

"KEMAL KAYANKAYA IS THE ULTIMATE OUTSIDER
AMONG HARD-BOILED PRIVATE EYES."
—MARILYN STASIO, *THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW*

BROTHER KEMAL

A KAYANKAYA THRILLER

JAKOB ARJOUNI

TRANSLATED BY ANTHEA BELL



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MELVILLE INTERNATIONAL CRIME

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JAKOB ARJOUNI

*Translated from the
German by Anthea Bell*

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CRIME**

BROTHER KEMAL

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Chapter 1

Marieke was sixteen and, in her mother's words, 'very talented, well-read, political, committed, with an inquiring mind and a good sense of humour – simply a wonderful intelligent young woman, do you understand? Not the sort to hang around idly, not addicted to computers or into nothing but shopping and complaining that life's so boring. On the contrary: class representative, a member of Greenpeace, paints wonderfully well, interested in modern art, plays tennis and piano – or did play tennis and piano anyway ...'

Her mother looked briefly at the floor and tucked a strand of blonde hair back from her forehead with her red-polished fingernails.

'Well, that's the way things go, don't they? Right? Two years ago she suddenly developed new interests. I suppose you would say Marieke was what you'd call an early developer. She had her first boyfriend when she was fourteen. Jack or Jeff or something like that, an American, son of a diplomat, in the class above hers. Then at some point it was another boy and so on. Marieke became something of a live wire, if you know what I mean.'

I knew what she meant. However, not from the photos of Marieke that I had in my hand. They showed a slightly dark-skinned girl with blonde Rasta braids looking sternly through black-framed designer glasses, with a forced and slightly condescending smile. Pretty, possibly charming, maybe cute if she took off those glasses and looked friendly, but certainly not what you'd call a live wire. More of a short circuit. Leader of a school strike, or singer in a protest band singing songs about animal rights.

What her mother meant applied to herself. *She* was what you'd call a live wire. At second glance. At first glance she was simply one of those athletic solarium blondes with a body that seemed cast out of hard, light brown rubbery plastic: a small pointed nose, full lips slightly too full to be natural, and eyebrows plucked to semicircles as thin as a thread to make her eyes look larger. The eyes were rather narrow, even the plucked eyebrows didn't help that and anyway it wasn't the size of her eyes that mattered. What made Valerie de Chavannes such a live wire was the blue steel in her eyes, promising all kinds of delights, which she turned on you as outrageously as if she were whispering in your ear: *I only ever think of one thing*. Of course – or at least, most very probably – she didn't have that one thing on her mind that morning; after all, what she wanted was to hire me to find her missing daughter. But at some stage in her life this way of looking at men must have become a habit for her.

When she had opened the door of the villa to me half an hour earlier without introducing herself, I had been more or less sure that she was a visitor: a younger sister who had gone with the dogs, or a pushy tennis-club acquaintance who had just burst in unannounced to deliver the latest changing-room gossip. Along with her I-only-ever-think-of-one-thing look, Valerie de Chavannes wore long, wide-legged, white and very translucent silk trousers that revealed slender legs and a pair of white panties, silver sandals with cork wedges about twenty centimetres high and a yellow T-shirt that was remarkably short and close-fitting for a high

society Frankfurt lady and did nothing to conceal her small, firm breasts, leaving so much skin on view right down to the waistband of her trousers that I could see the middle part of a snake tattoo. This was not what I would have expected of a woman called Valerie de Chavannes, daughter of a French banker, married to the internationally successful Dutch painter Edgar Hasselbaink, living in a five-hundred-square-metre villa with a garden and an underground garage in the middle of the diplomatic quarter of Frankfurt.

We were now sitting opposite each other in the sunny living room that occupied nearly a third of the ground floor, with white carpeting, modern art on the walls and valuable furniture with chairs made of leather, chrome and fake fur, sipping green tea from porcelain cups brought to us by a housekeeper of about fifty with a Polish accent. The question urgently occupying my mind was: Did the snake wind its way from her groin up to her navel, or vice versa? And what did it mean, one way or the other?

Instead I asked, 'When exactly did Marieke go missing?'

'At midday on Monday. She was at school in the morning, for a math lesson, and after that she told her best friend she was going into town to buy a pair of trousers and she'd be back in time for the sports lesson.'

Valerie de Chavannes crossed her legs, and a slender knee pressed through the silk. The platform shoe drew small circles in the air.

'Do you want to tell me the best friend's name?'

'I'd rather ... I did say ...'

'I know, no fuss, no police, keep it discreet, but I do need some indication who your daughter's hanging out with. Or I'll have to start knocking on the doors of every apartment in Frankfurt, working my way slowly up to Bad Homburg, then through Kassel, Hannover, Berlin, after that maybe Warsaw or Prague – all of them cities for young people eager for new experiences. Okay, not Kassel, obviously.'

She looked at me without a trace of humour in her eyes. The platform shoe had stopped in midair for a moment, and now the circles it drew were larger and faster.

As if speaking to a servant who was slow on the uptake, she explained, 'If everything is all right, and Marieke simply wants to gad about for a couple of days, she'd never forgive me for sending a detective after her. She'd say I was trying to spy on her and interfere with her life. Our relationship isn't entirely easy at the moment. I think that's normal between a mother and a daughter of her age.'

For a Frenchwoman, Valerie de Chavannes spoke German with hardly a trace of an accent. Only now and then did she emphasise the vowels at the end of a word a little too much: *mothaire, daughtaire*.

'Right, then how do you think I ought to begin searching? In the trouser shop?'

Once again the shoe stopped briefly in midair, and Valerie de Chavannes looked at me with barely concealed dislike. All the same, there was still a little of that I-only-ever-think-of-one-thing look left. As if she were turned on by an unshaven, slightly overweight private detective with a Turkish name and an office address in the notorious Gutleutstrasse area who cracked tired old jokes.

Of course it was the other way around: she turned me on, and what I called her I-only-ever-think-of-one-thing look was presumably more an I-can't-believe-I'm-letting-such-a-Turkish-asshole-sit-here-in-my-elegant-armchair-from-the-Art-Cologne-Fair expression. For

some reason she seemed to think she was dependent on me.

‘Well ... I told you on the phone that Marieke has recently been in touch with an older man – that’s to say, older than Marieke, around thirty. He’s a photographer, or so he claimed anyway. He said he wanted to take fashion photos of her – the usual chat-up line. His studio or office, or maybe just his apartment, is somewhere in Sachsenhausen. She mentioned Brückenstrasse and Schifferstrasse a couple of times. There’s a little tree-lined square. At supper, Marieke talked about a corner café there ...’

She cast me an inquiring glance. Did I know the café? The square? Sachsenhausen? Or was Gutleutstrasse all I knew of Frankfurt? Was I exactly what she’d been afraid of finding when she turned to the Internet in search of a private detective: a drunken, crude man from a sketchy neighbourhood who had failed at all the professions he’d tried before? Trouble with your ex-wife? Ex-husband? An overdue bill for drugs? Poorly treated by the pizza delivery guy? Kemal Kayankaya, private investigator and personal protection, your man in the outer city centre of Frankfurt!

I sipped the green tea, which tasted like liquid fish skin – or the way that I imagined liquid fish skin would taste – and asked, ‘Why did she mention it to you?’

‘Mention what?’

‘The café.’

For the first time she seemed annoyed. ‘What do you mean, why?’

‘Well, you say the relationship between you isn’t entirely easy at the moment. So why do you tell me about a café where she goes to meet a man who, her mother thinks, is bad company for her? Do you know him yourself?’ I gave Valerie de Chavannes a friendly smile.

‘I, er, no ...’ She leaned forward and put her teacup down on the low, cloud-shaped table between us. ‘Well, I saw him once by chance when he was bringing Marieke home in his car. We shook hands briefly.’

‘What kind of car does he drive?’

‘What kind of car ...?’

Once again she hesitated. Maybe it was a matter of form, maybe she simply wasn’t used to being asked questions by someone she was paying. Or maybe she didn’t need a detective at all – at least, not one who found anything out.

‘No idea, I don’t know much about cars. Something flashy, showy, a jeep or an SUV or whatever they’re called, black, tinted windows – maybe it was a BMW. Yes, I think it was a BMW.’

‘You did well for someone who doesn’t know much about cars. Perhaps you don’t know much about number plates either?’

She stopped short, slightly parting her full glossed lips into a moist, narrow-slit smile, looking as if I had asked whether I could invite her sometime to a delicious frozen meal and women’s all-in-wrestling on TV. I decided to make her stop short like that as often as I could.

Smiling, I raised a hand. ‘A little joke, Frau de Chavannes, just a little joke. Tell me what the man looks like, please: size, hair colour and so on.’

This time her hatred of him brought me a prompt answer. ‘Medium height, what do you know, neither really short nor particularly tall. Lean build, fit, long curly black hair, in the greasy combed-back style, dark eyes, three-day stubble – good-looking if you like that type.’

‘And that type is ...?’

‘Well, someone looking to pick up girls in a disco, that sort of character.’

‘You mean the slimy sort with the carnal stare, heels a little too high and an immigrant background?’

I smiled at her encouragingly.

‘If ... if that’s how you’d describe it ...’ For a moment she didn’t know where to look or what to do with her hands. Then she glanced up and looked at me, sceptical and curious at the same time. ‘Just so there’s no misunderstanding: no, I don’t think so.’

‘Of course not. It was only to get things clear: now I know what type you mean. And furthermore, that’s why you called me, isn’t it?’

‘That’s why I called you ...?’

‘That’s why you called Kayankaya, not Müller or Meier. Because you thought a Kayankaya ought to know how to deal with an immigrant background. What’s the man’s name?’

She briefly wondered whether to refute what I’d said, and then replied, ‘I don’t know exactly. Erdem, Evren – Marieke mentioned it only once or twice.’

‘You have a certain amount of trouble with the names of your daughter’s boyfriends, don’t you?’

‘Excuse me?’

‘Jack or Jeff, Erdem or Evren ...’

‘What do you mean?’ She looked puzzled, then sat up straight in her chair and snapped at me, ‘What are you getting at, anyway? Why are you talking to me like that!’ All at once she got to her feet and walked quickly to a bookshelf at the other end of the living room. It was roughly fifteen metres away. I noticed her swaying her hips attractively in spite of her ragged dress. From the back, she could easily have passed for a woman in her mid-twenties. With her hair rounded, taut behind like that, either she spent a lot of time in the gym or Edgar Hasselbair had struck lucky with her genes.

‘I called you to get me my daughter back! I’m just about dead with worry, and you sit here grinning and asking me nonsensical questions!’

She reached into the bookshelf and brought out a pack of cigarettes.

‘Well, questions about the name of the man with whom your daughter is presumably involved, what kind of car he drives and where he lives aren’t as nonsensical as all that.’

‘You know exactly what I mean!’ She snapped her lighter, held the flame to her cigarette, inhaled the smoke and angrily blew it out again. ‘Have I heard of number plates! Insinuating that I don’t remember the names of my daughter’s boyfriends! Your manner as a whole ...’

She took another drag. ‘All that silly sarcasm! And you’re probably just looking at my tits the whole time!’ She walked halfway across the room towards me, stopped abruptly and jabbed the fingers holding her cigarette in my direction. ‘Either you’ll work for me and do what I ask, or I’ll look for someone else!’

I let her tantrum blow itself out, watching her breasts, as if she had shown me an interesting detail in the living room furnishings. I thought it was rather funny. She took it sportingly well, shaking her head and laughing dryly as much to express ‘I don’t believe it!’ as ‘You’ve got some nerve!’

‘To be honest, I was just taking a look at your snake now and then. At least, I assume it’s a snake, but unfortunately the head is out of sight – oh, sorry, I mean the head is out of sight.’

She switched to looking at me as if I were an amiable madman: a friendly, sympathetic and

slightly repelled look. She drew on her cigarette. 'You don't say so,' and in her thoughts she was probably running through the list of private detectives in Frankfurt to decide which of them to call next.

'Right.' I put my cup of fish-skin broth down on the glass table and leaned back in my chair. 'So you want me to do as you ask. I'd be happy to do that, Frau de Chavannes although I'm not sure that you know exactly what you want me to do.'

'Excuse me?'

'Look, this is how I see it, roughly: you met this man – Erdem or Evren – somewhere or other, in the gym, or at a private viewing, something of that nature. He made up to you, and you felt a little curious, maybe along these lines: immigrant background, gold chain, oily hair – you don't meet that kind of person every day, you thought you'd like to hear what he had to say. And when it wasn't just the stupid showing off that you expected – let's suppose he was witty, charming, a little bold, and anyway he could tell stories that you don't often hear at the upper end of Zeppelinallee – anyway, you thought something like: Let's invite him to the party, won't Frau von What's-It and Consul Thingummy be surprised! See who Frau de Chavannes has come up with this time! And so all went well, Erdem or Evren was the original party sensation you hoped he'd be, he flirted with Frau von What's-It, he let Consul Thingummy tell him about something of no interest to anyone else, and told crazy stories about his friends, women, cars, the wide world, a touch of the suggestive, a touch of the Oriental, until ...'

I stopped for a moment. Nothing of Valerie de Chavannes was moving except the ash falling from her cigarette to the floor, but her eyes rested on me like the eyes of the fish whose skin I had just been drinking.

'... your daughter came home. At her age, parties given by your parents are a good reason to go to bed early for once and conserve your strength for your own parties over the next few days. But then your daughter saw Erdem or Evren, and that was a refreshing change from one of those usually boring occasions with the What's-Its and the Thingummies and Papa's tipsy painter friends – and so on. I may not have the details right, but the general drift of where your problems are coming from must be something of that nature? Of course that's the harmless version. There's another possibility, no party, no husband ...'

'Shut up!'

Her cigarette had burnt down to the filter and gone out. All the same, she still held the butt as if she were smoking it.

'I assume that's the reason you don't want me to talk to Marieke's friends? I'd find out that Marieke was going around with one of her mother's acquaintances. Marieke is sixteen, she has a right to do that, and if she's enjoying the situation ... she wouldn't be the first daughter in the throes of puberty who wanted to show her mother a thing or two.'

She was looking absentmindedly at the floor. The cigarette end dropped from her hand, but she didn't seem to notice. Suddenly she raised her head and asked, impatiently, 'So now what?'

'So now what?'

'What are you suggesting?' Her voice was harsh and stern, but she was being stern with herself, not me.

'You mean what should you ask me to do?'

‘I want you to bring my daughter back!’

‘Yes, I know that, Frau de Chavannes. But suppose you were to try Erdem or Evren first . . .’

‘Erden! Erden Abakay. He lives over the café I mentioned on the corner of Schifferstrasse and Brückenstrasse. He’s quite well known there, you’d find him easily.’

‘And then?’

‘Then you’d get my daughter out of there!’

‘Without telling her I was doing it for you?’

‘Of course.’

‘And preferably I’d beat up Abakay and threaten him – if he ever comes near Mariel again, and so on?’

She didn’t reply to that.

‘Frau de Chavannes, I’m a private detective, not a bunch of heavies. Once again: suppose you call Abakay first and try to speak to your daughter?’

She shook her head. ‘Out of the question.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I’m afraid of saying something wrong, something to drive her even further into that bastard’s arms. At the moment it doesn’t take much to make my daughter feel I’ve said something wrong.’

‘Suppose your husband were to call?’

‘My husband?’ She looked at me as if this were a remarkably idiotic question. ‘I definitely don’t want to drag him into this.’ She turned away and went back to the bookshelf for another cigarette. ‘Anyway, he’s away. He’s guest professor at the Academy of Art in The Hague. He won’t be home for another two weeks.’ She lit her cigarette, turned to me, and said firmly, ‘I want to get this whole thing out of the way by then!’

‘Okay, but then please tell me more or less how the story goes. If I come across Abakay I don’t want to hear any startling new discoveries. “Frau de Chavannes is my sister’s best friend,” that kind of thing.’

‘Nonsense. It was more or less as you thought. He approached me in the café, and I was a bit curious. A man speaking to a woman alone in a café, where do you find that these days? And I was probably rather bored that morning. We talked, and he was actually amusingly well, amusing in a nightlife, gambling, who-cares-about-tomorrow kind of way. Then he claimed he was a photographer and had taken a series called *Frankfurt in the Shadow of the Banking Towers*. Portraits of low-life crooks, characters, prostitutes, hip-hoppers ...’

She cast me a glance. ‘I know, not very original, but ...’

She was searching for the right words.

I said, ‘But together with the nightlife, gambling scene, the who-cares-about-tomorrow attitude, the immigrant background ...’

She examined me for a moment as if, once again, she had grave doubts about letting a man like me take a look at her life. Then she drew on her cigarette, blew out the smoke vigorously as if to dispel those doubts, and went on, ‘Could be so. I was thinking mainly of my husband.’

‘Of course.’

‘I knew you were going to say that.’

‘What should I have said?’

‘Listen: I didn’t tell you the truth at first. I hoped to solve the situation just like that. I’m well known in this city, my husband is well known all over the world, while to me at least you are an entirely unknown quantity. And you’re a private detective. What do I know about private detectives? If I didn’t need help so urgently ... Do you understand? Why should I trust you? I’m sure there are tabloids that would pay a few euros for a Hasselbaink mother-and-daughter story about mysterious underground photographers.’

‘Maybe there are, but no private detective is going to risk his reputation for a few euros. Our good reputation, so to speak, is our business model – the only one we have.’

While she thought about that, her plucked eyebrows drew closer together, and two small lines appeared on her forehead. I liked the fact that she didn’t resort to Botox. Maybe those lips were the genuine article. I’d once kissed a pair of Botoxed lips, and it felt like shaking a prosthetic hand.

She went back to the bookshelf and ground out her cigarette in an ashtray. ‘So I can trust you?’

‘I won’t sell your story to a tabloid, if that’s what you mean. Apart from that, I think you rather overestimate the importance of the story.’

‘Are you familiar with the art world?’

‘I know your husband is a big deal there. Eyeless faces, am I right?’

‘That’s one of his famous series, yes. *The Blind Men of Babylon*.’

‘I’ve Googled your husband. International prizes and so on. All the same, the kind of tabloids you have in mind don’t set out to entertain their readers with people who paint a series entitled *The Blind Men of Babylon*. Please tell me what you meant when you said you were thinking mainly of your husband.’

‘Will you believe what I tell you from now on?’

‘That depends *what* you tell me.’ I grinned cheerfully. ‘Come on, spit it out. Or would you rather think again about hiring me?’

‘I want to ...’ She hesitated, and for a moment it looked as if she was suppressing tears. She looked at the floor and folded her bare arms, shivering. As she did so the yellow T-shirt moved even further up her taut stomach, and I thought that in spite of the fifteen metres between us, I saw the head of the snake. I’d have liked to know at what point in her life she had decided: Right, now I’m off to the tattoo parlour to have a snake tattooed crawling between my legs. And I’d have loved to know what her parents, Monsieur and Madame de Chavannes, aristocrats from Lyon, thought of it. (I was assuming that you’d be more likely to get a snake tattoo at an age when your parents’ opinion still counted for something.) According to Google, since Georges de Chavannes had retired from his position with Magnon & Koch, a private asset management bank, they had been living in a small château in the Loire Valley making their own wine. I wondered whether they sometimes sat over a bottle of it on the terrace looking at the sunset, thinking their own thoughts, and at some point Bernadette de Chavannes asked, in the peaceful atmosphere where the only sounds were the twittering birds, chirping crickets and clinking glasses, ‘Do you think Valerie still has the terrible ...?’

‘Oh, please, *chérie*! Let’s enjoy the evening.’

And what did Edgar Hasselbaink think about the snake? Or had he perhaps designed himself? How about Marieke? I wondered how it went down in the school playground. He

Marieke, I've got a snake down there too. I'd like to introduce him to your mama's snake!

'My husband has always found Frankfurt horrible: boring, provincial, uncultivated. Sausages, stocks and shares, brash young bankers, and according to Edgar the locals' favourite drink is a laxative. We came here from Paris ten years ago. By then living in Paris was too expensive for us, and anyway we wanted to go somewhere with fewer exhaust fumes and more greenery for Marieke's sake. Then my parents offered us this house. My father was head of the Frankfurt branch of Magnon and Koch for more than twenty years. When he retired, my parents wanted to go back to France.'

'Forgive me, but if you sell the house you can live almost anywhere in the world with the money you'd get for it.'

'When I said my parents offered me the house, I didn't mean they gave it to me. In fact we pay rent, although it's a relatively low rate – that mattered to my parents, as a symbol.'

She paused, went over to a grey corduroy-covered sofa about the size of my guest room and took a white cardigan off the back of it. As she put the cardigan round her shoulders, she said, 'My parents and I haven't always got on well together.'

'Did you grow up in this house?'

'Yes. I was seven when my parents moved to Frankfurt, and I lived here until I was sixteen. Anyway: we thought it was only for an interim period until we'd decided where we wanted to live. But then ... my husband's pictures stopped selling so well, and at the same time we got used to the comfort and size of the house, Marieke was making Frankfurt her home, and so on – many reasons, some of them good, why we're still here. However, my husband has never changed his opinion of Frankfurt and particularly this part of it. You see, he grew up in Amsterdam, he's lived in New York, Barcelona, Paris – in the shabby districts of those cities, he wouldn't want you to think he's missing a life of glamour. When he was studying medicine in Amsterdam, he lived in a student hostel, later often in unheated attics, and in Paris we had a four-roomed basement apartment in Belleville. What he misses here is life with all its surprises. The only surprise you may get in the streets of Frankfurt is when one of the ladies in fur coats walking her permed dogs greets you in a friendly tone of voice.'

Valerie de Chavannes sat back in the Art Cologne armchair opposite me, and I wondered how many fur coats she had hanging in her own wardrobe. Or did the fact that she paid her parents rent mean that no financial support at all came her way from the château on the Loire? But who paid for the housekeeper, the deluxe furniture, the sparkling clean racing bikes in the hall?

'So you tried to bring a little of the life he missed into this place in the person of Abakay?'

'He wasn't the first. Whenever I meet someone who I think might interest Edgar, I bring that person home. Do you understand? I do so wish that Frankfurt could be more fun for Edgar. And I thought, Well, at least Abakay isn't just sausages and stocks and shares. So I invited him to supper, and it all went terribly wrong. Edgar thought he was a puffed-up windbag, and Marieke took Abakay's side in a pointless discussion about the freedom of art. Only to annoy us, of course ...'

Suddenly something unpleasant seemed to occur to her. Or rather, something that was unseemly in the circumstances; something to do with me. For a moment, she looked at me as if she had just that moment noticed that I looked like some bastard out of her past – a teacher with bad breath who felt her up while giving her extra tutoring, or an ex-boyfriend who

made off with her jewellery, something along those lines.

She lowered her eyes and began massaging her hands. 'Now you know what I meant when I said I was thinking mainly of my husband.'

'Hmm. A discussion about the freedom of art? What was that about?'

She hesitated, looked up briefly, then back at her hands again. She massaged them calmly and regularly. She was good at putting on a show of calm regularity, sometimes of anger and contempt as well. It was only now and then that the mask slipped – and behind it, or so it seemed to me, Valerie de Chavannes was shaking with fear.

'About those stupid caricatures.'

I guessed what she meant, but I said, 'I've no idea what you're talking about.'

'Well, the caricatures of Muhammad. All the fuss about them back then – how long ago was it? Three or four years? You must have heard about it.'

This time she was looking straight at me, and her expression was somewhere between worry and discontent. Was she treading on the toes of a guy called Kemal Kayankaya, or was it the private detective, who in the course of this conversation had finally seemed to her like a reasonably civilised person, just an uneducated idiot after all?

'I understand. Yes, I heard about all that. What attitude did Abakay adopt?'

'Well ... it wasn't so much about himself – Abakay is certainly not particularly devout – it was about respect for religions in general. Some relation of his – an uncle, I think – is an imam in a Frankfurt mosque.'

'Is Marieke susceptible to that sort of stuff?' I looked on the glass-topped table at the photographs of the stern-faced girl.

'You mean religion?'

I nodded. 'Maybe she's not gone off with Abakay after all but with the Lord God Almighty?'

'Oh no, she ...' Valerie de Chavannes shook her head, looked despairingly at the ceiling of the room, where her glance lingered briefly as if it showed her pictures of the disastrous evening. 'It was just because of us, or maybe just because of my husband. You see, we're modern, enlightened people, religion has never been important to us or Marieke. And that evening, well, she simply sensed she could make her father go ballistic. If the subject comes up Edgar is an outspoken atheist. He hates any form of religion. And then his daughter suddenly starts defending the veil as a cultural inheritance, an Oriental fashion accessory, a way for a woman to protect herself from men's eyes, and I don't know what else. Even Abakay contradicted her – he could have been privately smiling to himself, I don't know. As I said, it was all pointless. Edgar loves Marieke more than anything, and at the moment she's trying to shake off that love.' Valerie de Chavannes paused, and it was obvious that she was wondering whether to tell me something in confidence. 'You said just now that I didn't seem to know the names of my daughter's friends very well, and by comparison with Edgar you're certainly right. He can probably list the first names and surnames of all Marieke's friends from primary school on. Do you have any children?'

The question came as a surprise, and I thought of Deborah two days ago as we had our aperitif (a term introduced by Deborah; I'd have stuck with, 'I drink a couple of beets before supper') bringing up for the first time her desire to have children.

'No.'

‘Love for your children can sometimes become almost monstrous. I hope you realise how important it is for Edgar to never on any account find out that Marieke has been with Abakay. He’d never forgive her.’

‘Don’t you mean he’d never forgive you?’

Valerie de Chavannes stared straight at me. Her mouth slowly closed, and that I-only-ever-think-of-one-thing expression came back. In fact it was simply a way of looking down on me who, she supposed, only ever thought of one thing when they looked at her.

After a pause, she said, ‘You’d have liked it to be a bit more usual, a bit shabbier, right? Can’t you imagine that a woman like me – snake tattoo and so on – doesn’t jump into bed with every half-attractive man? Go ahead, as far as I’m concerned – but if you think I’d be idiotic enough to then invite the man to my house for supper, I take that as a real insult. Incidentally, in case you’re interested, my husband and I are happily married.’

‘I’m glad to hear it, Frau de Chavannes.’ I nodded to her with my head bent, the way I suppose servants anxious to keep their jobs do. ‘Particularly for your husband’s sake. And I can easily understand that you do not jump straight into bed with every half-attractive man. However, what I don’t entirely understand is that with a wife like you – snake tattoo and so on – there isn’t something in the air when a young curly-haired underground photographer turns up for supper at your invitation. At least so far as the photographer’s concerned, and I bet that one or another thought went through your husband’s mind.’

‘You don’t know my husband. He’s not the jealous type.’

‘In my experience, that’s only ever what other people say. And the only man I know who said it about himself became addicted to pills after his girlfriend cheated on him with one of his colleagues.’

‘Well, maybe your job doesn’t allow you much experience with people whose approach to life doesn’t conform to the usual standards.’

‘Could be, Frau de Chavannes. But I’ve met a few fathers who flew off the handle because their adolescent daughters started going around with other men. Among people whose approach to life does conform to the usual standards, that kind of thing is called jealousy.’

We looked into each other’s eyes for a moment, and maybe she wanted to hit me.

Finally she looked away and said, ‘Right, fine, Herr Kayankaya, obviously you’re very articulate, and that’s just as well. But it’s not really relevant at the moment. Will you get Marieke out of this without letting her know who asked you to do it?’

‘I’ll try. As I said, your daughter has a right to hang out with Abakay. I can’t simply carry her off.’

‘But you strike me as a man with imagination. Think up some kind of pretext. Lure Abakay out of town or ...’

‘Beat him up, yes, I know. But that won’t get us anywhere, Frau de Chavannes. And thank you for the bit about the man with imagination. Pay me a day’s fee in advance, and I’ll see what I can do.’

I took one of my standard contracts out of my jacket pocket and handed it to her across the glass-topped table. Four hundred euros a day plus expenses, two days’ fee as a bonus for success. Normally my daily fee was two hundred and fifty euros a day, but normally my clients don’t live in Zeppelinallee. In fact I wasn’t all that bothered about the money. I’d had plenty of work recently, and Deborah’s wine bar was doing well and becoming a must-visit

place in Frankfurt. But as with most relatively cultivated rich people – and I had automatically put the daughter of a French banker and vintner and wife of a highly regarded Dutch artist into that category – it was like this: they pleased themselves and others by supposing that special quality called for a special price, that you had to consider value for money rather than the price itself, that price plus wear and tear of cheap stuff ultimately costs you more than expensive stuff, and so on. It wouldn't even occur to someone with that much money that such an attitude is itself cheap, because attitudes don't cost anything. At any rate, I didn't want to stir up any more doubts in Valerie de Chavannes's mind as to whether she was putting herself into the right hands now that she had swallowed my official address in Gutleutstrasse. I was all the more surprised when she looked up from the document, frowning, and said, 'Four hundred euros a day? Your website said fee for arrangement.'

'If a case seems particularly difficult. In your case I'll stick to my usual conditions.'

'Four hundred euros a day – good heavens.'

She really did seem to be concerned about the amount. It made me feel uncomfortable. On the other hand ... I took a look around the living room.

'Do the *furnishings* belong to your parents as well?'

'Most of them, yes.'

It brought me up short. 'And the paintings?'

They were almost all large-format, modern-looking arrangements of blocks of colour, oil on canvas, in heavy, gilded, antique-style frames. Sometimes cubes of assorted colours, sometimes blobs or stripes, a rainbow of merging colours, a red square in a yellow square, a green square, and so on, a purple blotch like a storm cloud. When I looked more closely for the first time, I realised that they could hardly be by the artist who had painted *The Blind Men of Babylon*.

'Edgar would tell you that those aren't paintings, they're interior decoration.'

'Pretty.'

'Exactly.'

We looked at each other, and no one had to say so, but it was clear that her parents were forcing her and her artist husband to leave the pictures hanging on the walls. Maybe they came from the same firm that had furnished the waiting room, the conference room and the lavatory of the Frankfurt branch of Magnon & Koch. Perhaps her parents wanted to tell the son-in-law, as if shouting it through a megaphone, what kind of paintings did not 'stop selling so well' at some point in time. Or perhaps they just wanted to inflict a little torture on the tattooed daughter who had left home at sixteen.

So Valerie de Chavannes was living in furnished accommodation, and four hundred euros was not just chicken feed to her.

'As I assume that I can do the job in a day or so without too much expense, I can offer to halve the bonus for success.'

'Thank you,' she said, and it came from the heart.

She signed the contract, and while she went out to fetch the four hundred euros I put my jacket on and went over to an A4-sized drawing that was fixed to the wall with a drawing pin between two large paintings, a two-by-two-metres rainbow and a three-metres-long row of red and green horizontal stripes. A quick, smudged pencil sketch showing a man with an African

hairstyle and his mouth wide open, kneeling on the floor between two huge pictures of rainbow and some horizontal stripes with a mound of vomit that reached to his chest and threatened to smother him.

When Valerie de Chavannes came back she saw me standing in front of the picture.

‘This one is funny,’ I said, and I meant it.

‘No,’ she replied, ‘it isn’t. Here you are.’ She came towards me and gave me four hundred euro notes. ‘I’ll be at home all day. Please call me as soon as you have any news about Marieke.’

At her daughter’s name the strength suddenly drained out of her. She was breathing heavily, her chin began to quiver and she pressed her lips together.

‘Please bring me my daughter back! And forget about halving the bonus, that’s so stupid, was only ...’ She fought off her tears. ‘We really don’t have a lot of money right now, and was only out of a horrible habit that I thought of it, of course I’ll pay anything you like, just get Marieke back for me.’

She came a step closer to me, wringing her hands in front of her stomach and looking pleadingly at me. It was just about impossible not to put my arms round her. Her head fell on my shoulder, she gave way to tears and her trembling body pressed close to mine. She had taken off the cardigan when she went to find the money, and I was holding her bare muscular arms. The sleeves of her T-shirt slipped up, and my fingertips touched her damp armpits. When I began to feel her breasts through my lightweight corduroy jacket, it was time to leave.

I carefully pushed her away from me. Her face was wet with tears.

‘Don’t worry, Frau de Chavannes. I’ll find Marieke for you. That’s a promise.’

She looked at me despairingly. ‘If he does anything to her ...’

‘He won’t.’ The things we say. I pointed to the glass-topped table with the photograph. ‘Your daughter is a strong, self-confident young woman. And girls her age do gad about. I’m sure the two of them are doing nothing but sitting in a café and talking about underground photography or our antisocial society. Maybe they’ll go into the park and smoke a bit of weed now and then. She’ll be back this evening, and you can lecture her about the extremely proper things you did at sixteen. I assume there’ll be a lot about skipping ropes, poetry albums and classical piano music ...’

She had to smile a little.

‘See you this evening, Frau de Chavannes. And no, don’t stay at home. Go for a walk, or shopping, or to the gym – move about, do something to take your mind off it. But don’t forget to take your mobile. I’ll call you, okay?’

She nodded, sniffing, and then she said, ‘So that’s your picture of me, is it? Shopping and the gym, hmm?’

I looked at her for a moment. ‘Don’t worry about how I see you. Everything is fine there.’

We shook hands, and the next moment I was in the hall. I wiped the sweat from my brow with my sleeve.

The gentleman’s racing bike that must have cost five or six thousand euros was leaning against the wall. I’d come to know a few things about bikes since I gave up smoking four years ago. Every time I felt a craving for nicotine that I could hardly withstand I got on my bike and fought the just-half-a-cigarette devil by riding uphill and downhill between Ba

Soden and Bad Nauheim, whatever the time of day or night.

Perhaps the racing bike came from financially better times. Or it was one of the things that were meant to give Edgar Hasselbaink the idea that Frankfurt could be fun, and the family scrimped and saved to afford it. Or Valerie de Chavannes, a credit to her financial wizard of a father, had put on a performance for me aiming, just on principle, to lower costs in any situation, however inappropriate.

Just before I reached the hefty, iron-clad front door, a forbidding sight from both outside and inside, the housekeeper came up the cellar steps with a basket of laundry under her arm.

She stopped in surprise. 'You're still here?'

'Yes. Thanks for the tea. Next time I'd like to try your fish soup, on the reverse principle ...'

She gave me a puzzled look.

'Just one question: how long have you been working for the de Chavannes family?'

She didn't like my asking, and if I was not much mistaken she didn't like me either.

'Over twenty years. Why?'

'Only wondering, sheer curiosity. Goodbye, then. Have a nice day.'

She murmured something that I couldn't make out. Was she going to report my visit to Georges and Bernadette de Chavannes? *There was another of them here today ...*

When the door latched behind me, I stood in the front garden for a moment breathing in the clear autumn air. Apart from an elderly couple slowly approaching down the pavement the Zeppelinallee was deserted. Not a car driving along, no noisy children, no clinking of crockery, no lawn mowers. You heard the sounds of the city very quietly, as if from far away, although you were almost in its centre.

Both the man and the woman wore Hunter green felt hats, the woman had a fur round her neck, the man carried a walking stick with a gleaming golden knob shaped like an animal's head. The *click-clack* of the walking stick sounded through the silence of the diplomat's quarter.

Let's try it, I thought, and waved to the couple, smiling. 'Good morning!'

As they went on they looked at me as if I were a talking tree or something, and as if talking trees and indeed anything like them were extremely crude.

I took my bicycle, pushed it out of the front garden and rode away in the direction of the Bockenheimer Landstrasse. As I passed the elderly couple I called out, 'You poorly educated pigs!' And once again they looked, without moving a muscle. A talking tree on a bicycle – what on earth is the world coming to?

I pushed down on the pedals, with the mild October sun in my face, convinced that I had an easy, pleasant job ahead of me. At least, so long as I kept my distance from my client. Valerie de Chavannes was an attractive woman, no denying it, and if I was not much mistaken she wouldn't turn down a little comforting if it was offered in the right way. But there were plenty of attractive women around. I was living with one of them. And anyway Valerie de Chavannes's I-only-ever-think-of-one-thing look struck me as coinciding exactly with the range of possible feelings about her – and who wanted the hell bit at my age? I was in my early fifties, I did my work, I paid my bills, I had made my way. I'd managed to stop smoking, all I drank were two or three beers in the evening or my share of a couple of bottles of wine with friends, and Deborah and I were planning our future. This morning I had

stepped out of my front door generally pleased with life, and I had mounted my bike with an apple in my hand. Not quite heaven, maybe, but not so far from it.

And then I went and did it all the same. I held the fingertips that had just touched Valérie de Chavannes's armpits close to my nose, and caught a faintly lavender-scented smell of sweat, and for a moment I felt as if the October sun were burning down on my head like it did on my sister in August.

Chapter 2

My office was on the second floor of a run-down sixties apartment building – or perhaps had never run very far up – at the beginning of Gutleutstrasse near Frankfurt Central Station. Pinkish brown plaster was crumbling away from the façade, the bare brick wall showed through in many places, a number of windows had sheets hung over them, others had furniture blocking them, chains of Christmas lights winked on and off all year round on the third floor and on the fourth floor a *Frankfurt Hooligan* decal covered one pane. On the ground floor there was a second-hand clothes shop where you could buy used moon boots, polyester shirts and cracked leather belts. My friend Slibulsky called it the Third Armpit, on account of the smell that wafted out of the shop when the door was open. The front door at the entrance to the building had once been ribbed glass, until a drunk kicked it in three years ago and the owner had replaced the glass with a wooden board.

The stairwell, which was painted greyish yellow, smelled of cats and cleaning fluid. If you found the half-broken-off light switch and pressed it, a candle-shaped naked energy-saving bulb gave just enough dim light to show you the stairs. Some joker kept smearing some kind of sticky substance on the banisters: jam, honey, UHU glue. I was sure the perpetrator was the twelve-year-old son of a single father on the fourth floor, but I couldn't prove it. I once cornered him on the subject, and his answer had been, 'Something sticky? Are you sure it was on the bannisters? Did you wash your hands first?' Little bastard.

A Croatian Mafia, trying to keep me from investigating their shady business, had blown up my previous office thirteen years before. The two-room apartment in Gutleutstrasse had been a quick, cheap, and – I thought at the time – temporary substitute. My fears that, with such an address, and the state of the building, the only clients I'd get would be people with a list of previous convictions or bad drug problems proved to be exaggerated. It's true that with the passing trade that made its way up the gloomy stairs to the second floor merely because of the nameplate saying *Kemal Kayankaya – Investigations and Personal Protection*, I could hardly have earned the rent in those first years. But I had a pretty good reputation as a detective in the city, the word-of-mouth publicity worked well, and business was good. My wish for a classier office space faded. I got used to the area, the chestnut tree outside the window and the little Café Rosig on the corner, until the success of the Internet and computer technology made the location of my office superfluous. My clients got in touch by email or phone, my paper files would fit into a shoe box and I held business meetings in the Café Rosig. I could have given my private apartment as my business address. But then Deborah found a new apartment in the West End district of the city – four rooms, kitchen and bathroom – and asked if I'd like to move in with her. We'd been at first an occasional, then more and more of an established, couple for more than six years, and I was happy to accept the offer. That meant I needed an office away from my home. If anyone else had designs on me with explosives or anything else, I didn't want Deborah to be affected.

Since my website had gone online, exactly two people had come to Gutleutstrasse unannounced: a woman neighbour who wanted me to get her brother to confess over an inheritance dispute – ‘He’s a cowardly, soft little worm, you’d only have to squeeze him a bit’, and a sad man who had fallen for an anonymous girl in a porn film and wanted me to find her for him. When I explained how much such a search could cost him, and how high my advance was, he went away even sadder than before.

So on the morning when I came back from Valerie de Chavannes’s house to my office, I hardly took any notice of the woman leaning against a sunny bit of the wall, talking busily on an iPhone. She wore a blue, expensive-looking trouser suit, and had a short, modern hairstyle. In front of her stood a large leather handbag crammed with papers. An estate agent, I thought. There were constant rumours that the building was being sold to make way for another hotel or parking garage near the station.

I had just put my key into the front door lock and was about to shoulder my bike when I heard her calling behind me. ‘Excuse me ...! Herr Kayankaya ...?’

I lowered the bike and turned round. ‘Yes?’

She came towards me smiling, on high heels and with her full and obviously heavy handbag in one hand and her iPhone in the other. She had a broad, friendly face, and the closer she came the more clear it became how tall she was. She was almost a head taller than me; she would still be half that extra height without her shoes on, and I’m not a short man. I liked to see such a tall woman wearing high heels – she obviously wasn’t setting out to do the showbiz people of the world any favours. She let her bag drop to the ground, threw the iPhone into the air and held out her hand to me. Her hand was large, too.

‘Katja Lipschitz, chief press officer of Maier Verlag.’

‘Kemal Kayankaya, but you know that already.’

‘I know you from a photo on the Internet, that’s how I recognised you. The man who saved Gregory ...’

She was smiling again, perhaps a little too professionally, and there was a look of speculation behind the smile. Did the name Gregory shake me? Gregory’s real name was Gregor Dachstein, and years ago he had won a *Big Brother* TV show, followed by a CD of songs like ‘Here comes Santa with his prick, chasing every pretty chick’ and ‘She’s an old Cu-Custard Pie Baker.’ Since then he’d played the clubs in the discothèque world between Little You-Know-Who and Nether Whatsit. Gregory’s manager had hired me as his bodyguard for an appearance at the Hell discothèque in Dietzenbach, and the outcome was that I had to take Gregory to Accident and Emergency in Offenbach at four in the morning with about thirty vodka Red Bulls inside him. A yellow press reporter was waiting there with a camera and for some time after I asked myself whether the manager had arranged with the reporter to be there before the concert, and had organised his protégé’s consumption of Red Bulls accordingly, or whether the idea of offering a tabloid an exclusive story had occurred to him only when Gregory collapsed onstage. Anyway, two days later a photograph of me with Gregory and my jacket covered with his vomit was published, with a caption saying: *Poison attack? Gregory in the arms of his bodyguard on the way to hospital.* It was an appearance I could have done without.

I responded to Katja Lipschitz’s professional smile by asking, ‘Would you like an autograph?’

‘Later, maybe – as your signature to a contract. As to the reason for my visit to you here ...’ – she cast a brief, disparaging look round the place: backyard, wood-boarded entrance, and the traffic on Gutleutstrasse – ‘would you like to hear it outside?’

‘That depends. Does Maier Verlag sell magazine subscriptions door-to-door? Your trouser suit doesn’t look as if a door-to-door salesman could afford it, but maybe that’s just because suits you so well ...’

She was brought up short, apparently baffled at least momentarily by the term *door-to-door salesman*. Perhaps she was a neighbour of Deborah and me; you didn’t meet door-to-door salesmen in the elegant West End. By way of contrast, three shabby, pale-faced guys had been haunting Gutleutstrasse in the last year alone: ‘Want a great deal? *Gala, Bunte, Wochenecho*. Lots of good reading there. Or hey, just give me ten euros anyway, I haven’t eaten for days. It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a poor bastard to scrounge the few euros he needs to survive from a rich man.

She shook her head and said, amused, ‘No, no, don’t worry. We’re a highly regarded literary publishing house. Haven’t you ever heard of us? Mercedes García is on our list, and so are Hans Peter Stullberg, Renzo Kochmeister, and Daniela Mita ...’

She was looking at me so expectantly that the possibility of my being unacquainted with her authors would have marked me out as a total idiot.

I knew the sixty-something Stullberg from newspaper interviews in which he called for young people to devote themselves to the old values. Reading his words, I thought how writers like to express themselves in metaphors: he was the old values, and the young people devoted to him wore close-fitting jeans and had nicely curved breasts. I’d once seen photos of Daniela Mita in Deborah’s *Brigitte* magazine, and it could be that the idea of the young people turning to old values had occurred to Stullberg at the sight of his colleague on the Maier Verlag list. I hadn’t read anything by either of them.

‘Sorry, of the two of us my wife is the one who reads books,’ I said, and couldn’t suppress a grin when I saw Katja Lipschitz’s slightly forced smile.

I looked at her with a twinkle in my eye and nodded towards the entrance to the building. ‘Come on up and I’ll make coffee. While I’m doing that you can look through my annotated edition of Proust.’

A quarter of an hour later Katja Lipschitz, now relaxed, was sitting in my wine-red velvet armchair stretching her long legs, sipping coffee and looking round her. There wasn’t much to see: an empty desk with only a laptop on it, a bookshelf full of reference works on criminal law, full and empty wine bottles, and a plastic Zinedine Zidane Tipp-Kick figurine from a table football game that Slibulsky had given me. Several watercolours painted by Deborah’s niece Hanna, who was now fourteen, hung on the walls, along with a large station clock with my little armoury hidden behind it. Two pistols, handcuffs, knock-out drops, pepper spray.

‘Do you have children?’ asked Katja Lipschitz, pointing to the watercolours.

‘A niece.’ I sat down with her in the other red-velvet guest armchair. The chairs were left over from Deborah’s past. She had worked for a couple of years at Mister Happy, a small, chic brothel on the banks of the Main run on fair lines by a former tart. When Deborah stopped working there ten years ago, she had been given the chairs as a leaving present.

‘Well, what can I do for you?’

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