

Ursula Reist

**The Case of the Unshod
Corpse**

Nick Baumgarten's Fourth Case

Translated from the German by
Henry Randolph

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Characters and plot are the author's invention; they are
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For Dominique und Aleš

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“Our society by the day is becoming less tolerant of behavior that doesn’t fit the norm, especially when it involves people from a migration background. Sure, we Swiss like traveling to other countries with different cultures, where we can delight in ‘Turkish hospitality’ or the ‘relaxed Italian lifestyle.’ But, look out if the Turkish neighbors in our Rombach apartment building get loud company all the time or the delivery date for that Italian designer sofa keeps slipping. That’s when the admired alternative way of life suddenly hits home, touches our own life and calls for genuine tolerance. And this is where Mr. and Mrs. Swiss would rather call up the tenant’s association or file a legal expense insurance claim than start a conversation with Mr. Yilmaz or Signora Magnani to let them know what’s on their mind and maybe work out a compromise. The cry goes up instead for rules, regulation and legislation, with our MP’s all too happy to comply. But for our profession the result is that we no longer go after serious crimes but instead wind up chasing down misdemeanors. If it takes more police and more judges just so our life can go on the way it always has, so be it. Responsibility for a friction-free life is pushed off on the state, and no one seems bothered by it. What I am suggesting instead is for each of us to weigh the consequences of our actions, to stand up and be counted if something goes awry. The only way to change things, ladies and gentlemen, is to lead by example. Even a small action will speak louder than big words any day.”

The retired police commander gave a perfunctory bow and stepped away from the speaker’s lectern. As the applause ebbed away, Councillor Bertschinger rose

from his first row seat and turned toward the speaker and his department staffers. "Thank you, Martin. Your speech was inspiring, if I may use a big word. Now, how about some of that action; we still have time before happy hour to get in some jogging, swimming, weight lifting or other activity. Move that body and burn a few of the many calories you'll be ingesting later. Let's go!"

Nick Baumgarten and his seat neighbor looked at each other quizzically. Compulsory sports yet, of all things? Cécile Dumont shook her head ever so slightly and whispered: "I'm game for a walk, but nothing that elevates my pulse."

The audience, some fifty strong, filed out of the seminar room in no hurry and also seemed less than inspired by their chief's boosterism. Did you now have to prove yourself an elite jogger to get anywhere in the Department of the Economy and Interior? Bertschinger's being a distance runner himself very well may energize and calm him, as he never missed a chance to point out; but such blatant prompting to follow in his tracks could only stem from the rarefied Hasliberg mountain air and the fact that he had a captive audience in this congress hotel.

Cécile Dumont, diminutive, round, and by now the top district attorney for Canton Aargau, pulled a silver cigarette case from her jacket pocket. "First, I'm going to have a smoke right in front of the hotel entrance in full view of all these top athletes. Want to come along?"

Nick Baumgarten, no longer on the slim side and still deputy chief of CID, nodded. "But then we're going for a short walk, all right?" Though for twenty years a non-smoker, he still liked to hang out with the little clusters of nicotine fiends puffing away in front of office buildings, restaurants and factory halls.

Truth be told, however, he would have much

preferred to get into his car and drive home. He did not sleep well in strange beds and, with wife Marina for company, would much rather himself cook opulent dinners like the one on the program this evening. True, the annual staff retreat offered a chance to meet people new to the department, clear up some matters informally and tend to old relationships; but, after all was said and done, he regarded small talk and banter as a chore. Not that he was a loner; it was just that he felt most comfortable in an intimate circle. In a personality test a few years earlier, it had surfaced: he was clearly introverted, but had learned in the course of his professional life to open up, to approach people. Police psychologist Michael Lewinski had explained the difference between introversion and extroversion to him this way: 'All you need is to consider what sort of environment replenishes your energy reserves. If you prefer to be alone, with music or a book, with your partner, or with a few good friends – you tend to introversion. If you go for large gatherings, take vacations with large groups and feel fully energized after a roaring party, you lean toward the extroverted side. You can't change this basic structure; you can, however, learn to adapt your behavior to the situation.'

Nick promised himself to ease into the evening and relax, maybe even try to enjoy himself. Since he had to be there he would simply make the effort to be sociable.

Angela Kaufmann was jogging at a good clip right down the middle of the Aare Bridge by Ruppertswil. It was early Sunday morning, hardly anyone else was on the road, and she only had to dodge a solitary cyclist bent over his handlebars pedaling from the opposite direction. On the river bank still swathed in the occasional patch of fog she turned left toward Biberstein where she would cross the Aare again for the run back to Rohr. She was breathing easily and rhythmically, listening to the birds busy soliciting partners and building nests and letting her thoughts drift. Wasn't it getting to be time for her nest building too? Her mid-thirtyish biological clock was starting to tick louder. But for this she needed a reliable partner and that was easier said than done. Over the past few months of trying to hook up over the Internet she had met with middling success at best; she did meet some interesting men, but it all really ended up going nowhere. It wasn't just her police habits that at times caused her to be acerbic and even suspicious; the sparks simply hadn't flown on a first or second date, not even enough to light up one night. She shook her head and shifted into a sprint. Just let it go, she told herself, someone is bound to show up who can share my life and I can maybe even have kids with.

Her smartphone intruded; she was on call. "Kaufmann?" She slowed her pace. "On the Windisch campus? Where exactly? – All right, I'm on it, but it will take me at least twenty minutes to make it back home. – I'm out jogging. Can you ask Beltrametti to come by and get me? – What do you mean, can't be reached? – All right, I will drive myself and try to get in

touch with him. And you'll send me the photo as soon as possible. Ciao, thanks."

With speed now of the essence, her years of relentless workouts paid off. She made it home in seventeen minutes, allowed herself a quick shower and got dressed: jeans, t-shirt, leather jacket and boots, her personal uniform. She pulled out of the garage in her silver Golf and headed east, keeping well under the speed limit. The body dangling from the top of the Landi Tower behind the Brugg train station would have to swing in the wind a little longer.

“Pino, where are you hiding?” Angela was locking her car. “What, in Davos? What for? – All right, none of my business. It’s just that I’m standing here by myself at a possible crime scene and would love to have a second pair of eyes. – Yeah, good idea. I’ll shoot as many pictures as possible from various angles. – No, no need for that; Nick should be back from the Bernese Highlands no later than tomorrow morning. Ciao.”

Colleague Beltrametti was one who liked to spend his days off as far away from Aarau as possible to avoid just this sort of situation where he might get sucked back into work. Angela could empathize; after all, she, too, like Pino, had been a cop long enough to know the virtue of compartmentalizing. Still, for inspecting a crime scene she would have preferred backup just now.

Two colleagues in uniform pointed the way for her. Guessing that the elevator might have been used by victim and perpetrator – if any – she climbed the seven flights of stairs, then up a ladder through the skylight onto the flat, tarred roof surface. Two more uniformed colleagues flanked a taut rope that, after looping around a chimney, stretched to a roughly 50 cm high balustrade over which it disappeared. Bending forward carefully over the parapet, Angela looked down and swallowed hard. The rope ended in a hangman’s knot bulging from the neck of a man with short black hair. From her vertical perspective, it was impossible to see anything more.

“CSI and forensic medicine were called,” said one of the officers, “they should be here in fifteen minutes.”

“Good, then one of you wait here and call me as

soon as they show up. I'm going to have a look around, maybe there's something to be seen from below."

"Or from across the way," said one of them, "I roused the campus custodian out of bed, and he can take you up on the roof or let you in the offices. You'll probably see more from there."

Angela looked at her colleague's name badge. "Right on, Pedroni, good call. Want to tag along?"

The young policeman came to attention and looked at his supervisor, who nodded and gave him leave with a wave of his hand. "Go ahead, Kevin." Angela knew the watch commander from Police Post North well. "I'll send him back to you, Markus, don't worry! I'm sure you'll manage here until the cavalry comes riding over the hill from Aarau. And you, Officer Pedroni, please get the binoculars from your patrol car."

"By the way, this thing was reported by a train passenger," Pedroni called up to her from the ground floor, which he had reached bounding down two or three steps at a time, well ahead of Angela, who was still pounding down the second and first floor stairs with somewhat shorter legs. "He was coming in from Baden, saw something hanging there and went for a closer look. He called us right away and waited until we got here. We sent him home; nothing suspicious about him that we could see, but he's set to talk with you anytime."

The campus custodian led Angela and Pedroni onto the green planted roof of the new main administration building. He cautioned them to be extra careful – "There are no railings, and you don't really want to end up like the stiff over there, right?" – and he himself stayed well away from the roof's edge.

Through the binoculars she could see that the dead man's face was swollen and his eyes protruded from

their sockets. The neck didn't snap, concluded Angela; it was a slow death. He had on a dark grey suit, with a white shirt, no tie. He was shoeless.

"Did you find the shoes?" asked Angela.

"Not so far, but then we weren't looking for them. They're not on the roof, in any case, because I would have noticed them," Pedroni answered and now pointed across the way. "Looks like the tech folks have arrived."

"Good. I'm going to take a few pictures, but they won't show much, he's too far away. Go ahead and give the technicians a hand in searching the ground below the corpse. The shoes could be important."

Angela turned to the custodian. "Which rooms have windows looking out on the Landi high-rise?"

"The apartments at the top, the staff offices and those of the professors on the two floors below. Mind you, I would have to call first before I unlock any rooms."

Angela thought a moment and then shook her head. "We'll wait until tomorrow; it will presumably be business as usual and the offices should be occupied. Thank you very much."

* * *

Back on the Landi roof, she greeted Urs Meierhans, chief of the technical unit, who, having had a look around, was dictating notes into his smartphone. Someone she did not recognize was bent over the balustrade, peering down at the corpse.

"Meet Colin MacAdam, forensic medicus at Aarau Canton Hospital. Angela Kaufmann, member of Nick Baumgarten's team." Never one to talk much, Meierhans kept it short. "We'll be working together

from now on and grateful for the shorter distance: instead of a hundred kilometers, it's just two from police headquarters to ACH." Previously, the autopsies had to be done at Forensic Medicine in Berne, but the Aarau branch had now been open for two months.

Colin MacAdam shook Angela's hand, smiling. "A pleasure," he said and made a slight bow. "I'll do my best to support you."

Good manners, thought Angela, as she gave him the top to bottom once-over. The doctor was around forty, had a reddish-blond head of hair with incipient bald spot, and was slightly shorter than she. He had a deep voice but not too loud. The eyes were baby blue.

He cleared his throat. "Let's pull the corpse up to the roof, Herr Meierhans, shall we, so I can start my work."

The men returned to the parapet and started pulling the rope up slowly and carefully. It took a few minutes before the corpse lay on the plastic tarp they had spread out on the roof. Angela and Urs went through the dead man's pockets, finding just a few coins and a key ring with a few keys on it. There was no billfold, no hint of an identity. Meanwhile, MacAdam, having taken some pictures, set to work, giving a running commentary as he went: "Male, about fifty years old, Caucasian, overweight, not the athletic type. He's been dead for eight to twelve hours. Cause of death presumably strangulation by this rope here, which I infer from the swollen face and protruding eyeballs. There are deep abrasions and bruises on all his extremities. He defended himself; however, his wrists were tied behind his back, possibly after a struggle. It may well be that there were two assailants." The doctor rose out of his crouch and turned to Angela. "Those are my observations for now. My assistants will come for him as

soon as you are done here, and we can review the first results tomorrow morning. I'll give you a call, Frau Kaufmann. May I have your card? – Thanks. – Oh, yes, and he's wearing a cheap, ready-made suit, his shirtsleeves are too long and they are frayed around the cuffs. My guess is that the shoes will turn out to be cheap, too, should you ever find them. He does not seem to have given a whit about his appearance."

"Or didn't have the money for it," said Angela, slightly put off. MacAdam's jeans, shirt and suede jacket were clearly expensive and of good quality.

"Yes, of course," he laughed disarmingly, "but it doesn't take a lot of money to dress better than this fellow here." He picked up his instrument bag and, with a wave, disappeared into the stairwell.

Urs Meierhans grinned: "He's half Brit, half Swiss, from a good family, and it shows. I should tell you, however, that no one doubts his professionalism and brilliance, and I'm sure we can learn from him. Maybe, with time he'll unbend a bit, who knows. Basically, I'm done here; ready to head back?"

At that moment, Pedroni came running up out of the stairwell door. In one hand he held a pair of dusty shoes, in the other a billfold. "Barely covered over with construction debris," he said, slightly out of breath, "it must have been done in a hurry because one of the shoes was showing."

The feet belonging to Marina Manz were soaking in warm soapy water and her fingernails were freshly painted. Eric Clapton was playing softly; one of Richard Ford's old Bascombe yarns rested on the sofa beside her. She felt the way she had when she still lived alone: a slow-paced Sunday afternoon, without obligations, quiet, and restorative. But not ever quite like this; never had she been this relaxed, with her duties and problems as a business owner always hovering in the background before. But last year she had sold the cosmetics institute to her longtime employee Nicole Scherer, and it looked like the customers of both genders remained loyal to the firm. Marina had been going in as a floater and backup the two times a month or so that Nicole needed help. To explore a different side of the beauty business, this summer Marina planned to continue her education as a make-up artist. But clearly it was her private life above all that fostered this serenity and did so to a degree that still surprised her. Since marrying Nick Baumgarten and coming to live in his house on Fröhlichstrasse, she was super content. Stability really was not to be underestimated as a happiness factor, never mind the occasional escapist fantasies the impetuous child in her might concoct. There was no reason now for her to pack up and leave; it was simply the old freedom principle that still had a now only theoretical grip on her. Surprising what you could still learn even at the ripe old age of fifty, she reflected as she began her pedicure. She had an interested audience in the form of a small black and white cat that had appeared a week ago in their garden, meowing piteously and with its ribs showing. The small piece

of chicken Marina had cut up and proffered on a saucer was enough to convince the little creature to hang around. To date, no one had responded to a posted "found cat" sign and the animal rescue society offered no help either. On Monday she would drive to the vet to see if he could find an i.d. chip. She hoped not.

When the phone rang, she looked expectantly at the display but was disappointed. Angela Kaufmann. So it was official business. "Hello, Angela. Your call means that you can't kick back even on a Sunday, am I right? – No, haven't heard anything so far. I expect him later this evening. – They probably all have to shut off their phones; that's the usual way at these leadership workshops, I believe. Something going on? – That does not sound good. He's sure to call you back immediately, if able; you know how he is. – That's all right; I'll resign myself to having dinner solo, no problem. Ciao, Angela."

Marina rubbed a generous amount of lotion on her feet and pulled on cotton socks. Dinner may be yesterday's leftovers, she grouched, but if I am to eat with just a cat for company at least I'll have a glass of wine. Now, which wine was it again that goes so well with warmed-over vegetables au gratin?

“Horst Michael Böckel, born 1971, single, lived in Küssaburg, Baden-Württemberg, on the side of the Rhine opposite Bad Zurzach, was a docent at the University of Applied Sciences in Brugg-Windisch, in the School of Engineering.” It was shortly before nine o’clock Sunday evening, and the full team was assembled in the conference room. Gody Kyburz, chief of the Aargau CID and his deputy Nick Baumgarten had arrived ten minutes earlier from the Bernese Highlands. Pino Beltrametti, after fielding Angela’s call, had decided to cut his holiday short because Angela needed backup. However, he allowed himself to take the roundabout way back to Aarau through various passes – he and his antique Lancia Delta were not about to relinquish their Sunday that easily. Urs Meierhans, Beltrametti’s successor as CSI chief, had driven home for the evening meal with his wife and children and then resurfaced in his lab two hours later.

Angela Kaufmann pointed to one of the whiteboards they used keeping track of their cases. “He lived in one part of his parents’ house, his brother with family in the other. Our Waldshut colleagues are still looking for the brother, but the kids have Easter vacation, and the family seems to have left town. The new forensic physician suspects that Böckel was hit over the head and knocked out, drugged or otherwise overpowered before being hanged. It looks like he choked to death slowly and painfully, but that’s just my unscientific opinion based on his facial rictus.” Angela indicated the relevant photo, and Pino came up for a closer look. He shook his head.

“Pretty bad,” he murmured. “But it couldn’t have

been done by one person, given the obesity." With that he went back to his seat.

Angela nodded. "It's what Colin MacAdam says as well. During the autopsy he'll try to analyze the bruises and contusions. We should get the first results toward noon tomorrow, also with respect to alcohol or drugs." She took a swig of coffee and tried in vain to stifle a yawn. "Sorry. We found his car in front of the Cantonal Bank by the Brugg train station, where you can park free from Saturday five p.m. to Monday six a.m. At this point we don't know when it was left there."

Urs Meierhans spoke up. "Unofficially, it doesn't look like the Audi is linked to the deed, but we'll do a formal check tomorrow. We found nothing on the Landi roof that could get us further; it was all dry and not very dusty, hence no shoeprints. About Böckel's shoes: interesting that they were found with his billfold hidden under a pile of construction debris, and they may tell us something: unlike the rest of his clothes, they look expensive and in good condition." He cleared his throat and winked at Angela: "Maybe Colin MacAdam could enlighten us as to their origin; he seems to have some expertise in this area." Next, he picked up a short piece of rope from the table and held it up: "The rope is made of hemp, like this one. It's about a centimeter thick, a bit over eight meters long, of a type called calving rope. It shows considerable wear in several places so it likely was not bought for the purpose. It was wrapped twice around the chimney and secured with a simple reef knot. When we find the culprit or culprits, they will in all likelihood have rope fibers on their clothes, and no doubt they'll be savvy to that. These are my preliminary findings, tune in for more tomorrow."

Nick Baumgarten stood up and stretched. "And,

naturally, no one saw or heard anything. Who have you interviewed so far, Angela?"

"You can only see the roof from the campus building and, presumably, on Saturday night no one was there. We haven't had a chance to question the train station personnel on duty around that time; in general, not much was going on Saturday. We probably would need to issue an appeal to the public if we hope to come up with any chance passer-by witnesses. The Brugg colleagues are going to be canvassing restaurants and bars, but those mostly lock up around midnight or shortly after. Brugg doesn't seem to have much of a nightlife scene."

Gody Kyburz straightened up in his seat and took the lead, as he had just learned in the executive seminar. "Thank you Angela and Urs, good work. I think we will all permit ourselves a few hours sleep now and then pick up tomorrow morning where we left off. It strikes me as important that we find out more about Böckel and his environment, and of course we'll have to put the School of Engineering under the microscope. There will be pushback, but we know how to handle that." With an audible sigh, he said: "Regrettably, I have an official appointment tomorrow, but I'll be back by evening. Shall we reconvene at five? Fine, then have a good night, everyone."

"Just a moment, gentlemen." Angela hesitated, but it had to be said. "The Aargauer Zeitung caught wind of something, I have no idea how. Steff Schwager tried all afternoon to worm it out of me, and he threatens us with a front page. Someone should call him before ten o'clock so that he doesn't blindsides us."

At that moment, Nick's cell phone chose to ring. A short glance at the display caused his eyebrows to shoot up. "Speaking of the devil...." He set the phone

on speaker. "Hello, Steff, I hear you've been molesting a certain female staff member of mine again."

"Sure, when a dead professor is hanging from a silo. What are you prepared to tell me about it?"

"Not a thing yet, Steff, unfortunately. You know the rules. Wait until tomorrow."

"Forget it. My guess is one of my peers from the gutter press has also caught on and when every commuter tomorrow morning reads the story, the AZ, as the premier local organ, certainly cannot afford to lag behind. So, what have you got?"

"Piss on that, Steff. We still haven't notified the victim's family and that means that I don't want to see a thing about this story in your paper. Am I making myself crystal clear, or does Gody Kyburz need to call your editor in chief?"

"Shit, Nick, now you're the one who's threatening me. So, when do I get more info?"

"I'll call you, but leave Angela alone. Get some sleep, Steff, it'll do you good. Ciao." Nick clicked off and turned to his chief. "That means we need to put a press release together for tomorrow morning. Can you coordinate one with our spokesperson before you take off?"

Gody nodded and grimaced. In addition to his normal duties, he was also acting police commander for a few months; the new one would not take up his post before the summer. "We'll do it tomorrow morning. I can't blow off the conference; the Northern Swiss commanders are meeting and I've got to be there. Anything else, Angela? No? Pino, Nick? Good, then let's lock up. Good night."

The alarm clock startled Nick out of his sleep at half past five. Throughout his life, he had learned to cope with his irregular sleeping rhythm, but it was becoming more difficult as he aged. Now that he had turned sixty, he needed more rest, more sleep, and more relaxation.

Marina opened her big brown eyes and mumbled: "Good morning, my heart. Do I have to get up too?"

Nick bent over her and his kiss brushed her forehead. "You stay in bed as long as you like, but I've got to go."

"Good, then I'll catch a few more winks." She closed her eyes again, rolled over on her side and pulled the blanket up to her chin. "Let's hope you find the culprit soon so we can have breakfast together again."

Nick went down to the kitchen and switched on the coffee maker. He showered, shaved and went into the dressing room – a new amenity that Marina would not be talked out of when they had remodeled the year before. By now he could also see the advantages, although his things took up at most a quarter of the space. He settled on a charcoal grey pair of pants, a light blue shirt and the suede jacket. He rolled up a yellow tie with a small pattern and stuffed it into his jacket pocket just in case there would be the impromptu press briefing. In the old days, he never wore a tie as a matter of principle except for weddings and funerals, but since marrying Marina he had changed and not for the worse by any means.

Back in the kitchen, he preheated a cup, pushed the espresso button and breathed in the aroma of fresh ground coffee – it's these little things that make for

satisfaction in life, he thought; all you need is to live in the moment. A faint "meow" came from the window sill where the cat sat with its gaze fixed expectantly on him. "I almost forgot about you," he said and set about spooning some canned cat food into a small bowl. "So, I guess you've made up your mind about your new home, hm?"

He pulled his black mocs from the shoe cabinet, stowed keys, cell phone and billfold in his jacket and left the house, trying not to make any noise. It was a cool morning, the wind was still blowing last night's raindrops from the trees, but the skies had cleared. He was about to turn the corner on his way to the garage when he heard someone say his name quietly.

It was Angela standing by the garden gate, waving to him. Just how long had she been waiting? He looked at his watch. "I would have called you at six thirty sharp," she said with a mischievous smile, "but I didn't want to keep you from drinking your sacred espresso. Morning, chief." Her eyes and lips were discretely made up, she wore her blond hair in a fashionable banana updo, and had on a crisp white blouse, navy blue slacks and stylish grey cardigan. "We're driving to Waldshut to talk to our German colleagues about how to proceed, now that they've found the relatives. Other than that, nothing new yet. I'm your designated driver today." She opened the passenger side door: "If you please."

"Wow, talk about whistling a new tune. You look altogether bodacious today and that makes me ask who or what is responsible for your excellent mood."

"Nothing special, it's just such a beautiful spring day, and I'm getting the feeling somehow that we're going to do good work today. Maybe the case will even be solved by this evening."

I doubt it will go that fast, flashed through Nick's mind, but hope springs eternal. In any event, Angela's good mood spilled over on him and, as they drove in direction Germany, he shared a few anecdotes from the executive seminar with her. As they drove by the Klingnau reservoir, he suddenly recalled the old Truninger case. "Here by the weir is the spot where Peter Pfister that time found the body of the woman that drove to Aarau from the psychiatric hospital to knife Tom Truninger, the casino director. What was her name again?"

"Sybille Senn," came the prompt answer. Angela remembered it all very well; it had been her first, bigger case with Nick Baumgarten's team, and she would never forget the talk she'd had with Herr Senn. But the victim's widow had also left an indelible impression and so had Andrew, Truninger's best friend. "How are Maggie Truninger and Andrew Ehrlicher doing?"

Nick had to laugh. "He still looks as good as he did five years ago, if that's what you're getting at. I haven't seen either of them the past two months, but Marina works out in the same gym as Maggie where, I suspect, they gossip intensely instead of pumping iron. I have no idea about Andrew's whereabouts at the moment but when he's here he always checks in." He shook his head. "When I think back how jealous I was when he offered Marina the job in St. Martin year before last ..."

Angela kept quiet. During that 'winter of discontent' – as she called it – she had gotten to know a totally different side of her chief: impatient, quick to anger, and unfair. Not until Marina came back from the Caribbean after two months and accepted his marriage proposal did he revert to the Nick known and valued by the Canton Police.

At the Waldshut border crossing, traffic was backed

up only in the opposite direction, and Angela's navi showed them the shortest way to the Old Town police station. Twenty minutes past seven they stepped into the office of Inspector of Police Uwe Priess.

"Morning folks, or better: good day to you both." Priess was big, broad shouldered, but soft. The friendly smile, however, did not extend to eyes guarding their steely look. "Coffee, sir? And how about you, young lady?"

Angela could feel her hackles rise. She instinctively disliked the tone with which some men addressed her effectively as an assistant. Still, she had learned to hold her tongue; spilling resentment got you nowhere. "Yes, thank you so much."

"Coffee for three," barked Priess toward the hallway, and in next to no time a uniformed officer came in balancing three cups. Angela and Nick said their thanks, and Priess flipped open the file he had before him on the desk. "The Böckel family is vacationing on Lake Como. My men got in touch with the brother by cell phone and filled him in on the situation. He has a solid alibi. He's on his way back and at some point today will show up here in the precinct. The family stays in Italy for the time being."

"What details did you fill in for the brother and how did he react to the news?" asked Nick. Things were unspooling just a bit too fast to suit him.

"As little as possible, the minimum necessary, like we're used to doing if there's only the phone: Horst Böckel found dead in Windisch, presumably met his death through foul play on Saturday night. Böckel, first name Franz, right away wanted to know if it happened in the Hotel Bahnhof where Horst often spent the night when he missed the last train or had too much to drink. Did you already check there?"

Angela shook her head. "We wanted to yesterday, but the front desk is only manned intermittently. We'll certainly look into it. How did Franz Böckel react, so far as you could judge?"

"It came as a shock, naturally, but he didn't exactly break down crying. He can't imagine who would have reason to kill his brother, but then he knows little about Horst's private or professional life. He is the family type, his brother a perennial bachelor; they did not have much in common from the sound of it." Uwe Priess pushed his papers together. "That pretty much covers it. Let me suggest that we drive to Küssaburg as the next order of business and have a look at Böckel's apartment." He cleared his throat. "Just so we're clear from the start about jurisdiction: on German soil, what we say goes, and we will also conduct any talks, starting with Franz Böckel. One of you can be there, but as the silent partner. We know what we have to do." He got up. "We'll take my car. I still need to wrap up a few things here, kindly wait outside."

Angela was sorely tempted to toss off a salute, and just managed to stifle a "oui, mon general." She and Nick exited, and when they were a few meters from the door the looks they exchanged spoke volumes. "The sheriff is just missing a couple of small details," said Angela disgustedly, "namely the mirror sunglasses and the black-and-white Dodge."

Nick chuckled. "Come on, Angela, don't be so touchy; he and his people presumably are highly efficient. They are ready to help us, but only if we behave ourselves."

"All right, all right, chief," Angela answered but then guffawed as she watched Priess in sunglasses emerge from his office. "All he needs to do now is get into that Dodge." She turned away and took the phone

out of her pocket. “Pino, could you ask about Böckel in the Hotel Bahnhof in Brugg? Seems he was a regular there. – No, but we’re on the way there, together with our German counterpart. I’ll call in as soon as we know more. Oh, and he probably had a payroll account in Switzerland, just have a look. – Thanks, talk to you later .”