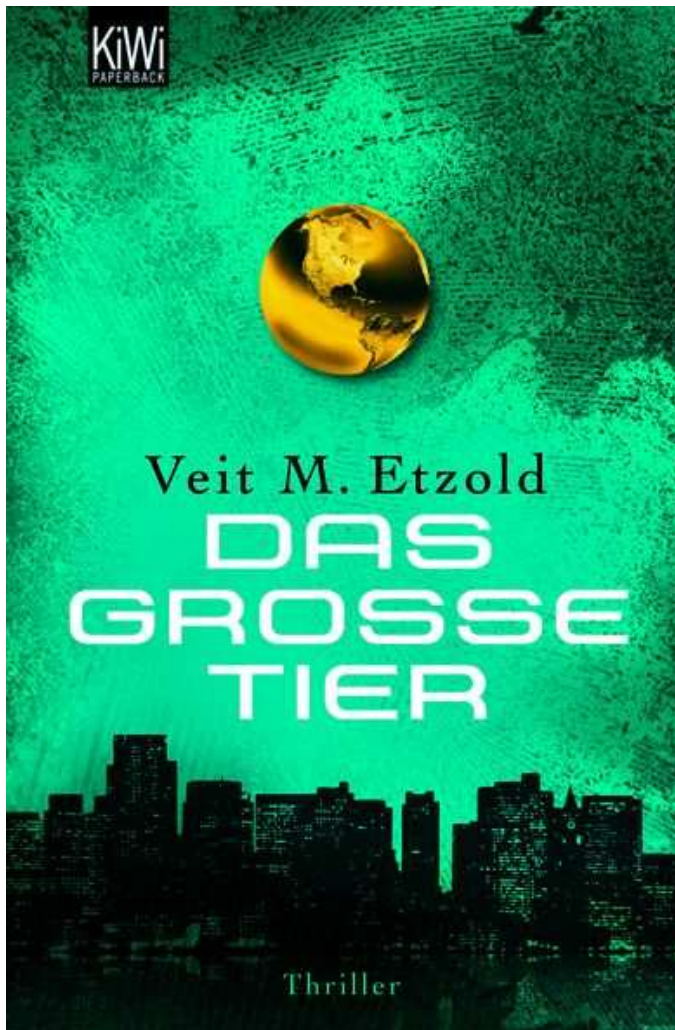


Sample Translation

Das Grosse Tier/ The Great Beast by Veit Etzold

Thriller

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THE GREAT BEAST by Veit M. Etzold

1

Berlin, January 1

01:00 am

Stuart M. Hill, CEO of Promethean Industries, opened the door of his Berlin Adlon Hotel suite, letting himself and his attractive lady guest in. His bodyguards were accustomed to such situations and searched Hill's guest discreetly for weapons. *What a night*, thought Hill. *God must have felt the same way, after having created heaven and earth on Day Six.*

Last year, the company had reported record earnings. Promethean Industries and Stuart Hill had become one entity. Without him, nothing moved. The analysts ate from his hand, his visions moved the share price upwards, and his stock options would make him a billionaire. The expansion, which had finally paid off under his aegis, exceeded all expectations. The job cuts in Germany were already finalized.

If you happen to know that the leader of the trade unions is a pedophile — and it is your job to know such things — why not send him a 12-year-old girl and take some photos? Or better yet, a movie? And let him know. That speeds up things a lot!

He looked around and saw that everything had been arranged. The champagne, the crystals, the ice. He had loosened his bow tie in James Bond style and he was beginning to feel like Her Majesty's agent. He looked out of the large windows and the double doors of the balcony. The lady moved into his sight and looked straight into his eyes.

„What's so interesting outside?“, she asked. „Look at me!“

His eyes moved from her high-heeled shoes and her tanned, slender legs to the black of her evening dress, which contrasted only slightly with the black of the night sky behind the windows, up to curved section where the dark of the dress ended and her brunette complexion showed in a promising way, up to her mouth half open with a smile, and then to her dark and hypnotic eyes.

“When I am here”, she said, shaking her head, her chestnut hair playing around her neck, “you should look only at me and nothing else.” She drew him towards her by the ends of his bowtie. “Mr. Bond!”

“I beg your pardon”, he said. “How could I be so rude?”

And how could he?

The whole evening, he had only had eyes for her, she, who was now standing so close by and smiled at him so seductively. His lips approached hers – but she turned away.

“Not so fast”, she laughed, taking his hands and guiding him in dancing style around the room, “I thought you were a gentleman. Let’s have a drink first. We have all night before us.”

It had been like this the whole evening. They had enjoyed a five-course meal and then had gone dancing. But every time he wanted to kiss her, she moved away, just burying her head into his embrace.

“Here!” She held out the champagne bottle to him, which she had produced from the drinking cart. “Open it!”

He took the bottle and opened the double doors to the balcony. Icy air rushed inside. The unique setting of the *Paris Place* in Berlin caught his eyes with its combination of bank, embassy, and Brandenburg Gate.

Architecture is frozen music, somebody had said once. *Strange*, thought Hill, *a quiet music that has the power to overshadow the noise*. He carefully eased the cork before letting it fly off with a bang into the winter night. He poured two glasses, passing one to her.

“Our good health?” he said. The glasses came together with a bright tone. “Our very good health”, she answered and raised an eyebrow.

They drank. *The ambience of glossy photos*. Hill could imagine the photographer, the stage technician, and the light assistant in the suite, but they were alone. Just he and the woman.

He stroked her hips, just like in the tango dance earlier. “You still have not told me your name.”

“I like curious men”, she answered with a smile, “but I also like men who can live with a secret. One must not always know everything. We are together tonight. That counts, doesn’t it?”

“And you’re the queen of the night”, he said, breathing heavily and drawing her towards him. “And the night is still young.”

“It can’t be long enough”, she said.

His lips came for her lips again. This time, she did not move away. Their lips met, teasing each other. He felt her arms wrap around his neck, felt her warmth, her breathing, her tongue – and suddenly an acid taste that bathed his mouth and throat in boiling steel. His head seemed to be at the end of a chain that swung around with full power and soon would be released to hit the glass door of the balcony with full

force. His legs became weaker, and he stumbled, trying to preserve his balance by holding onto her hand, her dress, her legs.

“What’s that?” he whispered, but his voice was almost gone.

“Nemesis gives you your longest night”, she said, smiling and blowing him a kiss.

But Stuart Hill was already dead.

2

St. Moritz, January 1

01:00 am

Throughout the evening, the anonymous caller with the hidden number had tried to contact him. Each time, he had rejected the call. It couldn’t be that important. He had already phoned his parents to wish them a happy new year and all his big clients were here. But now, his phone rang again. He hated hidden numbers. He pressed the button and took the call, earning a puzzled look from the lady he was dancing with.

“Do you always have to pick up the phone?” she asked. “We’re celebrating New Year’s Eve.”

“Wait a second, I’ll be right with you”, he said, leaving his dancing partner in the middle of the room, working his way through the dancing crowd, muttering “Sorry”, “Scusy”, and “Entschuldigung”.

He was an investment banker and the bank was celebrating New Year’s Eve. Badrutt’s Palace Hotel, 165 rooms, 30 suites, all occupied by his company. The program was exceptional: dinner and a ball, skiing and snow-polo, as well as talking and networking at the pool, the spa, or the bar. About macroeconomic trends, the stock exchange, the beginning and potential end of the financial crisis and all the opportunities it might finally give birth to. Whatever happened, the next year would be the bank’s most successful year. Or at least this was what most people said, or hoped. He had never dreamed that so many clients would accept a New Year’s invitation from their bank. The party would cost a high six-figure amount and he already pictured the managing directors the next morning, drawing a balance if all the cash was invested well.

“I’m listening”, he said into the phone.

“I’m very happy for you, that you take the time”, the voice said.

“New Year’s Eve is a very strange occasion for talking business, don’t you think?”

The voice chuckled. "I beg to disagree. When are important decision made, if not at the beginning of the year? And I must correct you: We are not talking about business, we are talking about you!"

He looked through the window at the frozen, snow-covered lake below. The muffled sound of the party was audible. The first guests were already heading for their rooms.

"You are in a top position within a top company", the voice said. "But you would not be where you are if this were enough for you."

"You are offering me a job?" He preferred the direct approach.

Silence at the other end. He was about to repeat his question or hang up, when the voice was heard again.

"I invite you to join the elite. The top of the food chain. This is where you want to be, right?"

Top of the food chain, he thought, shooing away a waiter approaching him with a tray of champagne. Elite. Everyone wanted to be elite. Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, McKinsey. But the true "Elite" had only existed once, otherwise it would not be "Elite". He had heard of it several times. The legend haunted the business schools, the big law firms, the top management consultancies, and the investment banks. That there was a company, older and more influential than all the others. Completely unknown. Or better, invisible.

"I have heard of this", he said, making himself sound uninterested. It was better not to be enthusiastic when talking to head hunters. "If I accept your offer, what would your "Elite" have to offer me?"

"First of all, a huge contract for your bank. Our client becomes your client. That means you will be Managing Director in no time. Not Associate, Vice-President, and then, only if you're lucky, Managing Director, but fast track. Because that's what you want, isn't it?"

He rubbed his hand over his face and switched the mobile phone to his other ear. Fast track, he thought, Managing Director, top of the food chain. That was what he wanted.

"What else", he asked.

"Access to everything that you have had only in short supply until now: people, money, and information. We are not just talking about changing the world, we are doing it."

"So what's in it for me?"

"No matter how much money your bank is paying you now, if you cooperate with us you will get double your salary on top!"

He raised his eyebrows. "It could well be that I am interested."

"Good!" said the voice. "We know that you are good. But we want you to be even better. So first we need to know if you are really as good as we think."

He shook his head. Were they planning an admissions test with him? "What comes next?" he asked. "Multiple choice test, assessment center, case studies, group interviews, psychology gadgets? Why don't you recruit at college?"

Again a chuckling from the voice. "Banks like yours have case studies and 20 interviews in two days, and consultancies are no different. The big business schools require the GMAT. Our client ...", the voice continued, "our client has different tests."

"What sort of tests?"

"First, we will test your flexibility."

He shook his head in disappointment. Empty phrases! Such were the job offerings of the worst companies: "We expect flexibility, stamina, a good or very good college degree ..."

"Have you ever seen an I-banker being inflexible?"

"No", said the voice. "That's why we expect you at Berlin Tegel Airport tomorrow at noon."

"What?" he said. "You want me at Tegel tomorrow? Look, it's New Year's Eve. I am here with my bank, we're having a big client event. My clients expect ..."

"I thought you were flexible?"

He listened to the music. It had changed from a waltz to rock 'n' roll.

"What should I tell my boss? That somebody died?"

"Why not?" said the voice. He did not like the sound of the voice saying "why not".

Thoughts were rushing through his head, and he was already scheming about possibilities and scenarios. He was accustomed to thinking like this. What if? But then he saw himself standing at Tegel Airport on New Year's morning with nobody there to meet him. And he would discover that some old business school friends were taking him for a ride and that the career, the possibilities, and the "Elite" did not exist at all.

"To promise is easy", he said. "To deliver is not. How do I know you are telling the truth?"

"Check your bank account at 2am. If you see that it is up five million, you will know we are telling the truth."

"In one hour?"

"Forward transfer."

He stared into the darkness above the lake. Five million was a lot of money, no matter how rich you already were.

"My account number...?" he asked.

"We know it", the voice said. "And everything else as well."

"And how do I find you in Berlin?"

"You won't have to. We will find you."

The call ended.

3

Berlin, January 1

01:30 am

Thus begins the New Year for a budding doctor of art history, thought Vincent, his gaze following the flaming tail of a rocket shooting howling through the night sky. In icy cold, with ear splitting roar and flashing fireworks whose explosions were mirrored upon the glass facades of the Potsdamer Platz. Vincent had been persuaded by his friends to join them 'where the party was on', and as near the Brandenburg Gate fireworks were not allowed, the lot had moved to the Potsdamer Platz.

Vincent was no fan of noisy parties. And least a fan of big crowds. Here, he had both, hanging around with 32 years of age with some university freshmen and letting himself throw explosives at. New Year's Eve in Berlin, in mist and cold and surrounded by idiots. For someone thinking of himself of being more original than average, this was not really original. Same as him entering his date of birth on a horoscope website on the internet the hours before. *New Year will start with a surprise for you*, the website had said. He was surrounded by people but nevertheless, he was bored. Was that the surprise?

"I said, that Heraclitus had said, that War is the father of all things", Vincent shouted against the noise. New Year's Eve was noise - noise in clubs, noise at parties, noise everywhere. He spoke to a young girl standing next to him, about twenty and perhaps a bit too young for him. One of those Tobi called "citychick", because she now lived in the city, but still was behaving like a chicken from the countryside. Since October, she studied pedagogy at the Free University and New Year's Eve in Berlin had, of course, to be completely different than from home in Westphalia. From the size of the city, she was still amazed. Actually, she was quite pretty, thought Vincent, albeit frighteningly naïve.

He had told her earlier that her face had reminded him of a ceiling fresco in the Sistine Chapel. One of the angels hovering in a cloud with the Lord while he awoke Adam to life. She found this comparison so cute that it now was difficult for Vincent to get rid of her. This often happened to Vincent: When it came to nothing, his observations hit the mark; but as soon as it was important, he often lacked the words.

Anyway, the citychick did not move from his side and often took a sip from his champagne bottle, from which he himself drank nearly nothing.

“Uhu”, shouted the girl back, whose name Vincent did not get or had already forgotten, “and what has this to do with New Year’s Eve?”

“People seem to miss war even in peacetimes and that’s why they bring it back, just like here.” Vincent shoutingly fought against howling missiles racing skyward, while Tobi stopped to ignite the next fireworks. It turned with a wailing noise around itself before burning out abruptly and leaving a smoking pile of blue ash.

“Don’t tell her such a shit, she won’t get it anyway”, he shouted. “Father of all things! Better see, that you will get king of two things tonight!” He laughed dirty, moving his hips back and forth in an obscene manner. Vincent grimaced while looking at Tobi, who was already searching in his backpack for new fireworks. With his chin-long hair, the denim jacket he wore any time, regardless of weather and temperature and his sports-shoes, he looked like a relict from the 80s, which was to eighty percent an ironic staging of a prole, but to twenty percent showing that he really was one. However, it could be worse, thought Vincent. In former times Toby had had so little taste concerning dress, that Vincent often thought he was color blind. The citychick gazed upwards against the rocket infested, burning sky.

“That’s a strange statement for New Year’s Eve, with the war”, she said. “It’s time for party, not for thinking about war. What are you doing anyway?”

“When I am not reflecting about New Year’s Eve, I do my PHD in art history at Humboldt University.”

For someone just having started studying, mentioning doing a PHD was of course leaving an impression.

“You do a doctor’s degree? Really? Cool! And on what subject?”

“About Michelangelo and the beginning of the cult of genius. Passing the centuries until now.”

The girl’s attention had been stuck at the first name.

“Michelangelo?” she asked. “The one with the chapel?”

“Yes.”

“Was not that the guy who built the cathedral of Cologne?”

“Uhm, no, that’s not entirely true”, said Vincent, “he built Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, even though he was already very old then. Anyway, he has become especially famous for his sculptures and paintings, that have shaped his image of the haunted, tormented, lonely and extraordinary artist, more lonely but also more brilliant than any other – simply a genius!”

“But surely the one in Cologne, isn’t it?”

“Which one in Cologne?”

“Saint Peter’s Basilica in Cologne.”

Vincent could securely roll his eyes in despair, as the citychick was just gazing against the glass facade, where a torrent of light was raining down.

“No! The one in Rome!”

Tobi saved him. “Hey, how about changing places? The other chicks want to go to the Kulturbrauerei. You know the birds. Always cold hands and cold feet.” He took up his backpack. “So I propose, we go there, guess, there is booz and birds as well.”

“I would not mind” said Vincent, “I ask myself anyway, why the biggest outdoor party of the year is celebrated at the time when it is fucking cold! The only thing ...”

He interrupted himself, giving place to a gang of thugs plowing through the crowd throwing fireworks around them, “the only thing staying warm despite of the cold is the champagne!”

“Don’t care, as long as I get hammered”, Tobi said and took another mouthful. Then he looked at Vincent and raised an eyebrow. “Where is Sarah?”, he asked.

Vincent shrugged. “Well, not here.”

“I see that.” Tobi shouldered the backpack. “And where is she?”

“With friends.”

Tobi seemed to be not entirely satisfied with the answer. Neither was Vincent. Sarah and Vincent met occasionally and usually had a lot of fun, but neither of the two knew, if this was just an affair or the beginning of something more serious.

“And there is something still cooking between you and her?”

“Generally yes.”

“And you’re a couple now?”

“Generally no.”

“But a bit?” Tobi was really pushing today.

“You can put it that way.” It was obvious, that Vincent would like to change the subject as he himself had no clear answer. However, Tobi was unforgiving.

“But you should know that”, he said, suddenly a wide grin on his face. “I thought, you want to be professor. Knowledge is power!”

“And ignorance is bliss!”

4

Berlin, January 1

07:00 am

“Are you off for a last drink or heading home?” The cab driver’s yellow teeth were grinning as he looked at the young woman through the rearview mirror. In the pale light of dawn, the Berlin cathedral appeared on the right at the moment when the taxi crossed the bridge that linked Karl Liebknecht Street with the avenue Unter den Linden.

“Neither”, said the young woman and searched in the pocket of her coat for her ID. She found handbags cumbersome. Especially when she was at work. “Duty.”

The taxi driver raised his eyebrows. “Duty?” he asked. “You work in the Adlon hotel?”

“You could put it that way.”

Sarah Jakobs, 31, the young chief superintendent responsible for economic crime with the State Office for Criminal Investigation in Berlin, looked out of the window. Outside, Humboldt University and the State Opera moved by. Taxis brought the last partygoers home. Everyone was going to bed – and she was going to work.

Being and becoming, a teacher had told her years ago, when the part of Germany where she came from was still called GDR. *Being and becoming, these are the most important things in life.* Somehow, this quote had stuck in her head ever since, and not only because it was so much out of tune with the usual socialist doctrine that she heard at school. *Being and becoming*, everything is in permanent flux. Accepting that nothing is constant in this world and that the only dependable thing was change itself. Sometimes, she did not know if she had joined the police because she loved change or because she was looking for ways to master change, to tame change. She could still remember the speech by the president of the Berlin police years ago when she started her training. “Our job is like no other. Here, something happens, you can believe me.”

Being and becoming and something happens. Oddly, it was the people who had accepted that everything changes all the time who were best able to give her a feeling of security.

Something happens. Even before her “holiday,” which encompassed only New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, she had had a talk with deputy commissioner Winterfeld, the head of the homicide unit of the state office for criminal investigation. Winterfeld had once been her instructor and he could not stop playing the elder statesman, even though they now worked almost side by side. The department for

economic crime and the department for homicide were on the same corridor in the bureau and they met frequently on the corridor in front of a big window, which Winterfeld would then open to “smoke outside” as he called it. Before New Year’s Eve, she had stood there with Winterfeld at the open window with her arms clenched to her body for warmth, while Winterfeld had smoked a cigarillo and gazed with blinking eyes into the distance. “Something happens on New Year’s Eve”, he had said, giving Sarah an all-knowing look and blowing smoke into the chilly winter air. “If I were you, I would leave my pager on.”

“What could happen?” she had asked and had gotten only another all-knowing look in reply. To herself, she had called him a paranoid pessimist. Later, she drove home, assured of rest for at least two days. Caring for drunken slobs, burning kiosks, and bums was the duty of the riot police, not her department.

Her holiday abruptly ended at seven a.m. on New Year’s morning, when the penetrating ring of her cell phone pulled her out of her sleep.

“Bellmann here! Good morning, Ms. Jakobs!” Sarah sat bolt upright in bed. Dr. Alexander Bellmann, head of the State Office for Criminal Investigation himself! She had not thought that Winterfeld’s prediction would hit the mark with such precision.

“Paris Place, as soon as possible”, Bellmann continued in rapid fire, without waiting for an answer. “Murder, in conjunction with a lot of money. Adlon Hotel, suites, fifth floor!”

“Business or politics?” she asked, still drowsy but trying to sound intelligent.

“Business,” Bellmann continued. “The financial authorities expect market manipulation and insider trading, want us to scout the perps. Winterfeld is already on site, forensics as well.”

“I’ll be there as quickly as I can”, she said. Luckily, she had drunk almost nothing the night before.

“Make it quicker!”

That was Bellmann. Holiday was not in his vocabulary. Nevertheless, quicker was impossible. So was getting a taxi on New Year’s morning. But she had to smile. *Winterfeld is already on site.* She would again work with Winterfeld, the “Enforcer,” as they called him within the Berlin police.

“What are you doing in the Adlon?” The taxi driver pulled her out of her thoughts. “Entertainment?” He looked at her through the rearview mirror with big eyes, like a child looking at a forbidden show.

“No”, she said, hesitating for a moment. “We belong to the cleaning department.”

5

New York City, January 1

02:00 am

Paul Territo felt good. The lights of the party danced on his semi-long, dyed blond hair and on his skin tanned by the sun of Miami. He looked at the dancers, who moved like an amorphous mass to the stomping beat of the music, as if they were a single, giant organism. “Hive Mind” scientists called it, when a thousands of individual entities were turned into one big thing with one single determination. Every big structure on earth, he thought, was such an organism. The dancers, companies, countries – and the world wide web. It was the New Year’s Eve and a new year was ahead of them. The internet was the future, a second world that grew up, a digital universe that would grow and grow and eventually would be more important than the first world that had brought it to life before. And Paul Territo was the king of this world. He sold images, knowledge and emotions, anywhere, any time. Only he himself was never seen, neither in any tabloid, nor in Business week or Fortune. He was a protestant god of the internet, of whom no one *should* not make himself a picture – of whom no one *could* make himself a picture. Because none existed. He had no wife, at least not on a long term basis, and no family. His baby was Xenotech Corporation, a fusion of many other, smaller high tech companies that he had bought and finally formed into a giant octopus, stretching out its digital tentacles to every PC, laptop and mobile phone in the world. All these small firms Territo had formed into something big, very big. All these small firms had been set up in Silicon Valley, in some forgotten place and room on Stanford University campus, where pizza boxes were piled high in one corner or in some garage – free from thinking about profit, free from thinking about strategic alliances to control the global market, solely inspired by the possibility of global networking, creating a large community, that could communicate with everyone everywhere. All of them had had ideas, and all of them had needed money – and they got it: From Paul Territo. ‘Saint Paul’ they called him in the tech scene, as he had been able to create something big from something small, as Saint Paul had done it with Christianity, turning a conflict-torn, religious sect into a 2000 year lasting, world spanning global player.

He looked at the heated swimming pool on the roof terrace and enjoyed the moment of silence, looking through the large windows along Fifth Avenue, his gaze sweeping over the Met-Life Building and Grand Central Station. And he saw the lift on the exterior façade of the building, moving up slowly. As far as he could make out,

four men were in it. The elevator would just stop at his penthouse, no stop in between. Late comers to his party? But who?

6

Berlin, January 1

08:00 am

The butler and the bodyguard had found Stuart Hill as he lay on the carpet of the hotel suite with empty eyes looking a bit silly against the ceiling. His mouth was open, a thread of saliva hanging almost to the surface of the carpet, while a forensic assistant whipped it up with a cotton swab, which he then pocketed in a glass tube and put the whole thing into a black suitcase. A colleague, a 25 year old who despite the white paper suit, looked more like hip hop and street-ball than forensic, put paper bags on hands and shoes of the corpse, dabbed with a graphite brush over furniture and walls, blinked here, shook his head there and only occasionally used the adhesive film strips to secure an impression. A third person collected traces from the carpet.

Standing in the middle of this organized chaos, in expensive suites and with nervous faces, were two representatives of Promethean Industries. Mr. Miller was head of the legal department and personal lawyer for Stuart Hill. He was with Mr. Thomson, the Chief Financial Officer. Both had been flown in directly from London. Their faces looked pinched in a way that went far beyond grief. No wonder. Investors would have less interest in a well formulated obituary for the deceased but more in the question, why a healthy man like Hill had died just like that and if this had to be expected also of further executives of the firm? And how would the share price absorb this message? Most likely, both of them had themselves preferred stock of the company in their portfolios.

Thomson was wiping himself repeatedly over his brow, even though he was not sweating at all, and spoke in rapid fire English to deputy commissioner Winterfeld, who stood between the two, his hawk like face with the prominent nose and the steel blue eyes shooting to and fro between them.

"I don't know, if it was a natural death, an accident, suicide or murder. But be assured, it's my job to find out! But expecting me to point out the killer in less than 10 minutes is a bit over the top!"

Winterfeld seemed to be thankful that he had spent a year in London with Scotland Yard, nevertheless, the two pinstripes made him nervous, noting, how often he strolled through his short, gray hair. After all, the sudden death of a big shot like

Stuart Hill did not happen frequently – and especially not on New Year’s Eve. “Mr. Ward should arrive in a few minutes via helicopter from London”, said the lawyer. Winterfeld rolled his eyes – and then he discovered her. For a moment, he smiled, almost relieved, and raised his hands.

“Sarah”, he said, obviously happy to have a reason to stop conversation with the two pinstripes. “Here we are again. What did I tell you yesterday?” He lowered his head and looked at her, playing the elder statesman once more. “Something happens!”

He took a step towards her and led her to the body. She looked at him. He was under stress, but he was in his element. Walter Winterfeld, 58 years old, divorced the second time. They knew each other for several years, but Sarah had still not understood him completely. On the one hand, he developed dubious theories, saying, that alone from the looks of a person one could judge whether he was a criminal. “Preventive physiognomy” he had called that and proposed once in the wake of a security conference in Berlin, to put all people who looked like criminals under surveillance. This had caused a medium earthquake in the political landscape of Berlin. “Heinrich Himmler is back”, a famous newspaper had titled. Even the BKA, the federal state office for criminal investigation, had expressed serious concerns. Against this, however, were lined up Winterfeld’s success stories as a profiler. For strangely, he was often right with his bizarre heuristics. First he had not taken Sarah very seriously, thinking, she was a curious chick he needed to take under his wings. Then she had helped him in a critical moment with a highly charged information, not entirely official, as both were working on separate cases. Winterfeld was to throw light on the disappearance of a woman, a case the police already wanted to close. There was this large-construction tycoon from Frankfurt, now living in Berlin. He had a wife 30 years younger and a son from his first marriage. The son was a 32 year old kid, having all XBOX games, but nobody to talk. The woman stemmed from the drug milieu and also the construction tycoon was a friend of cocaine. Then suddenly, the wife disappeared. Winterfeld found the son strange when he first met him, and when he proposed to look for the woman in the vicinity of the son, he was laughed at. It would be quite clear, the police colleagues said, where the lady was. She got fed up with the old fart and disappeared together with his credit card and younger lover from the cocaine gang to the Caribbean. This was no case for homicide, but rather for a divorce lawyer. Winterfeld had hesitated. Sarah then suddenly got an anonymous CD-ROM from the customs. It was from a gang that was illegally importing orang-utan apes from Borneo to Europe. The gang operated a zoo-like brothel, where abnormal but well-paying clients could have their game with the animals. The apes had their claws removed

and teeth pulled so that they would resist less. On the confiscated CD-ROM, Sarah found the name of the construction tycoon's son. "People who are involved in this sort of crime are also capable of even worse things", she thought and passed the information to Winterfeld. Without asking her boss or anyone. Quite risky. But Winterfeld liked the direct approach. He played hardball, saw imminent danger, did not wait for approval from law enforcement and had the apartment of the son searched. Afterwards, no judge felt being ignored and no complaints were made: In the son's fridge the police found the head of the woman, together with other parts. God knew, why the son had kept them and what he had done with them. Now, nobody laughed. Father and son the least.

Winterfeld had gazed into the abyss in his life on several occasions, but this time, they had done it together. Sarah and him. And this connects.

"At first, a happy New Year", said Sarah.

"Same to you", said Winterfeld, consciously in German, so that the pinstripes could not understand anything. "Even though the start could be happier. But here we are." He pointed to the corpse. "Stuart Hill, CEO of Promethean Industries. He is not 100% identified, but I think we can be sure that it's him. You know the company?"

She knew. US company, satellite technology, GPS, guided missiles. Privatized under Reagan in the 80s and floated on the stock exchange. A few weeks ago, she had read an article on Hill in Fortune. Hill was more a hands-on guy and playboy, a networker, being able to strike deals and leave the details to others. "It's not rocket science", he had described his job in the interview.

Sarah nodded.

"Good for you", Winterfeld said, running his fingers through his hair, "I have never heard about it. Then back to work: According to forensics, this guy died between 11:30 pm and 2:30 am in the morning. We won't get it more precise. He lived in the suite alone. At seven in the morning a call was received from Beijing on his cell phone. Maybe a bit early, but it seemed to deal with great investment decisions and Hill was supposed to pick the phone. But as no one answered, one of the bodyguards got suspicious. He and the butler made their way to the suite and they found – this!"

He looked at Hill.

"We have the report of an emergency physician. Since Hill is actually healthy, the bodyguard pushed the doctor to call the police. And now we're here."

Sarah looked around. "And where is the bodyguard now?"

"Just taking a leak", Winterfeld said. "Cause of death is unclear. Heart attack or apoplectic stroke we can exclude. Obviously, there are also no signs of external

violence, a little mystery if you want. But the colleagues from forensics will finally see to that. Pretty sure, that the district attorney will call for an autopsy.”

Winterfeld looked at the forensics guy searching the carpet, ruffed his hair and continued.

“The moment, the body was found, the whole judicial apparatus had been roused, be it New Year or not. Hill is not some run of the mill guy, after all. The secretary of state in the Senate administration has already phoned district attorney Rathenow. The body has been confiscated, the colleagues are just waiting for the “go” to start the autopsy.” He raised his hawk-like nose, as if waiting for some inspiration.

“Old age, I think, is unlikely. That is more the case with me, I am not the youngest guy in town, after all.” He looked at Sarah, the elder statesman again. “Help an old man: What could be culprit and motive?”

Sarah thought about the school teacher. *Being and becoming*. Who would *become* something, if Hill *is* no more.

“Possibly revenge”, she began to think aloud. “Anyone wants to hurt Hill, getting things even the hard way? Or it comes to making money? Activist shareholder XXL. Hill dies, the stock tumbles south. Someone gets a bargain, buys the company with a ninety percent discount. Not really the stuff business ethics are made of, but someday, something like this had to happen.”

“Not bad”, said Winterfeld, “exact words of the manual. However, Sherlock Holmes would not be happy with this. He would ask, *how* these people that wanted to kill Hill actually killed him.”

“If they killed him.”

“Well”, he continued, “let’s assume that the caviar was not spoiled and with 44 years, he does not die ‘sudden and unexpectedly’. Rathenow already ordered a medical file on Hill from the NHS, if they don’t have one, the inquiry goes on to the US.” Unfortunately for Winterfeld, there was no single suspect to see, so his sixth sense and ‘preventive physiognomy’ did not help him at all.

“As far as I know”, said Sarah, looking at the corpse and the suite, “this is one of the suites with bullet proof glass. Bush was also here in 2002. So no sniper shooting with micro-projectiles through the window which are almost invisible and only discovered by forensics hours later.” She plugged at her earlobes as she often did when thinking. “You said something of spoiled caviar. Maybe he was poisoned?”

Winterfeld waved if off. “If yes, then an injection. Once the autopsy is approved, it’s the turn for the guys with the rubber gloves! We have checked the champagne. Everything is fine, as it looks, but we are still waiting for the report from the lab. The bottle was served closed, Hill has probably opened it himself. Fingerprints at the

bottleneck. He probably let the cork fly off in the night from the balcony. There is small frozen puddle of champagne on the balcony's floor and also Hill's fingerprints on the balustrade.

Such a big shot and party animal like Hill alone in his suite? Sarah found this very unlikely. Or would Winterfeld play cat and mouse with her, as in earlier times?

"That is, the cork was not found", she said. "we therefore do not know for sure, if the bottle was really closed?"

"We have the testimony of the room service", said Winterfeld. "If the bottle would have been served open, the drinks would have been poured by hotel staff. Also, Ms. Beancounter, we have already police staff searching the Paris Place for corks."

"Could imagine that there are tons of corks. We are celebrating New Year."

Winterfeld rolled his eyes. "But few Dom Perignon Vintage 1998!" Sarah smiled. Her thoroughness seemed to both impress and annoy Winterfeld. If you did not have second sight – or thought, then you needed to use old fashioned logic and cause and effect.

His cell phone rang. "Winterfeld. Morning Mr. Rathenow. O yes, Happy New Year, forgot to say so. Yes, Ms. Jakobs is here as well. Dissection? I thought so." He raised a hand to the forensic guy, pointed to the corpse and made a scissor-like gesture with his fingers. The guy in the paper suite nodded knowingly. "I think we will need another 30 minutes, then the corpse will go to the dissecting room. Investigation file will follow immediately. Talk to you. Bye."

"Where are we?" he asked, pocketing the cell phone. "Ah, yes, the poison. As said, the lab has taken a probe of the champagne. Nothing so far." He stroke through his hair, looking at the policemen guarding the entry door. "What we are doing here now is maybe exactly what the perps want. We are talking hours about the champagne and oversee the real important things.

"We also don't know, if Hill drank from this bottle at all", Sarah said.

"We also don't know, if he drunk anything at all in this room. Nothing taken from the room bar, we already checked with the concierge. I am sure, over the course of the evening, he drank a lot, but this, the rubber gloves will tell us soon. From the two glasses standing here", he said, pointing at the crystals, "somebody *did* drink."

He looked at Sarah as a father would look at his child at Christmas gift giving.

"On one glass is lipstick."

About the Author:

Veit M. Etzold, born in Bremen in 1973, studied English, art history, media sciences, and general management in Oldenburg, London, and Barcelona. In 2005, he completed his doctoral thesis on the feature film "The Matrix". During and after his studies, he worked for media organisations, banks, and an international management consultancy. Veit Etzold lives in Berlin.