

Night Without Shadows by Gisa Klönne

First published in Germany 2008 by Ullstein Buchverlage

Translation: Katy Derbyshire/Bennett Owen

PART 1 DESIRE

Saturday, 7th January

"Now you know what it's like."

Puzzling words, with no context, no speaker and no face. Detective Inspector Judith Krieger lies perfectly still. Someone has made that remark to her, maybe even someone she knows personally. It must make some kind of sense. She tries to re-create the images of her dream but can only think of the files piling up in her office, rapidly filling every available space. Then her thoughts turn to the disastrous Christmas raffle. It's no use trying to decipher the cryptic phrase. She can't even imagine what 'now' might mean. It sounds like *schadenfreude*, perhaps even a threat.

She throws on her bathrobe and ambles into the kitchen for a glass of tap water. 2:11AM. Oddly, she isn't surprised when the phone rings. It's as if she's been waiting for the call without really being aware of it.

"Krieger?"

"Henning, CID. Sorry to bother you."

"Don't worry about it." She rummages for a notebook and pen under a newspaper on the kitchen table as the police officer on the other

end rambles on.

"We've got a body at Industrial Park Station. Probably the train driver. Could be an accident. Then again..."

"OK, send a car for me."

It is drizzling as she steps outside, with the sodden remains of New Years fireworks plastered on the gutter. The soundtrack of an urban weekend wafts through the night air: vehicles, scraps of conversation, music.

Judith closes her eyes as the patrol car moves through the feverish city center towards the northwest side of town. She feels a sudden longing, perhaps simply for a younger version of her self. There was a time when she thought she could distinguish good from evil, and that hope provided an antidote for desperation.

A small army of squad cars is already parked at the entrance to the Industrial Park Station. The platform itself is above ground, built on grubby brickwork giving way to an embankment dotted with unkempt green. On the other side of the railway bridge, Judith observes a neglected plot of allotments. Industrial Park Station bears the namesake of a district in transition, with office complexes slowly adding to a zone inhabited by small businesses, including construction companies, car lots and junkyards. The main road is lined with abandoned, darkened tenements and an old brick factory, all scheduled for demolition. The only source of entertainment is a run-down pizza parlor. But it's been abandoned too.

"DI Krieger?" A female officer with a tightly pulled back ponytail gestures vaguely up the stairs. "The witness who called us is still

here."

Graffiti smears the staircase walls, the steps a receptacle for trash, urine and vomit. Judith silently climbs the steps, followed by the uniformed officer. On the platform, another group of police surround a wiry man with short-cropped gray hair. No sign of a corpse.

"The body is over there." The officer accompanying Judith points to a suburban train, stopped about 150 yards short of the platform, it's headlights still beaming.

"How did the witness find him?"

"He says he walked over because the train didn't pull into the station. He wanted to complain." The officer lowers her voice. "He reeks of alcohol."

"I'll have a look around," said Judith. "Keep him here. Are the trains running?"

"Yes. There are no disruptions. This one's on a siding anyway." She hands Judith a flashlight and the detective jumps down onto the track bed, turning it on. The incessant drizzle hangs in the air, as if putting the crime scene in soft focus, slowly drenching her hair, face and coat. Millions of tiny droplets, inexorably destroying evidence. She wonders how much time has passed since the body was discovered. Too much. Judith picks up her pace, concentrating on the cold reflection of the flashlight on the tracks, averting her eyes from the blinding glare of the train's headlights. Just beyond the industrial park, the Amor Mega Brothel appears to be close enough to touch. Nine floors of decadence with red lights flashing

across the façade. Further away, the landmark Cologne Cathedral seems to be floating, carried along by the lights of the city, shrouded in colored fog.

The body lies on the track bed, just below the driver's cab. One knee is drawn up and the body is on its side as if the man were sleeping. But all appearances of peace and relaxation are shattered by the grotesque angle of his head and the blood seeping from a slightly opened mouth. It looks almost black. Oily. Judith crouches down, shining her flashlight on the face. His eyes are clouded but she feels as he is staring at her, asking for something, not comprehending what has happened, unable to accept his own death. The metallic, slightly sweet smell of blood rises to her nose, mingled with the scent of urine and excrement. The victim must have soiled himself at the moment of death.

"It seems as if he's trying to tell us something." The policeman standing guard next to the body folds his arms.

"What?"

"What do you mean by what?" the policeman replies with an irritated glance.

"What do you think he's trying to say?"

"I don't know. Just a funny feeling." The officer shrugs.

Judith silently forces latex gloves over her numbed fingers. The body is stout, clothed in a sweatshirt, trousers and shoes, all dark blue or black. Blood is everywhere. She reaches under the man's head, registering grazes and cuts on his forehead and cheek. Rigor

mortis hasn't yet set in. How heavy a human skull is when the neck muscles no longer carry its weight. His face is pale, waxy and cool. Judith looks for signs of post-mortem lividity but finds none.

As she lowers the head back onto the ground a gush of lukewarm blood pours out of the dead man's mouth and onto her hands. She suppresses a curse.

"His lungs must be injured," she said aloud, trying to ignore the dead man's discomfiting stare and the memory of the mysterious message in her dreams. "Call in the forensic team. I want lights and a cover sheet or a tent, right the hell now. Can you arrange that?"

Damn this rain, she thinks. It's at that instant, she realizes the victim isn't wearing a coat. Once again, she studies the body with her flashlight. The railway logo is emblazoned on the front of his sweatshirt. His left hand is tucked beneath his body, the right hand clenched in a fist. Judith steps behind the corpse, crouching down again and notices a dark crust on the fabric of the sweatshirt. She leans in closely and sees tears in the fabric to the left and right of his spine, paper-thin cuts, no real pattern.

Judith straightened back up. "Someone must have stabbed him like a madman. In the back. You'd better inform pathology, too."

Again, the officer radios in the request. "Mueller's on duty," she replies to Judith.

The detective nods in response, shining her flashlight around the ground before turning towards the driver's cab of the train. By now the drizzle has turned to rain, soaking her hair, shrouding her in

dampness. It's too warm for a January night, she thinks. The whole winter's been too warm, it's all over the news...melting polar ice caps, rising sea levels, tornados, famine and it's all our fault. But it's still too cold to leave home without a jacket.

Once again, Judith trains her flashlight on the body. What could have happened to the jacket? Did he take it off before he was murdered? Did the killer take it and if so, why? She thinks the dead man's nose is too big, his mouth too small, his light brown hair thinning at the back. She can imagine him, walking along the track bed from the back of the train to the front cab, shoulders bent, with no interest in posture or physical activity. And then she realizes that the laces of his shoes are undone. Was he going to take them off for his last break of the night? Right here on the tracks? Not likely.

"Where could the killer have come from?" asks the police officer.

"Maybe he was on the train. We need to contact the railway, with any luck this train was fitted with surveillance cameras." Judith points the flashlight toward the train. It's old and filthy. She wonders whether the victim had a wife or children. He didn't have a wedding ring, a least not on his finger.

"You wait here. Call DS Korzilius and get him down here," she says to the officer. "I'll go speak with the witness."

The wind is picking up, whipping rain into her face. She doubts whether the killer returned to the station across the tracks. It was simply too open and exposed, even at this time of night when it seemed everyone was asleep.

The forensic team is waiting on the platform, the dull neon light painting their faces pale green. Judith quickly tells them what she's deduced so far and they swarm out across the tracks like wingless white insects. She brushes the wet strands of hair from her face. Just yesterday, her senior officer, Millstaett said that her rehabilitation was going well and put her on standby duty. He told her that her colleagues regarded her as fully healed. It was the very status she'd been fighting for, ever since her breakdown, her time off and her return to duty. But was it really what she wanted? Yes, she thought. Yes. Stop doubting everything. Judith straightens her shoulders, gazing out through the rain at the crime scene. She senses danger, as if there were a darker, colder truth yet to be uncovered.

"DI Krieger?" The female officer with the tightly bound ponytail approaches Judith. "I brought our witness some coffee and a sandwich a few minutes ago and he suddenly started talking."

"Anything of interest?"

"He says he saw someone over there. Possibly the killer."

www.gisa-kloenne.com