the edge of the sink, and was just about to head back to the living room when she glanced at the screen. Confused, Lena stared at her phone for a moment before walking to the living room with the phone in her hand.

'You said you'd tried to ring me?' she said. 'That's weird, because there are no missed calls.'

'It was just a test,' said Drescher, his expression unchanged. 'I wanted to see how you'd react.'

*A test?* Lena wondered what was coming next.

Drescher cleared his throat. 'We're dealing with a brutal case, the likes of which we've never seen. And exceptional cases require exceptional measures, and exceptional qualifications, if you see what I mean . . .'

'What's your point?' Lena asked sceptically, as she sank into the leather chair opposite him.

'There are certain people who think this series of murders might be too much for you to handle.'

Lena felt her temples throb. 'But apparently you disagree, otherwise you wouldn't have brought me in.'





She noticed his glance down at her bare feet, then her flat chest and skinny shoulders. He then looked down at the glass of whisky and touched the plaster on his nose.

‘You have an impressive academic background, Peters. And I don’t just mean your outstanding marks in psychology and criminology, but above all your excellent research into criminal profiling.’

‘Thanks.’ A smile came to Lena’s lips, and then quickly vanished. ‘But you’d still rather your profiler was six foot – and built like a boxer,’ she added, looking at his battered nose.

‘Your words, not mine.’ Drescher cleared his throat and pushed his glasses up with his middle finger.

Lena picked up her whisky from the coffee table and held herself back from emptying it in one swig. ‘You yourself stated in an academic journal that good people are rare, and that it’s as difficult to tell the competence of a team member from looking at them as it is to detect the motivation of a criminal.’ The throbbing in her temples grew stronger as she felt a surge of rage come over her and she felt angry with herself for letting him get to her. To calm herself down more than anything, she stroked the soft fur of her cat, who had just jumped up beside her and was making himself comfortable.

Drescher cracked his knuckles and looked up from his glass. ‘This is Berlin, after all – not Fischbach or whatever suburb it is you’re from.’

*How incredibly astute.* ‘If I may remind you, the red-light district murders, the dead children at the port and the poisoner were not in Fischbach either.’

‘But this is completely different terrain,’ he replied with a vehement shake of the head.







Lena held his piercing stare and wondered how she was supposed to convince him that she was right for the case. But did she even have to? After all, he was the one who had asked her to join the team, not the other way around. Lena washed away her irritation that he seemed to doubt her before she had even started work with a decent swig of whisky. Unexpectedly, she found herself smiling.

*He wants to put me to the test? Fine, let him.*

Lena gave the glass a shake and waited until she had his full attention. Then she closed her eyes and said, 'You're wearing a light blue cotton Ralph Lauren shirt with cuffed sleeves. It has six buttons, not including the one missing in the middle. In your right breast pocket is a charcoal grey Lamy pen, engraved with your name. It is slightly chewed at the end, perhaps because you're under pressure. You're not married. At least you haven't worn a wedding ring recently – there isn't the slight indentation you get over the years. Your Hugo Boss glasses have a small scratch at the front of the left arm, perhaps because you dropped them. You use Vetiver by Guerlain. Although this morning you only sprayed it behind one ear, most likely because you were in a hurry.' Lena kept her eyes closed. 'You value punctuality and you're clearly always punctual yourself, because,' she said, tapping her wrist, 'your watch is two minutes fast. You wear classic leather shoes, with heels a good four centimetres, which suggests that—'

'OK, Peters – that's enough,' Drescher interrupted. 'OK, you've won.'

When she opened her eyes again, she saw his astonished expression.

'I just wanted you to be warned, that's all,' said Drescher.



She stifled a grin and, for a moment, an oppressive silence hung like a deep abyss between them.

‘I thought you lived alone?’ Drescher asked abruptly, his eyes turned to a game of chess, which was set out on a plain white chest of drawers. ‘Who’s your opponent?’

Lena forced a smile. She didn’t like to talk about herself. Besides, she didn’t have the slightest desire to be interrogated by Drescher about her private life. She brushed his question aside with a shrug.

The abyss grew deeper.

She saw that Drescher was holding back a comment. He pulled a photograph out from the breast pocket of his shirt and placed it on the coffee table. Lena looked at the print and saw a young woman with a warm smile. She was wearing a short dress and high-heeled, strappy sandals. The picture was obviously taken at a party, and it looked like she was having a good time.

‘The victim?’ Lena asked.

Drescher took a deep breath. ‘Her name is Yvonne Novak; twenty years old.’ He bit his lower lip and shook his head. ‘Barely more than a child.’

‘Where was she found?’

‘She hasn’t been found,’ he said, frowning. ‘She’s doing maths at Humboldt University and she disappeared without a trace after her lecture yesterday.’

Lena gulped, but for the time being she wanted to remain optimistic. ‘That doesn’t necessarily mean . . . She might have just left town. She could be anywhere.’

Drescher shook his head again and had a sip of his whisky. ‘My instinct tells me it’s related. Besides, yesterday she was supposed to pick up her brand-new car, a present from her parents



for doing well in her studies. A red Beetle with all the frills . . . She chose it herself and according to her roommate she's been looking forward to it for weeks. It's not the sort of thing you just forget about, is it?

'No, maybe not . . .'

'Ms Novak lives in a shared flat in Kreuzberg. Eyewitnesses have on several occasions seen the same windowless black van parked near the entrance door. A similar one was seen in the area before the other victims disappeared.'

Lena put her glass down, annoyed. 'Why didn't you say so?'

'Good God, there isn't a single day when this accursed case isn't dominating the headlines. We've already spent far too long treading water in this investigation and we cannot allow there to be any more victims. The press and the police chief are really piling on the pressure.'

Lena pressed her lips together. 'Nevertheless, we still don't necessarily need to assume the worst for Yvonne Novak.'

'No,' said Drescher. 'We don't.'

But Lena had the feeling there was something else he wasn't saying. That there was a crucial piece of information that Drescher was holding back.



## 2

*Monday morning, 9th May*

Just a few hours after she had fallen into bed, her mobile phone's ringtone tore Lena from a restless sleep. Her eyes half-shut, she fumbled about on the bedside table for the handset.

'Hi, Peters speaking . . .' Slowly she sat up and rubbed her sleepy eyes.

It was Volker Drescher. 'Damn it, where are you? There has been another victim. And it's almost certainly one of his.'

Lena suddenly woke up with a jolt. Pain hammered against her temples, which intensified after a quick glance at the alarm clock on the bedside table. It was eight o'clock – the meeting had already started! Lena shooed away Napoleon, who was lying curled up on the duvet, and jumped out of bed.

'I'm on my way!' she shouted into the phone. She had barely hung up when she clutched her head. *Shit, shit!* She never overslept – how could this have even happened? Cursing, she pulled off the baggy T-shirt she slept in, grabbed her bra and hopped with one leg in her jeans over to the wardrobe, while frantically trying to reconstruct the night before. The last thing she remembered was sitting up late with Drescher, discussing the case. And then? Lena paused. After Drescher had gone, she'd

poured herself yet another whisky and eventually slumped into bed, exhausted. Lena massaged her temples. Her head felt as if a whole flock of birds was trapped inside her head. What was the matter with her? The only time that she had ever been so drunk that she couldn't remember anything was when she was a teenager, on the night of her prom. That was an eternity ago, and it was not at all like her to lose control. With a strange feeling in her stomach, she put on a dark blouse and buttoned it up to the top. She dashed into the bathroom, splashed some water on her face and tied back her shoulder-length, light brown hair. Her make-up was limited this morning to a smear of red lipstick, which she found made her look older and a bit more severe. Unlike her twin sister Tamara, Lena was more the sporty tom-boy type, but today she opted for some heels, which made her a good five centimetres taller. A little spray of perfume, then she rushed into the kitchen and put some cat food out for Napoleon. In the hallway, she grabbed her bag and her trench coat from the wardrobe and ran out of the door. Lena put on her helmet, jumped onto her midnight blue Vespa and stepped on the accelerator. *Shit!* This would have to happen today of all days – her first day on the new job!

### 3

Barely twenty minutes later, Lena was rushing down the corridor to the meeting room, her heels clicking on the floor as she ran. The smell of freshly brewed coffee filled her nose, but there was no time for the dose of caffeine that Lena always started the day with. Her hand on the door handle, she paused a moment and took a deep breath before she opened the door. *Back straight, chest out.*

‘From now on, no more details are to be passed to the press – and when I say nothing, I mean nothing! I hope I have made myself clear,’ she heard Volker Drescher say, just before he spotted her. ‘Ah, Frau Peters – how nice of you to join us,’ he said. Drescher was facing his audience, leaning halfway across the table, and he cast an undisguisedly reproachful look at his watch.

‘Good morning. I—’ said Lena.

‘Sit down.’ He glared at her over the rim of his glasses, pointing to the nearest free chair.

Lena nodded as she looked around at the curious faces, and she immediately sensed the tension that was tangible in the room. Although the large windows were tilted open, there seemed to be a complete lack of oxygen in the air. Lena squeezed along the tight row of chairs before she sat down, her face flushed, repeatedly telling herself not to stare at the

plaster on Drescher's nose or his bloodshot eyes. She paid as little attention to her new colleagues' glances as she did to the whispers. She rummaged about in her bag for her black leather-bound notebook and a pen, then tried to summon up a thoughtful expression as she followed Drescher's gaze as he turned to look at the wall covered in photos of all the women who, in the last two months, had been found mutilated. All twelve victims were found in fields, in wooded areas or on tucked-away stretches of the river bank, but not a single crime scene offered any usable evidence. The women in the photos were aged between seventeen and thirty-five, and each of them was naked and lying face down. Their hands were tied behind their backs. Each of them had had something severed from their body. One was missing her arms, another the genitals, another the entire bottom half of her body and one had even been decapitated. In addition to pronounced bruising, all the victims had numerous cuts as well as the typical bruising on the wrists and ankles that Lena had often seen on victims who had been abused when handcuffed. Besides these details, there was no dominant type among the women, no clear victim profile, as Lena had seen in the case of other serial killers, who, for example, targeted only blondes, redheads or brunettes, or particularly corpulent or frail women. *These women were as diverse as the social environments they came from*, Lena thought as she let her eyes roam over the photos. Lena gulped when she came to the last picture in the series. The maths student. The twelfth victim. Drescher was spot on the day before when he predicted it.

'The latest victim is twenty-year-old Yvonne Novak,' Drescher confirmed when he registered Lena's horrified look.

The young woman was also naked. The smile Lena remembered from the other photo had been replaced by an agonised, frozen look. When Lena saw that the woman's feet had been cut off, a shudder ran through her.

'A forklift driver found her body at the scrapyard in Wedding early this morning,' Drescher summarised again for Lena. 'According to the coroner, Yvonne Novak had already been dead for a good twelve hours by that point, from which we can assume that her murderer abducted her on Thursday, after her last lecture at the university.'

Immersed in thought, Lena nodded. 'Anything else?' she asked, surprised at the volume of her own voice. All eyes were now focussed on her.

Drescher nodded. 'Checks on Novak's laptop show that she'd been browsing forums on the occult, where they chat about black magic and all sorts of hocus-pocus,' he reported while everyone listened, transfixed. 'According to the chat-room logs, she had arranged to meet a certain "Dark Armon" early Thursday evening, about the time of her disappearance, in a bar in Görlitzer Strasse.'

Again the murmur of whispers got louder.

'Do we already know who's behind the screen name?' said Lena.

Drescher nodded. 'His real name is Ferdinand Roggendorf. Medical student, twenty-nine years old, no criminal record.'

'Please don't say he's related to that top lawyer from Charlottenburg?' groaned the redheaded guy sitting next to Lena, whose toned upper body showed through his tight polo shirt.

Drescher didn't flinch. 'Sorry to disappoint you, Vogt.' He cleared his throat sternly before he continued. 'Ferdinand Roggendorf is Richard Roggendorf's son.'

'Hmm, that's going to be fun . . .' sighed Vogt.





Hearing a slight groan from both sides, Lena turned to look at her colleagues. Most people in the conference room seemed to share Vogt's opinion: the displeasure about the person they would have to deal with was written clearly on their faces.

'According to witness statements, Novak never showed up in this bar in Görlitzer Strasse,' Drescher continued. 'Whether Ferdinand Roggendorf was there at the appointed time is yet to be established – questioning is still ongoing. So far, all we have been able to find out about him is that besides studying, he has a casual job as a ward assistant at Virchow Hospital –' Drescher pursed his lips – 'which is interesting, because according to the initial report from the coroner, there were confirmed traces of flunitrazepam in Yvonne Novak's blood.'

'Rohypnol – date rape drug,' Lena thought aloud. 'As a nurse, Roggendorf would have easy access to it.'

'Indeed,' said Drescher. 'At any rate, we'll have him under observation.'

Lena nodded pensively. *If this medical student was really on the chatroom to scout for potential victims, to meet them and knock them out with Rohypnol, we need to quickly establish if he was also in contact with the other women.*

'If his father gets wind of it, we're facing one lawsuit after another,' said Vogt. 'Anyway, I'm amazed this Ferdinand Roggendorf would have to moonlight as a nurse. I mean, with the fees his dad brings in, I'd have thought he wouldn't need to.'

'Perhaps Richard Roggendorf's a stingy bastard who wants his son to stand on his own two feet,' chipped in the lady with the head of brown curls sitting diagonally opposite Lena.

*That must be Rebecca Brandt,* thought Lena. Drescher had already told her about Brandt and described her as an indispensable member of the team. With her pink top, her plunging



neckline and fake fingernails, she came across as more like your archetypal undercover investigator to Lena.

‘Oh, before I forget: Roggendorf goes boxing every Thursday at seven p.m.,’ added Drescher. ‘The club’s called The Steel Fist. Who wants to go and take a look?’

Vogt raised his hand and volunteered. ‘I’ll go. I know the club – you get some pretty nasty types hanging round there.’

‘Very good,’ said Drescher, as the door was pushed open from the outside and a plump woman entered.

‘This has just arrived from Pathology.’ She took two colour photographs out from an envelope and placed them on the table in front of Drescher.

‘Thank you, Lucy.’

Before she had even left the room, Drescher pinned up the photos under the image of Yvonne Novak. These were close-ups of the lower legs, from which the student’s feet had been severed.

‘What do you notice?’ Drescher asked the group.

It was obvious that it wasn’t only Lena who would have preferred not to see such a sight early in the morning.

‘Clean work,’ remarked Rebecca Brandt. ‘The same precision as with the other victims – the guy’s no amateur.’

‘If you ask me, we’re dealing with a trophy collector,’ mused Vogt, picking off a breadcrumb from his T-shirt. ‘He’s probably collecting the severed limbs in a fucking freezer somewhere – one I wouldn’t want to stumble across—’

‘I don’t think so,’ countered Lena. All eyes were now fixed on her again. ‘Trophy collecting is a hobby. With a hobby, you have a kind of playfulness.’ She turned her pen between her fingers. ‘But whatever this psychopath’s up to, he’s not doing it for the sheer pleasure – no, he can’t help it, he’s obsessed.’



‘The precision with which he cuts off the limbs – we could be looking at a surgeon,’ Rebecca Brandt threw into the mix. ‘One who, for example, has lost his licence and can’t get back on his feet, but who knows what he’s doing and is now making a killing running an illegal transplantation ring . . .’

‘Then he would behave in a more professional manner,’ Lena pointed out. ‘He would dispose of the bodies properly. But these bodies were intended to be found, otherwise he would hardly have left them where they’re so easy to find.’

‘I’d agree with Frau Peters,’ said Drescher.

The brunette leaned back and crossed her arms over her ample bosom. Lena saw a flash of irritation in her eyes.

Drescher’s phone started ringing. After glancing at the number, Drescher took the call.

‘Volker Drescher speaking. Yes?’ He listened to the caller and Lena understood from the look on his face that this wasn’t good news.

‘I see . . . OK. That’s fine, thank you.’ Twelve pairs of eyes looked at him, transfixed, as Drescher hung up. ‘A pedestrian has spotted a severed foot in the Spree quite near the junkyard where Novak’s body was found. The river police are in the process of cordoning off the whole stretch of riverbank and the police divers are still out looking for the second foot.’ He squinted in Lena’s direction. ‘The foot is size thirty-nine, the same as Yvonne Novak. We’ll see from the lab report whether it is indeed hers.’ He turned back to the photo wall. At that instant, the plump Lucy burst into the room again.

‘A young woman has just been found at Ernst-Reuter-Platz U-Bahn station,’ she reported, in between short gasps for air, as she stared in horror at the fax she held in her hand. ‘Her name is



Christine Wagenbach. Twenty-three. Kindergarten teacher,' she read aloud. 'From Schöneberg and she hasn't been to work for two days.' Lucy hesitated a second before she continued: 'Her right hand was cut off.'

No sooner had she uttered the words than a sudden commotion broke out.

Drescher banged his palm against the table. 'Fuck!'

## 4

Drescher took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes and put them on again. The conference room suddenly seemed even more stifling than before. Lena watched as Drescher's eyes quickly scanned everyone present and stopped at the brunette.

'Brandt, you head over to the morgue.'

Rebecca Brandt nodded. 'Sure.'

'No, no – she's still alive,' interrupted Lucy. For a moment there was dead silence in the conference room as everyone froze.

'My God!' Drescher exclaimed in shock. All of a sudden Lena saw how his face lit up.

'If this woman could identify the bastard—'

'They've taken her to the Franziskus Hospital, Budapest Strasse,' Lucy explained.

Drescher looked over at the plump lady. 'Is she conscious?'

'As far as I know.'

Volker Drescher was visibly nervous. 'Peters, you accompany Frau Brandt.'

Lena looked on in disbelief. 'With all due respect, the victim has just been found; questioning her so soon could adversely impact her recovery.'

Drescher looked into Lena's bright green eyes. 'You think it's too early to question her? Tell that to the next victim!'

Lena suppressed an indignant sigh. If Drescher had made a decision, it was apparently pointless to attempt to talk him round.

‘All right, I’ll speak to Christine Wagenbach, but I’ll do it my way – and please, after everything she’s been through, don’t expect any miracles.’

Malicious rumour had it that Volker Drescher was a short-tempered bully with a bit of a Napoleon complex. He always insisted on getting his way and his often inappropriately irascible nature didn’t fit with his slight physique. Lena was starting to realise what people meant.

‘I’ll expect your full report by tomorrow morning at the latest and the first draft of an offender profile within the next few days,’ he said. And with that the discussion was over.