

# Rowohlt Verlag – Highlights

**rowohlt**

Please contact:

Ms. Carolin Mungard

Foreign Rights Director

Phone: +49 40 72 72 - 257

Fax: +49 40 72 72 - 319

E-Mail: carolin.mungard@rowohlt.de

Ursula Poznanski

## Five

Wunderlich

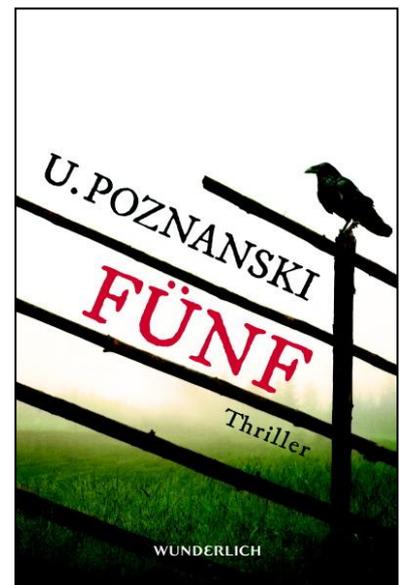
fiction

384 pages

February 2012

A woman is found dead on a pasture. She was murdered. The soles of her feet have been tattooed with coordinates, leading to another gruesome find: a human hand, sealed in plastic foil, together with a riddle, leading the two detectives, Beatrice Kaspary and Florin Wenninger, to a man who does not seem to be connected to either the murdered woman or the killer. Then they find yet another body part. They are led on a grisly GPS treasure hunt from one human remnant to the next. Every witness they interview is murdered a short time later, and the murders happen ever more quickly.

Time is running out for the two detectives; and they slowly realise that only the last riddle will reveal the final piece of this deadly puzzle.



Ursula Poznanski was born in Vienna in 1968, and worked at a publishing house focussing on publications on medicine. After the tremendous success of her young adult novels *Erebos* and *Saeculum*, she now dedicates much of her time to writing fiction. She lives with her family in Vienna. *Five* is her first thriller for adults.

- The new number one of German thriller writing: More than 55,000 copies sold since publication in February 2012!
- Rights sold to Italy (Corbaccio) and France (Presses de la Cité). The author's previous works have been translated into 24 languages.
- Recommended by New Books in German

## PROLOGUE

The place where his left ear had once been throbbled to the rhythm of his heartbeat. Quick, panic-stricken. He breathed in loud, short gasps. A few steps away from him Nora bent over the table where the gun and the knife lay. Her face was contorted, but she was no longer crying. “Please,” he whispered hoarsely, “I don’t want to. Please.”

Now she did let out a sob, short and dry. “Be quiet.”

“Why don’t you let me go. We’ve still got a chance, please, just let me go, ok? Ok?”

She didn’t react. Her quaking right hand hovered over the weapons which gleamed in the light of the naked bulb.

Fear sent his body into spasms. He writhed on the chair as much as the chains would let him. They burned into his flesh, as unyielding as steel bands.

*But it wasn’t my fault, it wasn’t my fault, it wasn’t...*

He screwed up his eyes and then opened them again. He had to see what was happening. Nora now had her hand on the knife.

“No!” he screamed. In his mind it was a scream. “Help, why won’t anybody help me?” But his voice failed him at that very moment. It was gone, and soon everything would be gone, for all eternity, his breath, his pulse, every thought, everything.

Tears that he couldn’t wipe away blurred his vision of Nora who was still standing in front of the table. She emitted a long-drawn-out wail, quieter than a scream, louder than a groan. He squinted.

She’d taken the gun, her right hand shaking like that of an old woman. “I’m sorry,” she said. Frantic, he hurled himself forwards and backwards, almost toppling the chair. The feel of cold metal on his temple. Then he grew still.

“Close your eyes” she said, resting her hand gently on his head. He felt her fear, just as strong as his own. But she would continue to breathe, to talk, to live.

“No,” he whispered soundlessly and looked up at Nora, now standing directly in front of him. He wished he had never heard her name.

**N47°35.285 E013°17.278**

The morning mist enveloped her like a damp shroud. The dead woman lay there on her stomach. The grass beneath her was wet with dew and blood. The cows wouldn't graze there any more now. They didn't have to, the meadow was big enough and they were unsettled by that thing in the shadow of the cliff. Just after sunrise the brown one had wandered over to it, lowered her heavy head and curled her rough tongue around the strands of flaxen hair. But she'd deemed her find inedible and had gone back to the others.

They kept their distance. Especially those lying down, chewing the cud and staring at the water. But the grazing cows too kept clear of the cliff. The smell of dead animal made them nervous and they preferred to graze where the first sun-rays were penetrating the mist, speckling the meadow with light.

The brown cow trotted to the trough to have a drink. With every step the tinny clatter of her bell could be heard. Her fellow beasts did not so much as flap their ears, but continued to gaze stoically at the river, their jaws grinding relentlessly and their tails swatting away the first flies of the day.

A breath of wind passed through the meadow, blowing the woman's hair aside to reveal her face. The short, upturned nose. The birthmark at the right corner of her mouth. Lips that were far too pale. Only the forehead stayed covered, where blood had stuck hair and skin together. Gradually the morning fog thinned to just a few veils which were eventually blown away, giving a clear view of the meadow, the animals, and the unbidden gift that somebody had left for them. The brown cow's muffled moos greeted the day.

Beatrice always took two steps at a time. She skidded down the corridor making sure to pass swiftly by the second door on the left. Just seven more steps. Six. There was her office, and except for Florin, nobody was in there. Thank heavens!

"Was he here already?" She flung her rucksack on the swivel chair and the file on her desk.

"And a good morning to you too!"

How comforting that somebody radiated calm around here. She threw her jacket at the coat stand, missed and cursed.

"Now before you do anything sit yourself down and take a deep breath." Florin stood up, picked up her jacket and hung it carefully on a hook.

"Thanks." She turned on her computer and spread out the contents of the file hurriedly on her desk. "I would have been on time if Jakob's teacher hadn't delayed me."

Florin stood with his back to her, fiddling with the espresso machine. She saw him nodding.

“What was it this time?”

“He threw a tantrum and took it out on the class mascot.”

“Oh. Was it a live animal then?”

“No. A cuddly toy, Elvira the owl. You wouldn’t believe the drama that ensued. At least ten children burst into tears. I offered to send in a Crisis Intervention Team, but the teacher didn’t see the funny side. Anyway, I have to organize a replacement for Elvira by Friday.”

“That’s no small challenge.”

He frothed up some milk, pressed the double espresso button and crowned his masterpiece with a dusting of cocoa. His composure was catching. Beatrice realized she was smiling when Florin placed the steaming cup in front of her.

He sat down at the desk opposite her, scrutinizing her with a furrowed brow. “You look as though you didn’t get much sleep.”

*You can say that again.* “Everything’s fine,” she muttered, concentrating on her coffee and hoping that Florin would be satisfied with this short answer.

“No calls in the middle of the night?”

Yes. One at half past eleven and one at three in the morning. The second call woke Mina up and it took her an hour to get back to sleep.

Beatrice shrugged her shoulders. “He’ll give up at some point.”

“Bea, you simply have to change your number. Don’t give him the opportunity to run you ragged. You’re a police officer, for God’s sake! There are measures you can take to stop him.”

The coffee was perfect. In the two years they had been working together Florin had gradually worked out the ideal combination of coffee, milk and sugar. Beatrice leaned back and closed her eyes for a few seconds, longing for a quiet moment, just one.

“If I do change my number he’ll be at my door in two shakes of a lamb’s tail. After all, he is the father and has a right to contact his children.”

She heard Florin sighing. “By the way,” he said, “Hoffmann was here of course.”

Shit! “Really? Why is my monitor not full of post-its then?”

“I placated him by telling him that you’d called to say you had an outside appointment. He said nothing, just pulled a sour face. He’s stuck in meetings today, so he should leave us alone.”

Fantastic. Beatrice put the cup down, tried to loosen up her shoulder muscles and began to sort through the papers on her desk. She was finally going to get to that report on the stabbing that Hoffmann had been hassling her about. She glanced up at Florin who was staring at his computer screen looking quite perplexed with a strand of his dark hair almost blocking his vision. Clickclickclick. Beatrice’s attention now turned to his hand, resting loosely over the mouse. Nice hands on a man. Her old vice.

“Having problems?” she asked.

“Intractable.”

“Can I be of assistance?”

A deep frown formed between his eyebrows. “I don’t know. Antipasti are not something to be taken lightly you know.”

She laughed “I see. When are you expecting Anneke?”

“In three days time. I think I’ll make vitello tonnato. Or maybe bruschetta after all? Damn it, I wish I knew if she was off carbohydrates at the moment.” All this talk about menus wasn’t such a good idea. Immediately, Beatrice’s stomach began to rumble. She quickly went over what she’d eaten so far today, came up with a total of two biscuits and decided that she was more than entitled to be hungry.

“I vote for vitello tonnato” she said “and a nip into the cafe downstairs.”

“Already?” He met her look and smiled benignly. “Ok. Just let me print this pa...”

The telephone interrupted him. It took Beatrice only seconds to gather from Florin’s sombre countenance that she’d have to forego her tuna baguette.

“We’ll be right there.” He put down the receiver and looked up. “We’ve got a body, female, near Abtenau. It looks like she fell from a cliff.”

“Oh God. Sounds like a climbing accident.”

Florin’s eyebrows formed two dark ridges over his eyes.

“Hardly. Unless she was climbing with her hands tied.”

The body was a bright patch on the green grass flanked by two uniformed police officers. A tall man in dungarees with no shirt on underneath looked curiously in their direction. He was standing in the next field, trying to control a small herd of cows. For a brief moment he raised his hand, as if he wanted to wave to Beatrice and Florin, but then he let it fall again.

To one side of the meadow an almost sheer cliff face towered at least 20 metres high, in craggy contrast to the picture postcard landscape around it.

Apparently Drasche and Ebner from forensics had arrived just a few minutes before. They were already busying themselves with utensils in their overalls and greeted their colleagues with a quick nod.

Directly beside the fence a man was kneeling and filling out a form, resting it against his doctor’s bag to write.

“Good morning”, he said without looking up. “Are you from the Federal Criminal Police?”

“Yes, I’m Florin Wenninger and this is my colleague Beatrice Kaspary. What can you tell us so far about the dead woman?”

With a sigh, the doctor put the cap back on his pen.

“Not much. Female, aged between thirty-five and forty. I think that somebody pushed her over the cliff last night. The cause of death is likely to be either cranial trauma or a ruptured aorta, her neck certainly wasn’t broken. You’ll have to ask the coroner for more details.”

“Time of death?”

The doctor puffed out his cheeks. “Between 2 and 4 a.m., but don’t hold me to that, I’m only supposed to establish death.”

Drasche plodded past them with the forensics kit in his hand.

“Who touched the body?”

One of the police officers spoke up hesitantly, “The doctor and myself. But only to feel the pulse. I also looked for ID or a wallet, but found neither. We didn’t move the body.”

“Good.” Drasche beckoned Ebner to him, the latter already with a camera in his hand. While the pair of them were taking photographs and gathering samples to place in small containers, Beatrice’s gaze remained on the dead woman. She tried to block everything out – her colleagues, the sound of traffic on the main road, the jingle of the cow bells. Only the woman mattered now.

She lay on her stomach with her head turned to one side. Her legs were bent at the knees and facing right, as though frozen in mid-sprint. Her hands were tied behind her back, the wrists tightly bound with cable tie.

Her eyes were closed, but the mouth was half-open, as though death had come for the woman while she was speaking.

Beatrice’s head automatically filled with images: the woman being dragged through the darkness. There’s the abyss. She puts up a fight, pulls back, pleads for her life, but her murderer’s got a firm grip on her, he shoves her to the edge, waits until she can sense the sheer drop below her. Then the gentlest of pushes in the back.

“Everything alright?” Florin taps her gently on the arm.

“Sure.”

“I’m just going to have a word with the others. You probably want to submerge yourself a bit, right?”

Submerging, that was his word for it. Beatrice nodded.

“But don’t dive too deep.”

She followed him with her eyes, saw him approach the two officers and get into conversation with them. She took a deep breath. It didn’t smell of death here, just of cow dung and meadow flowers. She watched Drasche as he tied a plastic bag around the bound hands. If it was up to her, she’d climb right over that barrier to have a closer look at the body, but the forensics team didn’t look too kindly on that, and Drasche in particular could get really nasty. Without allowing her focus to stray from the dead woman, Beatrice traced an arc around the perimeter of the meadow in search of a new perspective. Her focus turned to the victim’s clothes: a bright red silk jacket over a floral-patterned blouse. Expensive jeans. No shoes. The soles of her feet were very dirty with some blood on them, as if the woman had had to endure a long barefoot trek. But underneath the dirt there were dark traces on each foot. Small black marks.

Or perhaps...

Beatrice went down on her honkers and squinted, but she couldn't make out details from that distance. "Hey, Gerd!"

Drasche didn't stop working for the blink of an eye. "What is it?"

"Can you have a look at the victim's feet for me?"

"Just a minute." He carefully secured the transparent bag with adhesive tape before taking a closer look at the lower half of the corpse.

"Oh fuck."

"There's something there, isn't there? Like letters, am I right?"

Drasche called Ebner over and got him to take a few close-ups of the feet.

"Come on, tell me!" She lifted the wire slightly and ducked in under the fence. "What is it?"

"Looks like numbers. A different combination of numbers on each foot. Will you please stay where you are!"

Beatrice was finding it difficult to hold herself back "Can I see the photos?"

Drasche and Ebner looked at each other with a mixture of exasperation and resignation.

"Show her them." Drasche snapped. "She'll give you no peace otherwise."

Ebner switched the camera to view mode and held the display in front of Beatrice's face.

Numbers. But not only numbers. The first character on the left foot looked like an N. It was written with an unsteady hand, the diagonal line had broken off in the middle and had been completed from that point. It reminded her of the letters Mina had produced at kindergarten, crooked as a witch's finger. After the N came a four then a seven and something that looked like a small o that had wandered upwards. Then another four followed by a six, another six, a zero, and a five. Irregular black strokes.

She enlarged the image. "Was that drawn on her feet? With a water-proof marker?"

The other foot. Again a letter followed by a series of numbers. A wobbly E followed by an O or a zero, a one and a three. Then another of those small high-set circles. Then a gap followed by five more numbers: two, one, seven, one, eight.

"No, they haven't been just drawn on." Drasche sounded hoarse. "I'd say tattooed."

"What?" She studied the image more closely. Now that he'd said it, it seemed to be the only plausible explanation. Tattooed. There of all places. Hopefully it was done post-mortem.

She wrote down the number combinations in her notebook.

N47°46.605

E013°21.793

She'd encountered a similar arrangement of letters and numbers somewhere before, but where?

It had nothing to do with computers or telephone numbers. For Christ's sake! "I should know this" she muttered, more to herself than to the two forensic scientists.

"Indeed you should", Drasche spoke through his surgical mask. "If you promise to leave us in

peace afterwards, I'll put you out of your misery.”

“That’s a deal.”

“Enter the figures into your sat nav. They’re coordinates.”

Beatrice would have liked to pass this new piece of information on to Florin immediately, but she saw that he was in the middle of interviewing the man with the cows.

“I was about to bring the cows into the milking parlour at half past six when I found her. Knew right away that she was dead.”

“Were the cows the whole night in the meadow?”

“Aye, after milking them in the evening I bring them out and fetch them back in in the morning. The farmyard is just 400 metres away, it’s no problem.”

So the cows had trampled around the field all night. There was little hope of finding any good examples of the murderer’s footprints. If there were any in the first place. Beatrice drew up beside Florin and extended her hand to the farmer.

“Beatrice Kaspary.”

“Pleased to meet you. Friedrich Raininger.” He didn’t let go of her hand. “Are you also from the police?”

“Yes, why do you ask?”

A wry smile “Because you’re far too pretty to be doing such ghastly work. Wouldn’t you agree?”

The question was directed at Florin.

“I can assure you that Ms Kaspary is not only very pretty, but also extremely intelligent, which is critical for our ghastly work.” His voice had grown a tad cooler, but farmer Raininger was oblivious to that. He was now beaming at Beatrice and didn’t stop even after she’d managed to extricate her hand from his grip.

“I’d like to continue with my questions now if you’ve no objections.” Florin’s voice was bourbon on ice, cold, smooth, and crisp. “Did you notice anything unusual yesterday evening?”

“No. Same as always.”

“Ok. And did you hear anything during the night? Voices or screams?”

“No. But tell me, was the woman pushed from the cliff? Or was she killed with a hammer? There was that much blood on her head.”

He sounded eager now. Hardly surprising. They’d be all ears down at the pub when he’d tell them his story, so he needed details.

“We don’t know yet. Is the cliff easily accessible?”

The farmer thought for a moment. “Aye. You can get to it from the other side easily enough. There’s even a narrow road leading almost all the way up to it.”

Beatrice saw Florin writing TYRE TRACKS!!! in his notebook. So far, the coordinates were the only thing she’d written down in hers. She made a scribbled shorthand note of what

Raininger had told them.

“Does the woman seem familiar?”, she asked. “Have you seen her here before?”

The farmer shook his head vigorously. “No, never. And I’ve a good memory when it comes to faces. I’ll definitely not forget yours in a hurry. And the colour of your hair! Is that natural?”

His broad grin revealed a missing tooth on the top row of his teeth.

“If you don’t mind”, Beatrice made a point of speaking gently, “we’re the ones asking the questions around here.”

But they’d already gotten all the useful information the man could give them and dismissed him and his cows. Evidently sorry that the interview had come to an end so soon, the farmer kept glancing over his shoulders at them as he made his way back to the farmyard. Beatrice waited until he was out of earshot.

“Her feet” she said.

“What about her feet?”

“They’re tattooed. On the ... soles.”

He immediately grasped what she was trying to say. “So you think the murderer left her a parting memento?”

“It’s certainly possible. But I actually think it’s a message.” She showed him both rows of numbers.

“Somebody tattooed that on her feet?”

“Yes. The north coordinates on the left foot, the east coordinates on the right foot.”

Florin walked straight back across the meadow to the place where the body lay, apparently unconcerned about the damage a cow pat could do to his bespoke shoes. He stopped at the fence and looked over at the body with his head cocked to one side.

Beatrice had almost caught up with him when she felt her mobile vibrate in the pocket of her jacket.

“Hello.”

“I’m not going to let you make a fool of me any longer.” Every word was oozing venom.

“Achim, not now.”

“Oh, of course, it’s inconvenient, isn’t it always?” He’d soon be raising his voice. “Whether it’s about the children or ...”

“The children are fine and I’m just going to hang up.”

“No you’re not, you ...”

She hung up and put the mobile back in her pocket.

Deep breaths now. Come on, concentrate on what you’re doing. Christ, her hands were shaking, she wouldn’t be able to think straight. She interlocked her fingers and walked up to Florin.

“I’d like to know where her shoes are”, he mused. “If she lost them in the fall then they have to be around here somewhere. Do you want to tell me why you’re so nervous?”

She didn't answer the question and he lowered his chin knowingly. "It's Achim, isn't it?" As soon as she noticed Florin's concerned look, she drew back her shoulders and straightened herself. "Right, so her shoes, you said", picking up where they had left off. "I'm sure forensics will take a look at the cliff. If she really was pushed over, there's a chance we'll find the shoes up there."

He hadn't let his gaze wander for one second. "I'm an idiot."

"Why? We don't know about the shoes yet, but who knows, maybe we will find them on the cliff—"

"No it's not that. You still haven't eaten anything, have you? You must be faint with the hunger."

"Oh." She was suddenly aware of a sharp sensation inside her – yes, possibly hunger – but no great appetite. "No, lunch can wait. Dead bodies somehow spoil my appetite."

Best not to dwell on the subject. A light breeze made the flimsy plastic bag around the dead woman's hands rustle as though she herself was kneading it.

The mortuary van careened down the country lane and a grey metal coffin was lifted out. With a quick nod, Drasche gave the all clear to remove the body. As they were lifting her, the wind caught her hair. For the last time. Beatrice turned away.

Before the van drove off to the forensic lab, Florin leaned in to the window on the passenger side. "Tell Dr. Vogt I want the first results today, if at all possible."

Beatrice's mobile began to vibrate again in her jacket pocket. Achim again, no doubt. But this time she simply wouldn't answer the call. Just to be sure she took out the phone, looked at the display and heaved a deep sigh. The call was from the school.

"He poured the entire contents of his milk carton into the flower pots. That's just not on, you know. The plants belong to the whole class and if they die you will have to replace them."

"I understand. Let me know if that is the case."

"He's really quite a difficult child." The teacher on the other end of the line sighed. "Please talk to him again. He simply must learn that there are rules that apply to everybody."

"Of course. Did he say why he did it?"

The teacher snorted "Yes, he said that water was too thin and he wanted to give the flowers something decent to drink."

*Jakob my boy, my dear little Jakob.*

"Right, then at least he didn't mean any harm."

"Probably. But he's seven for heaven's sake. When will he learn to do what he's told and obey rules?"

Beatrice suppressed the urge to scream down the phone at the woman.

"I understand. I'll have a word with him."

"Thanks. Let's hope it has some effect." She put the phone down.

Now feeling completely wretched, Beatrice put her mobile back into her pocket.

On Florin's insistence they didn't drive straight back to the office but stopped at Ginzkey's en route.

"Vegetable curry helps restore one's inner balance" he pontificated and ordered two portions, although Beatrice now felt as if the entrance to her stomach had been sewn shut. It was only when the fragrant plate was put before her and she'd taken her first mouthful that her hunger returned with a vengeance. She devoured the curry before ordering cake and a hot chocolate. "Sugar therapy", she explained. "Generates momentary feelings of happiness. Once I start feeling sick, I'll forget all about that other stuff."

"Would it spoil your appetite if we talked about the case?", Florin asked.

"Not in the slightest. Let's check the missing persons register when we get back to the office. Before we know who she was, we're just groping in the dark."

"Not exactly, thanks to your discovery."

"Do you really think the coordinates have something to do with her death? The tattoos could be old. We should wait until we've got the coroner's report."

"You're right." He drank his espresso in a single gulp. "But I will just enter those coordinates in my sat nav. No use letting a flash of inspiration pass us by."

It had become overcast outside. They hurried back into the office where a message from Hoffmann awaited them. He wanted information on the new case. Florin went in search of the boss. Beatrice turned on her computer and went to the missing persons register.

A fifty-five year old woman with short grey hair who had gone missing from the regional psychiatric hospital. No. An unemployed twenty-two year old who had threatened suicide. No again.

When she looked at the third notice she felt that familiar little jolt, like something clicking into place, the wrench of her inner dowsing rod.

A woman, thirty-nine years old, blond with green eyes, about five foot seven, of slim build. With a dark brown birthmark at the right corner of her mouth. Notable features: none. *So no tattoos.*

Name: Nora Papenberg

Address: Nesselthalerstraße in Salzburg.

The woman's husband had reported her missing four days previously. Beatrice looked at the photo only after she had read the other details. It was a snapshot, hardly appropriate for a missing persons poster. The Nora Papenberg in the photo was laughing heartily, her eyes were closed and she was holding a glass of champagne in her right hand.

Mouth open and eyes shut. Just like in the meadow and yet so terribly different.

Beatrice noted the similarities: the round chin, the up-turned nose and the birthmark at the

corner of her mouth. Their body had a name.

She revealed it to Florin as soon as he came back from his meeting with Hoffmann. “Nora Papenberg. I’ve already googled her. She worked as a writer in a small advertising agency. There are a few photos on the Internet that leave little doubt that it’s her.” She pushed a pile of printouts over to Florin’s side of the desk.

“Then we can get going.” The enthusiasm in his voice sounded forced and Beatrice knew why. The most difficult part of the job came now – telling the relatives. Disbelief, tears, paroxysms of grief. *No way, it’s not my husband, my wife, my child. There must be some mistake. There has to be.*

They were already stuck in traffic at the Karolinenbrücke and Beatrice took a sneaky look at her watch. No, she wouldn’t make it now. She took her mobile out of her pocket.

“Mum?”

“Bea! Nice of you to call. Are you finished work already?”

“No, unfortunately. That’s the problem. There’s this new murder case and ...”

A maternal sigh at the other end of the line. “And you want me to pick up the children from day-care?”

“Yes please. I’ll be as quick as I can, and you don’t need to feed them – I’ll look after that later.”

“Frozen pizza. I know.”

Beatrice shut her eyes. As though she wasn’t feeling guilty enough as it was.

“No, I was planning to do a broccoli bake anyway this evening, that takes no time at all.”

If a broccoli bake wouldn’t redeem her in her mother’s eyes, then nothing would.

“Alright. I’ll collect them. But I’d really appreciate it if you’d give me a bit more notice next time. I do have other things to do, you know.”

“Yes, I know. Thanks.”

They turned into Aigner Straße and the traffic began to flow better. “You don’t have to tell him.” Florin was concentrating on the Audi ahead of them. “I’ll do it, ok? You can just take notes. But do kick me if I forget something important.”

She could have hugged him. He was volunteering to take the short straw, like she sometimes did when she played cards with the children, just to see them giggling and hopping for joy at having gotten the better of her.

Did Nora Papenberg have children?

While Florin was parking opposite the house, Nora scanned the garden. No sign of a sand pit, a child’s bike or a trampoline. Only one of those Japanese pebble gardens where you can make patterns with a rake.

“We’re too early, he won’t be at home yet”, Florin said as he turned off the engine.

They rang the bell anyway. Almost immediately the door was opened by a man in jeans and a check sports jacket over a dark-green polo shirt.

“Are you Konrad Papenberg?”

“Yes.”

“We’re from the police.”

Beatrice saw the man flinch, saw him frantically studying their faces for a smile or some gesture that would give the all-clear, saw how it dawned on him.

“My wife?”

“Yes. I’m afraid we’ve bad news for you Mr Papenberg.”

“Please, come in.” He held the door open for them with his pale face averted. Most people looked away then, before the inevitable had been said, as though trying to prolong this state, the last seconds of blessed ignorance. He offered them a seat before jumping up and fetching them a glass of water from the kitchen without even asking them if they were thirsty. The glasses shook in his hands so much that he spilled half their contents on his way back to the sofa.

Florin waited until he was seated and looking at them. “We’ve every reason to believe that we’ve found your wife. She was discovered this morning in a field near Abtenau.”

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

“We think we’ve been able to identify her based on the photo in the missing persons register. She had no form of identification with her.”

“But she always carries ID ... in her handbag.” The man swallowed loudly and squeezed the fingers on his left hand with his right hand.

Beatrice wrote *missing bag* in her notebook.

“Of course you will have the opportunity to identify her in person, if you feel up to that”, Florin added kindly. “I’m very sorry.”

Papenberg didn’t answer. He focused on a point on the coffee table and began to move his lips soundlessly while barely shaking his head.

According to Hoffmann, ninety percent of women were murdered by their husbands. He was nearly always right. But this man was reacting so quietly. He didn’t believe it yet.

“What – I mean ... how did she –”

“At the moment, we have to assume she was murdered.”

A shivery intake of breath. “No.” Tears gathered in the man’s eyes. He covered his face with his hands. They gave him time, Bea held out a tissue to him, which he noticed only after a few seconds and accepted hesitantly.

“You saw your wife last on Friday?”, Florin asked.

Papenberg nodded. Squinted. “In the evening she went to an office dinner. She arrived there, but left at nine thirty. I’ve spoken with her colleagues; they say she wanted to go home because

of a headache.”

Now he looked at Beatrice, strangely hopeful, as if she could come up with an equation from her notes that would make sense of everything. “Her colleague Rosa said that she spoke with somebody on her mobile before she left.”

That was important. “We will be talking with your wife’s colleagues”, said Beatrice. “But we didn’t find any mobile phone with her. Do you know what model she used?”

“A Nokia N8, I gave it to her ... for her birthday.” His voice broke now and his upper body doubled over, trembling with a stifled sob.

They gave him time to recover his composure.

“Could you give me your wife’s number? We’ll check out who she spoke to.”

Konrad Papenberg nodded and took out his own mobile phone from his trouser pocket. He opened his contacts list and let Beatrice take down the number. “I called her at least thirty times that night.” It was difficult to make out the words. His voice was so laden with grief.

“But she had her mobile switched off. I could only get through to her mailbox.”

“When you reported her missing, you told the police that your wife had her car with her. Is that right?”

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

“A red Honda Civic?”

“Yes.”

“We’ve just one more question, Mr Papenberg.”

“Yes?”

“Did your wife have any unusual physical features?”

He looked up now. “How do you mean?”

“Scars, birthmarks, tattoos?”

He brought a shaking hand to his face and pointed to a place just above the right-hand corner of his mouth. “She’s got a birthmark here. Her trademark.”

“I see.” Florin cleared his throat. “Nothing else? No tattoos?”

“No. She always found them cheap.” His eyes shimmered with hope. “Maybe it’s not Nora after all?”

Beatrice and Florin exchanged glances.

“I’m afraid there’s no doubt that it’s her”, Beatrice said. “Not just because of the birthmark.”

For now, they had enough information. “We won’t intrude on you any longer. Is there anybody you’d like us to call? So you’re not alone. If you like we can get somebody from the Crisis Intervention Team to drop around.”

“My brother.” Papenberg’s voice sounded choked. “I’ll call my brother.”

Beatrice and Florin waited in the next room while he was on the telephone. There were framed photographs on top of a chest of drawers: Nora Papenberg in every situation imaginable.

Bronzed in a summer dress at the beach. In hiking gear at the summit of a mountain. In a hat and down jacket building a snowman with friends. Always laughing and moving, but it was the same woman they'd found dead that morning, no mistaking it.

"From the time she went missing to the time she was killed five days passed", Beatrice thought aloud. "That's a long time."

"Yes. It would seem to suggest that she was held captive before her death. What's your impression of the husband? I don't think he's putting on an act."

"I agree."

"But we should still sound him out."

"Sure."

The door to the living room opened and Papenberg came out. His eyes were now red and swollen. "My brother will be here in twenty minutes. If you've no more questions ... "

"Of course. We'll leave you in peace now." They were already at the front door when Beatrice realised that she still had the photograph with the snowman in her hand. She could feel herself blushing and wanted to put it back on the chest of drawers, but Papenberg took the photograph from her.

"That was such a lovely day. Like candy floss." he whispered. "Nora said that. Icy cold and clear. She adores the snow, nature, everything."

"I'm very sorry." Beatrice muttered and hated herself for that trite phrase. But the man seemed hardly aware of their presence now. He nodded absently with his eyes riveted on his wife, laughing for evermore against the blinding white of the snow.

"That's the Easter bunny, do you see him? And that's an angel who's just drilled a hole in the clouds. That's why it's raining." Jakob held the drawing so close to the steaming saucepan that wrinkles began to form on the paper. Beatrice guided him gently in the direction of the fridge and stuck up the masterpiece using two magnets. "Beautiful. Did you draw that at school?"

"Yes. Ms Sieber gave me a star for it." He was beaming from ear to ear and Beatrice went down on her honkers to be able to give him a proper hug. At least he'd had one little triumph today.

"Look here." He wriggled out of her arms and held his mouth open with two fingers. A loose tooth.

"Wow!" she exclaimed. At that moment she became aware of the hissing sound of boiling water spewing from the saucepan onto the hob and from there onto the floor. Beatrice cursed under her breath, pulled the saucepan to one side and turned down the heat.

"Go and play with Mina, now. I'll call you when dinner's ready."

"But Mina doesn't want to play with me", Jakob whined. "She says I'm a baby and I don't have a clue about anything." But he still toddled off in the direction of the playroom, making

loud engine noises on his way.

Beatrice cleaned up the mess from the hob and the floor, chopped up some ham, and peeled potatoes before finally collapsing into a kitchen chair once she'd put the bake in the oven.

There was a letter from Schubert and Kirchner on the table in front of her. Achim's law firm. She threw it unopened onto the dreaded to-do pile and fished her notebook out of her bag.

*Advertising agency: Who was at the dinner? Did anybody leave with Nora Papenberg?*

*Telephone call!!! How long afterwards did Papenberg leave? What exactly did she say before leaving? Could she have been going to meet somebody?*

*Find out caller's number.*

*Where's her car?*

*Five days before the murder. Why so long???*

She went back to the notes she'd made just after leaving the scene of the crime.

*A killing like an execution. Why does somebody push his victim over a cliff?*

She read the farmer's statement. He hadn't seen or heard a thing, everything had been the same as always. She'd written the coordinates above his statement. Beatrice closed her eyes and tried to recall the feet, facing sideways with one number after another scrawled on the soles. The tattoo certainly hadn't been done by a professional, that was clear. It was the murderer's handiwork. Or the victim's? When the egg-timer began to ring she opened her eyes. The bake was ready.

"Are we spending the weekend at Dad's house again?", Mina asked as she divided her broccoli into microscopic pieces.

"Yes, that's the plan. Why are you asking? Do you not want to spend the weekend there?"

"No, I do." She deigned to put a green morsel of broccoli into her mouth. "He said he might get me a cat. If it lives with Dad, can I then go there more often?"

Beatrice's food stuck in her throat. "We'll see." *A cat!*

"Yeah. Me too, Mum!", Jakob mumbled with his mouth full.

"Forget it, freak, it's my cat!"

"Stupid cow."

Mina ignored him. "If Dad calls again tonight, can I talk to him?"

"Me too!", Jakob shrieked in delight.

"No. There'll be no telephoning at night in this house. Dad will soon get the message."

She got the children ready for bed and tucked them in, letting the CD player read them their good-night story because she was so tired. Then she sat on the balcony with a glass of red wine and went over her sparse notes again. She kept going back to the coordinates.

She swirled the wine around her mouth, trying in vain to taste the blackberry and tobacco notes extolled on the label, and then downed the entire glass in one gulp. Sleep beckoned. She switched off her mobile and disconnected the house phone. Achim would have to find another

source of entertainment tonight.

Three yellow post-its awaited her the next morning on the monitor of her computer, covered in Hoffmann's illegible scribble. The reports. She rolled her eyes.

"We'll let Stefan do the paperwork, he needs the practice. And writing reports is character-building. He's already gone through the list of Nora Papenberg's phone conversations – and guess what?" Florin was standing at the espresso machine in an uncustomary get-up – combat pants, T-shirt, hiking boots – putting the final touches on his coffee-milk froth-cocoa powder creation for Beatrice. "The incoming call that dragged our victim away from her dinner was made from a telephone booth on Maxglaner Hauptstraße. I've sent somebody from forensics to have a look, but I doubt if he'll find anything." He looked up "Speaking of telephone calls – how did last night go? Did he leave you in peace for once?"

"Yes, because I plugged out anything that could have rang. But I did have seven angry messages in my mailbox this morning. He was worried sick about the children because he couldn't get through." She took a sip of her coffee. It tasted wonderful.

"The main thing is you got a night's sleep. Look, the coroner's report hasn't arrived yet, so I'd suggest that we concentrate on another aspect of the case first."

"The coordinates?"

"Right." He waved his mobile phone in front of her. "I've just installed new sat nav software. It looks like we're headed for somewhere in the countryside." He opened out a map on the desk and pointed to a wooded area near Wolfgang Lake.

"There? Are you sure?" Beatrice herself wasn't sure what would await them at the place indicated by the coordinates, but she was expecting something a bit more spectacular than just trees.

They drove in Florin's car. Beatrice pulled down the passenger-seat window. It was only the beginning of May, but it felt like the height of Summer. Argentinian tango wafted from the CD-player. For one brief moment she imagined that they were on a day-trip, with a picnic basket on the backseat and all the time in the world in the luggage compartment.

That got her thinking. "What if the place we're driving too only has a personal significance? What if it was the location of a fight? Or a first kiss, a promise, lovemaking, something that happened between people without leaving any visible traces. Then even if it is the key to this case, we're never going to find the lock."

Florin just smiled. "It's possible. But I still think we shouldn't ignore the tattoos. I can't imagine that they won't be of some help to us."

He was right of course. And at the very worst, they'd have spent a sunny May morning in the countryside, far away from Hoffmann and his post-its. It was worth it just for that.

"What do you think we'll find there?", she asked as the car began to wind its way up the

corkscrew mountain road.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Let’s just see what we find. If I have a fixed idea about what to expect, then chances are I’ll overlook what’s really important just because it doesn’t meet my expectations. By the way, you’ll be pleased to know I finally came to a decision.” Florin raised his eyebrows, a gesture that said *ask me*.

“What about?”

“Carpaccio di Manzo.”

“What?”

“The antipasto problem, don’t you remember? Carpaccio is the perfect solution. Anneke will just love it.”

The breeze carried the smell of fresh earth and lilac into the car.

“She’ll love it.”

They parked the car opposite a guest house. The path in front of them led through a meadow with villas on the left side and a beautifully restored old farmhouse on the right. Florin held out his mobile in front of him like a compass. “It’s another four hundred and thirty metres as the crow flies if we keep north-west. But I think we should stick to the path for the time being instead of getting into the rough straight away.”

Apart from an elderly couple in nordic-walking gear, there was nobody else in the woods that morning. They crossed an unbelievably clear stream and turned right when they came to a yellow signpost marked “Steinklüfte” [transl.: rock ravine].

“Not far now.” Florin held his mobile phone out to Beatrice. The chequered flag that marked their target on the display was already in view. Now steeper than before, their path meandered between huge rock formations, past fallen trees with fungi growing out of their stumps. One tree trunk straddled the path like an archway.

“There’ll be nothing to see there but landscape”, Beatrice muttered. “How far more do we have to go?”

“One hundred and twenty metres.”

She began to keep an eye out for something out of the ordinary, but that was difficult when you didn’t have even the slightest inkling about what that something might be. Rocks, lots of them, in all different shapes and sizes. Another stream.

“Forty metres”, Florin announced.

Everywhere they looked there were gigantic rocks leaning against each other for support. Trees were even growing on top of some of the rugged, moss-clad formations.

“Fifteen metres.” Florin came to a halt. “We should be able to see something from here.” He began to walk more slowly than before, with his eyes fixed on the phone. Beatrice tried to ignore the sinking feeling in her stomach. Ok, there was nothing here, but they hadn’t taken a

proper look yet. It didn't mean that the coordinates were utterly meaningless. They'd take their time and be thorough. They had to assume that there was more to the tattoos than simply a murderer with a weird fetish for feet and numbers.

"We're here." Florin stopped walking. "It's somewhere within a three-metre radius, my phone can't give us a more precise reading."

Dry leaves rustled under their feet as they slowly took one step at a time. This spot was no different from any other in the wood. Trees. Rock formations. Dead wood.

Beatrice took the camera out of her rucksack and began to take photos, trying not to leave anything out. It wasn't unlikely that the pictures would reveal more than what they could see there right now.

"Just ahead there's something called the Devil's Gorge", Florin reported. "Good name, but the coordinates don't fit."

"Let's make a note of it just the same." Beatrice sat down on a knee-high rock and surveyed the surrounding area. "Am I about right here?"

"Yes, pretty much. It – whatever it is – is about eight metres east of your position."

She breathed in the warm Summer air with its pungent aromas: sap, leaves, earth.

Eight metres.

She looked down at the ground around her. No, nothing unusual. Just rocks.

Wait a minute – could whatever they were looking be above them? In the trees?

Shielding her eyes against the sun with her hand, Beatrice looked up at the branches above them. But all she could see were trees.

Nothing that would give them a clue, no sign.

Beatrice could tell from Florin's expression that he was disappointed too, but his voice was upbeat when he spoke. "Time will tell that you were on the right track here, Bea. It always does. Who knows what significance this place has for the murderer. Something he saw, heard, or experienced here, maybe years ago."

"Yes." She took the water bottle he held out to her and took three large gulps. But it felt wrong. There's something here, but we just don't see it, we're blind.

We don't see it. The thought wouldn't let her go. We don't see it because we're not supposed to? Or because we need to make more of an effort?

Her gaze settled on one of the rocks set above ground-level with a stone leaning against it. The stone was almost the same colour as the rock behind it, just a shade lighter, but there was no trace of moss on its surface.

"Or because it's hidden", she said resolutely.

"Excuse me?"

Beatrice stood up and walked a few steps over to the rock. She had to climb to the spot she'd been looking at, hoisting herself up with the help of a tree whose roots were wrapped around a

boulder further below. With her free hand she examined the stone. As she had suspected, it was just leaning against the rock and covered the entrance to a hollow behind it, a dark hole. She took some close-ups of the rock, having trouble maintaining her balance. For a nanosecond the flash revealed something bright inside the small cavern.

“Well, would you look at that!” Florin climbed up to her and pulled out a torch from his rucksack. Its beam of light fell on the earth inside the hollow and a spider scarping under a few brown leaves, before coming to a halt at something white and plastic further on.

Without saying anything, both Beatrice and Florin reached for their plastic gloves and slipped them on. Florin reached into the hollow with one arm and produced a container with a blue and white cover. A food storage box. “Looks brand new”, Beatrice remarked.

“It feels heavy. Full. Did you photograph everything? Good, then let’s get down from here.” They kneeled beside each other on the forest floor and Florin flipped open the box and carefully removed the lid.

Something large wrapped in kitchen paper. And on top of that a neatly folded note, written on a computer. Florin unfolded it and Beatrice drew closer to him so she could read it too.

*Congratulations – you’ve found it!*

*This container is part of a game, a kind of treasure hunt using GPS. If you’ve come upon this by chance, then the hunt is already over for you. Close the container and put it back right where you found it. It’s better for you, trust me.*

*If you were looking for it in the first place, then you’re clearly a lot less stupid than most in your profession. I’m sure the contents of my “treasure chest” will be of interest to you. In an exception to the usual rules of the game, this time you don’t have to return the container to the place you found it. Take it with you and check it for fingerprints. You’re bound to find some...  
TFTH*

“Sounds as though he hid this here especially for us”, Florin reasoned slowly. He folded the note and slipped it into a plastic bag. Both of them stared at the container and the thing inside it, just waiting to be revealed. Then Florin went ahead. Some irrational part of Beatrice hoped he wouldn’t do it, but then the paper fell away.

A fake, she thought at first. A Hallowe’en dummy in its original wrapping. But her stomach was quicker than her head; before she’d had a chance to register all the details, she was hit by a wave of nausea.

“Fuck”, Florin whispered.

“It’s real, isn’t it?”

He took a deep breath and swallowed. “Looks like it. Do you see the frayed edges of the wound? I’m no forensic scientist, but ... that looks as if it was done with a saw.”

In a trained reflex, Beatrice summoned up enough willpower to put her imagination on hold and examine the object in front of her as soberly as possible.

A hand. Male. Severed just below the wrist and wrapped in thick transparent plastic. Like vacuum-packed meat and just as white, with blueish stains on the fingertips and around the nails.

She forced herself to look closer at the amputation wound, at the bones and a protruding artery. “It seems that we’ve got a second body on our hands then”, Florin’s voice sounded miles away. “Or a victim with one hand missing.”

He nodded. “Maybe somebody just helped themselves to hospital waste. We need to call Drasche.”

Beatrice quickly brought the camera between herself and their find and took several close-up shots before halting suddenly. “Florin! There’s something else in the box. Underneath the hand.”

She put the camera down, took out another piece of paper from the box and unfolded it carefully. Florin put his mobile away and drew closer to her to read this new note.

Unlike the first message, this was written by hand with sweeping curves and loops.

### *Stage 2*

*You’re looking for a singer, a man called Christoph with blue eyes and a birthmark on the back of his left hand. In the past – five or maybe six years ago – he was a member of a choir in Salzburg and sang Schubert’s Mass in A flat – something he was very proud of. In this equation the two last numbers of his birth year are A. Multiply A by itself, add 37 to the total and then add that figure to your north coordinates.*

*Multiply the sum of A’s two digits by 10, then multiply that figure by A. Subtract 229 from the total and subtract the number you get from your east coordinates. Welcome to Stage 2. See you there!*

For what seemed like a long time, birdsong was the only sound that could be heard in that part of the woods. Beatrice read the text over and over again. A man called Christoph? Schubert’s Mass in A flat?

No, don’t think too much about it. Store your first impressions. A woman’s handwriting. Not unlike Beatrice’s own, only that hers was more even, less ornate, but with a similar verve. She turned to Florin.

“Any idea what all that might mean?”

“Not the foggiest.” He shook his head without taking his eyes from the message. “The box is at the place corresponding to the coordinates on the body.” He shut his eyes tightly as though every ray of light hindered his thought processes. “We find information with which we can

deduce new coordinates. And a severed hand. Why? What's the point of the exercise? Why does he put his victims right under our noses, rather than hiding them?"

"Because he thinks we're stupid. He said it in the first note. Or she."

"But why? Does he want to get caught? Or does he consider himself so superior that he can risk it?"

Beatrice carefully replaced the camera lens cover. "Who knows, maybe he wants to lead us on a wild goose chase."

"With body parts?"

She looked at the dead hand. It was a right hand. There was a narrow groove on the ring finger, about three millimetres wide.

"By using body parts", Beatrice reasoned, "he can be absolutely sure that we will follow up on the clues he leaves for us."