

As Kirsten stopped outside the glass entrance doors to Fontes & Associados, she immediately saw that something was going on. Nearly everyone was gathered in the lobby: the partners, the lawyers from other departments, her new roommate Isabel, and Antonio Fontes himself – even though the general office meeting would not begin for another ten minutes. They were all looking at the big TV screen in the lobby, with the words ‘ULTIMA HORA’ flashing past in red.

Kirsten saw Isabel walk over to stand beside Fontes and glance in her direction. Then Isabel leant in close to Fontes, as if she wanted to tell him something confidential. Kirsten looked back at the screen, quickly keying in the code on the display. She cursed when she heard the beep of rejection that indicated an incorrect code. Her colleagues seemed to be in a state of commotion. Most alarmingly, the Sphinx had descended from her ivory tower and was standing with the others, which she never did. Isabel and Fontes were deep in conversation now. Were they talking about Kirsten?

She concentrated on the display. Suddenly someone appeared beside her, and Kirsten was startled to see Carla, who was standing behind a concrete pillar, apparently trying to avoid curious gazes from the lobby.

‘Can I speak to you?’ asked Carla.

‘Not now.’ Kirsten hurriedly pressed the numbers for the code, taking a quick peek inside as she did so. Was Mrs Ribeira staring at her? ‘And certainly not here.’

‘But I really need you to...’

The doors opened. Leaving Carla behind, Kirsten walked into the lobby. She looked up at the TV screen on the wall, which everyone was staring at, frozen like a herd of animals trying to escape a predator’s attention. A newscaster with a serious expression filled the

screen. Then the street she had not been allowed to drive along this morning appeared to the right of the picture. The camera zoomed in on a house at the corner of the street, and the alley beside it, which was cordoned off with police tape.

‘... from a reliable source that there is still no trace of the twenty-one-year-old Mariana Sá Pimentel,’ said the reporter.

‘What’s going on?’ asked Kirsten.

No one responded, except for Isabel, who shushed her. The reporter seemed to be the only one who was prepared to answer her question.

‘The missing young woman is the daughter of Carlos Jorge Sá Pimentel, the leader of the Partido Socialista.’

An archive image of the party leader appeared on the screen. A tall man in his late fifties, he had a strong jawline and silver hair. Kirsten had often seen him on television before. As a lawyer, he was a gifted speaker. He frequently mentioned that he was a man of the people, and this was reflected in all of his actions. He had publicly expressed his grief and condolences to a couple who had lost their five children in a fire, for example, and he was always the first to call for generosity in campaigns to help underprivileged groups. In turn, the people had come together en masse to console him with wreaths of flowers, children’s drawings and sympathy when he had lost his wife in a car accident four years ago.

But Kirsten knew that he also had enemies. Even within his own party. His charismatic approach had quickly won him a lot of supporters. In 2013, he had entered the Partido Socialista as a relative unknown in political circles, and his popularity had skyrocketed. The year after that, he was chosen as party leader and, in 2015, under his leadership, the Partido Socialista achieved an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections, joining the government as a coalition party. Carlos Jorge Sá Pimentel did not become prime minister, but he let it be known that it was his ambition for the next elections.

Some of his fellow party members had objections though, accusing him of being too ambitious and not even taking a break from work after his wife's death. In interviews, he said that no one should tell him how to run his life.

And now Mariana appeared on the screen. His only child. The room became perfectly silent, as if everyone were holding their breath. Even more so than her father, Mariana drew the viewer's gaze, thought Kirsten, not simply because of her looks – although she had long dark hair, a beautiful face and an enigmatic smile – but there was just something about her. Warm, sweet, affectionate. Mariana was the embodiment of innocence.

'Anyone who has information regarding this disturbing disappearance is asked to contact the local police or to call the number now on the screen.'

That seemed to be the signal for the herd to start moving. A buzz filled the lobby, and Kirsten caught snatches of conversation, some neutral and others more emotional, depending on who was speaking.

'I have a daughter myself. I can't bear to think what...'

'Has her father reacted yet?'

'Not officially. But there's already plenty of speculation on social media that Mariana's been murdered, either for theft or with a sexual motive.'

'The police say there was no sign of a break-in. That's an indication that she let her attacker in, isn't it?'

'They haven't found a body yet.'

The buzzing of voices disappeared into the background, and it was like Kirsten was being sucked into a dark funnel. She felt herself sliding back into the past, deeper and deeper, scrambling in vain to get away. Suddenly she was that ten-year-old up in the gutter again, watching Sandy's body fall to the ground. Over and over. With no way to stop it. She fought against that old fear, which was so paralysing that it could still wreak havoc even now. It was

a fight she had almost lost during her law studies, like that time she had suffered a black-out during an exam about a case involving a woman who was strangled by her husband.

‘Something wrong?’ she heard Isabel ask. The words sounded muddled and distorted, as if they were coming from underwater.

Kirsten shook her head and tried to focus on a nearby object. In his firm and calm manner, Fontes told everyone to go to the meeting room, which was next to his office. Isabel walked beside her, eyeing her thoughtfully. Kirsten felt herself becoming even queasier at the idea of having to share an office with an untrustworthy colleague who seemed to take such an interest in her. From now on, if a client in prison complained about an annoying cellmate, she would be more understanding. When they got to the meeting room, she sat as far away from Isabel as she could.

Fontes waited for everyone to sit down and then, after a brief recap of Mariana Sá Pimentel’s disappearance, he moved straight on to the order of the day. He went over a number of new cases and talked about how they would be allocated. A bulky file about a drugs case swelled the volume of Kirsten’s workload.

‘Finally,’ said Fontes, ‘as you are all aware by now, Carla no longer works here. There were valid reasons, but I’d like to leave it at that. I trust I can consider the matter closed.’

His gaze went around the table, and Kirsten wondered if it was a coincidence that he looked at her for just a little longer. Had he noticed that Carla had turned up outside the building? Or had Isabel had a word in his ear?

When the meeting was over, Kirsten was relieved to see that Isabel did not follow her upstairs, but stayed behind in the lobby, talking to Diego. She opened the door to their office. Isabel’s presence had already resulted in some visible changes. There were no files lying on the floor now. An extra cabinet had appeared on Isabel’s side of the office. On what had been

Carla's desk, the colourful bits and pieces had been replaced by a stapler and a letter-opener that at first glance looked like a knife.

The door opened and Isabel came in. Kirsten's phone rang. The caller's name appeared on the display: Carla.

Kirsten left it ringing.

'Aren't you going to answer that?' asked Isabel, sitting down at her desk.

'Just need to finish something that can't wait,' she replied, picking up her phone and turning it off.

It was late in the afternoon when Kirsten overheard a conversation between two lawyers at the photocopier.

'Apparently a suspect's been taken in for questioning in the Mariana Sá Pimentel case.'

'I hope for his sake that he's got a tough lawyer.'

'Why's that?'

'To keep the tabloids at bay.'

Carrying a pile of photocopies, she walked back into her office. Isabel didn't look up. The desk phone rang, and Kirsten was just in time to put down the pile of paper and answer the call.

'Mr Fontes urgently needs to see you in his office,' said the Sphinx. 'He wants to talk to you about a new case.'

She sounded as inscrutable as ever, but the metallic tone of her voice was somehow a little more insistent this time.

Half an hour later, Kirsten left Fontes's office with her phone in her hand. It felt like it was on vibrate, but she realised it was just her own hand trembling. With her mind on their conversation, she rushed out through the glass doors and onto the street, where she called Tomás. She wanted him to be the first to hear the news. When she reached his voicemail, she did not leave a message. There are some things that can't be summed up in a couple of sentences. And she wanted to hear his enthusiastic reaction herself and not in a text message later.

The next person she called was her mother.

'I've got big news, Mum.'

'Can you speak a little more slowly, Kirsten? I can't hear a word.'

'I've got my first big case, a disappearance, could be a murder. It's all over the TV here. The missing person is the twenty-one-year-old daughter of the leader of the Partido Socialista.'

'Oh, her poor family! Did they ask for you specially?'

'I'm representing the suspect in the case, Mum, a Flemish property developer.'

It went silent on the other end of the line. Then her mother wished her good luck, and Kirsten quickly ended the call. She looked at the busy traffic around her. She had been given her first big case, but the world just went on turning. Her telephone rang. When she saw the name appear on the display, she decided to answer. Outside was at least safer than inside.

'Why do you keep avoiding me?' asked Carla.

'Fontes explicitly told us not to have any contact with you.'

'So what's he saying about me? And about why they suddenly sent me packing?'

'Nothing, he's not said anything about it at all.'

Carla sighed. 'It's so unfair. If only I knew who'd done this to me. There's someone in that office with a hidden agenda.'

‘I’m sorry. It must be awful for you.’

‘They’ve taken everything from me.’

‘Listen, Carla, I...’

‘And I think you’re next,’ she said.

Kirsten heard someone cough behind her, and she turned her head. Isabel was smoking by the office doors.

Judging by her cigarette, she’d been there a while.

‘I didn’t ask for an intern.’

Kirsten looked at Marnick Tanghe, the well-built man in his fifties who was sitting before her in one of the small rooms in the police station in Bairro Alto. On the outside, the building was deceptively beautiful, with the small tiles in mosaics on the walls. Tourists often took photographs without even realising it was a police station. The interior was different though: a harsh world of hectic police officers and detainees.

Kirsten stayed where she was, but did not sit down. ‘It was you who called our firm, Mr Tanghe – one of the best-known law firms in Lisbon – and asked Mr Fontes if we had a lawyer who could assist you in your mother tongue.’

‘Yes, but not...’

‘Kirsten Hartogs, qualified lawyer,’ she said, holding out her hand purposefully. ‘As you can hear, I’m from Flanders too.’

His handshake was firm, but his palm was sweaty. Kirsten sat down across the table from him. The room was like a cell: white walls, a table, two chairs and a small window with bars. Some noise came from the corridor and Tanghe seemed to flinch. As she prepared her papers, she took some time to observe the man. Tanghe had pronounced features that, in the theatre, would have earned him the label of ‘character actor’. His eyes were too close together, and his nose was a little too big, with broken veins in the surrounding skin.

He reminded her of those people who euphemistically refer to themselves as wine connoisseurs, but whose more honest family members would describe them as alcoholics. There was no guarantee that Tanghe belonged to that latter category; he might simply have been let down by Mother Nature. His rough hands, with their gnawed fingernails, moved restlessly across the surface of the table. There were red blotches on his neck.

‘So why don’t you tell me why you’re here?’ Kirsten began.

‘You’d better ask those idiots out there,’ he said, with a brief nod towards the corridor.

The patches of red on his neck became even redder. Kirsten let her pen hover over the paper. Fontes had at least been honest in her conversation with him. He had said there was a new client – a property developer from Antwerp who had been living in Lisbon for eight years and who had expressly asked for someone who could assist him in his mother tongue, as he was unable to express himself fluently in Portuguese. ‘And definitely not now that I’m so furious at those bungling fools for trying to pin this on me,’ was what Marnick Tanghe had said to Fontes in English over the phone. Fontes had told Kirsten that it was not going to be easy.

A first major case never was, she thought. The noise in the corridor had died down now and she hoped the same calm would filter through into the interview room, as Marnick Tanghe looked as if he might jump up at any minute and overturn the table. One wrong word could light the fuse and make the block of granite in front of her explode.

‘You have been detained for questioning on suspicion of involvement in the disappearance of Mariana Sá Pimentel,’ began Kirsten.

‘I had absolutely nothing to do with that, damn it!’ His hand became a fist, and the muscle above his right eye twitched.

‘I’m here to help you, Mr Tanghe. Not to attack you.’

‘They could have sent someone with more experience.’

‘But they don’t speak your language.’

He did not reply.

‘It’s in your own interest to tell me everything you know,’ she said. His fist opened and closed; he looked at her like a drowning man considering whether the piece of wreckage looked strong enough to hold him. Then he apparently reached a decision, laying his hand on

the table and saying: ‘They were just suddenly there. The police. Hauled me off like some kind of criminal. Can you imagine? In front of my staff. In my own office.’

‘Where is that?’

‘Rua do Alecrim.’ A street in Chiado, Kirsten knew, with several commercial offices and a number of reputable hotels. ‘Is that where you live too?’

‘No, in Principe Real. We’ve got a flat there, my wife and I.’ He shifted uneasily in his chair again. ‘Whatever must Monique be thinking? And Gilles? How am I going to explain to my wife and my son that I’ve been thrown into jail?’

‘The examining magistrate still has to decide whether to hold you.’

‘When will that happen?’

‘This evening. I’ll be there for the hearing.’ She tapped her pen on her notebook. ‘So, Mr Tanghe, it’s very much in your interest to put all your cards on the table. Why did they arrest you?’

‘It’s all lies,’ he said, banging his fist on the table.

‘So what are they saying?’ asked Kirsten.

‘That there’s a witness who saw me there yesterday evening, at about quarter past ten, walking down the dead-end alleyway to the back of her house. And that they found a Tanghe Projects brochure in the house about the latest project that we’re developing. There was blood on it.’

‘What’s the project?’

‘We’re constructing a luxury resort in Comporta.’

Kirsten knew the small coastal village on the long Troia Peninsula; it had beautiful, pristine beaches and was an hour’s drive from Lisbon. That beauty came with a price label attached: millionaires and celebrities from all over the world were willing to pay big money for a luxury villa in a secure residential resort.

She cleared her throat. The next question might be the one that would light the fuse.

‘And were you in Mariana Sá Pimentel’s house last night?’

His face hardened and for a moment she thought he was going to fly at her across the table. ‘If I tell you I wasn’t there, then I wasn’t.’

‘So you don’t know Mariana Sá Pimentel?’

‘I’ve never even seen the woman.’

‘Did you know that her father is the leader of the Partido Socialista?’

‘I’m not interested in politics.’

‘Do you have an alibi?’

‘What?’

‘Can anyone confirm that you were elsewhere at the time when this witness supposedly saw you?’

‘I worked in my office until ten and then I walked straight home.’

‘Was anyone else there with you?’

‘Until ten at night? They’re not all crazy like me, working that late.’

‘That Tanghe Projects brochure with the blood on it. How did it get there?’

He leaned towards her. ‘Obvious, isn’t it?’

She waited for him to go on.

‘Because someone put it there.’

‘For what reason?’

‘You don’t have to have gone to university to figure that one out: to put the blame on me, of course.’

‘Why would they pick on you specifically?’

‘Because I’m not from around here, am I?’

When Kirsten took a step outside the police station, she had no idea what hit her. To the left and right of the exit, reporters, cameramen and photographers crowded around so tightly that they completely blocked her way. Some of the press were actually standing in the road, and impatient drivers were sounding their horns, only increasing the chaos. Her phone rang incessantly as she struggled to make her way through the pack without responding to their questions. Somewhere in the crowd, she spotted Miguel Rodrigues. Unlike the others, he was not yelling questions at her, but remained at a distance, looking at the screen of his telephone. Various microphones were shoved under her nose, adorned with what she recognised as the logos of major broadcasters. This was not a press pack, she thought, it was a rampaging horde.

‘Has the suspect confessed?’

‘Is it true that he’s a foreign property developer?’

‘Has he said what he did with Mariana?’

‘Was she raped?’

‘What’s happened to the body?’

Some of the reporters pressed close to her, touching her arms. *What have I got myself into?* shot through her mind. She considered turning around and fleeing into the police station. But running away was for cowards. *And for people who don’t realise that getting to the top means climbing uphill first*, she heard her father say.

She thought about the advice Fontes had given her, stood up straight, and said: ‘No comment.’

Then she squeezed her way through the baying crowd and ran down the street. The most persistent journalists pursued her to her car, and a red-haired reporter from a commercial channel had the nerve to stand right in front of her car door, with his microphone at the ready.

‘Did Mariana Sá Pimentel suffer much?’

She had to use her bag to push the man aside so that she could get into her car. Then she drove off, without looking back.

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Miguel had seen how the pack had gone after Kirsten Hartogs: it was open season. And this was just the beginning. She had done her best to keep them at bay. The young lawyer had spirit – he had to give her that. She reminded him of his ex-wife, Joana, back when their initial friction had still caused sparks. But then the sparks had sadly turned into everyday irritations and their marriage had ended up on the rocks. His thoughts turned to their seven-year-old daughter, Ana, and he was glad that Joana and he still agreed about one thing: Ana should not suffer because her parents considered their marriage the biggest mistake of their lives.

That reminded him that Ana was supposed to spend this weekend with him. She only came once a fortnight, and Joana thought that he sometimes went over the top in his attempts to be a good father. He assumed she was just jealous because he freed up so much time for them to have fun together. On her weekends with Daddy, he always took Ana for an ice cream at the shopping centre on Saturday afternoon, and then they went for a stroll around Baixa or Chiado. For Ana, it was the highlight of the weekend and a new fixed point in her life, something to hold on to since the divorce, which meant she had to live in two houses and the firm ground had been swept away from under her feet. They had not skipped their father-and-daughter ritual on any of their shared Saturday afternoons since then.

He thought about the message he had just received from an anonymous number on his phone. It was from Sombra, an informer he knew only by his nickname. Another reporter at the newspaper had warned Miguel not to have any dealings with this man. Sombra apparently

had a dark side and had once been convicted of fraud. They said he was not to be trusted, a slippery customer who played off one side against another, and some of Miguel's colleagues whispered about suspected underworld connections. None of that mattered to Miguel – on the contrary. The fact that he was one of the few journalists who sought out contact with Sombra made his information all the more rare and therefore valuable at a time when everyone was fighting for a scoop. He read Sombra's message again:

*Mariana Sá Pimentel. The whole thing stinks. Saturday at the Dominican church. 3 pm.*

Miguel was worried for various reasons. There was never any negotiation with Sombra about the place and the time. Going for an ice cream with his daughter suddenly didn't seem like such a good idea if he was going to be meeting a man with a criminal record. But there was something else. Sombra's information had previously opened up a few huge cans of worms. Last year it had led to an article about certain interest groups deliberately starting forest fires in Portugal, after which the editors and Miguel himself had received death threats.

Kirsten Hartogs had long since disappeared from sight. He could try to use that Segurança Social article to get to speak to her about the Mariana Sá Pimentel case. But he wasn't likely to get anywhere. He couldn't blame her. She's really going to need some nerve, he thought. The lawyer still had no idea of the wasp's nest she had entered.

‘You’re much later than we agreed,’ said Tomás.

He was waiting for her in the hallway of their flat, all dressed up and about to leave for Leonor’s party at their parents’ house.

‘The examining magistrate has decided to detain Marnick Tanghe on the basis of the witness statement and while they carry out further investigations, including fingerprints, DNA testing and mobile-phone tracking. And I had to go to the office to discuss it all with Fontes. Isn’t it incredible that I got this case?’

In his usual pragmatic way, Tomás said they could talk about it in the car. ‘We really need to leave now. I’ve already let my mother know we won’t be on time.’

For the umpteenth time that day, her phone rang. The media refused to give up. She saw the look on Tomás’s face, dismissed the journalist abruptly and ran for the bathroom.

‘Give me five minutes to freshen myself up a bit.’

Tomás had reacted calmly when she had called him at the beginning of the evening with the news that she had been appointed as the lawyer for the suspect in the Mariana Sá Pimentel case. A little too calmly for her liking. She snatched the brush from the bathroom cabinet and ran it quickly through her hair. Then she put on perfume and lipstick and used a cotton-wool pad to dab off a little stray mascara. She did not want Graciette to think she hadn’t made an effort. Checking herself in the mirror, she saw that her blouse was creased; the tiring day had clearly taken its toll. Graciette never stopped to think about the long days that Kirsten worked as a lawyer and would undoubtedly see it as a lack of courtesy. She dashed to the bedroom, dropping her blouse on the floor and grabbing another one from the wardrobe. The last button was still not done up when she dashed back to the hallway and Tomás. As he opened the front door, she whisked up her handbag, which she had deposited on the floor when she came in.

‘Hang on,’ she said. ‘Leonor’s present.’

Tomás held up a plastic bag from the exclusive clothes shop where she had bought a silk scarf a few weeks ago. Leonor had picked it up and admired it when they had been out shopping together; she thought it was beautiful, but sadly too expensive. Kirsten had remembered and gone back to buy the scarf later. Leonor was a friendly, somewhat timid girl, and Kirsten was glad to treat her to this luxurious item of clothing. Besides, a happy Leonor would score her points with Graciette.

In the car, Kirsten started to talk about the case, without going into detail. Tomás listened, keeping a careful eye on the traffic. Maybe that was why he wasn’t asking any questions. He was driving much faster than usual.

He looked a little agitated as he stopped at a junction, and he pushed the accelerator down before the light had turned green.

‘We really should have left much earlier,’ he said.

‘I wasn’t to know that the hearing with the examining magistrate would go on so late, and then I had to report back to Fontes afterwards.’

‘Mother expressly asked us to be on time. Particularly as it’s Leonor’s eighteenth. You know from previous years that she has a tradition of raising a glass together at the exact time Leonor was born, and that was...’ He looked at his watch. ‘...precisely two minutes ago.’

The rest of the drive took place in silence. They turned onto the street where Tomás’s parents and his younger sister lived. Kirsten thought once again about Marnick Tanghe, and how his anger had turned into panic when the examining magistrate had issued the warrant and Tanghe had realised that they were going to keep him in pre-trial detention. She wished she could make Tomás understand how important it was, but this didn’t seem like the right moment.

He parked the car and they got out. Carrying the wrapped gift, Kirsten walked to the front door. It was her fault they were late. In spite of the expensive present, she expected that the thermometer would not rise above zero. She could already see it on Graciette's face when she opened the door.

'I'm sorry we're late,' began Kirsten, 'but Mr Fontes asked me to...'

Graciette dismissed her words. 'Let's not talk about your work this evening.'

It sounded more like an order than a request.

She had not thought that Graciette was going to thaw out that evening, but against all odds she did. Kirsten popped another piece of *queijada* into her mouth, although she actually didn't feel like eating any more of the sweet almond-flavoured cake. The big table in the living room was laid as if not just the immediate family and a few friends had been invited, but the entire neighbourhood. Aurora, the maid, carried out her domestic duties as meticulously as ever, topping up plates of cakes and pouring tea and coffee. The eyes of Donna Graciette – as the respectful Aurora always called her – silently directed her to the empty cups and plates. Rui, Tomás's father, sat at the table beside him with the calm demeanour that his son had inherited. The fact that Graciette and Rui had such different temperaments had maintained the balance for years, thought Kirsten. At the head of the table sat Leonor, her red cheeks typical of shy people who reluctantly find themselves the centre of attention. By that point, Graciette had told so many stories about Leonor as a gifted child that even the most shameless of people would have blushed. Then it was time for the presents, and Leonor seemed relieved that the stream of praise had paused for a moment. There was even a touching moment when her mother gave her the traditional gold necklace that had belonged to her own dear departed mother, who had come from the north of Portugal.

‘Eighteen gold beads,’ said Graciette. ‘One for each year. That was the last one. The necklace is yours now, Leonor.’

Mother and daughter gave each other a hug. Graciette looked completely different when she smiled, thought Kirsten. Their eyes met briefly, and her future mother-in-law seemed to be hesitating about something. When Graciette had let go of her daughter, Kirsten walked over to give Leonor her present. Leonor seemed genuinely delighted with the silk scarf.

‘I can’t believe you went back to that clothes shop just for me,’ she said with a smile.

Graciette’s face seemed to soften. She left the living room and returned a little later, sitting down beside Kirsten and handing her a small black box.

‘These are for you. They belonged to my grandmother.’

Kirsten opened the box and saw two antique gold drop-shaped earrings, beautifully made in the traditional Portuguese style and probably worth a lot of money. She hardly dared to touch them.

‘Thank you, Graciette.’

She smiled at Tomás. Although she would never have bought anything like this herself, Kirsten realised it was the kindest gesture Graciette could have made. It meant: Welcome to the family. But Graciette would never say that out loud.

It was late in the evening and everyone except Tomás and Kirsten had left. Graciette asked Aurora to pack up some cakes so that they could take them home. There was no point arguing, thought Kirsten, and Tomás loved the pastries anyway. Rui had turned on the television and sat down on the sofa beside Leonor. The late news was on. Kirsten sat with Graciette at the table, waiting for Aurora to return from the kitchen.

‘Is there any more news about the daughter of Carlos Jorge Sá Pimentel?’ asked Graciette.

As Graciette had asked, Kirsten had not spoken another word about her work for the entire evening. She had hoped that Tomás might bring up the Marnick Tanghe case so that she could say something about it, but he hadn’t. On TV, there was a brief response from Bernardo Lopes, Carlos Jorge Sá Pimentel’s right-hand man. Lopes was a sturdy man in his mid-forties, and Kirsten had read in the press that he was a dedicated fan of Benfica and never missed a single home game. He liked to tell people that he had once played for the team himself and that he now volunteered for the youth programme. On the screen, the spokesman was looking at the assembled members of the press in a way that made it clear he would not tolerate any nonsense.

‘On behalf of Mariana Sá Pimentel’s family, I ask you to respect their privacy in these difficult circumstances,’ he said. ‘I also call upon anyone who has seen anything suspicious in relation to this worrying disappearance to contact the police as a matter of urgency.’

He turned heel without answering any questions from the press.

Then a photograph of Marnick Tanghe appeared on the screen and the name of his company, Tanghe Projects, was also mentioned. The surly expression on his face made him look like a potential criminal. Legally, suspects were not supposed to be shown on screen, and Kirsten cursed the media that did not respect that law. Maybe this was the moment to tell Tomás’s parents that she had been asked to assist Tanghe. That would place her a level higher on Graciette’s scale of respect. But before she could say anything, Leonor cried out enthusiastically: ‘Hey, you’re on TV!’

Kirsten saw herself presented on screen as the suspect’s lawyer, just at the moment when she left the police station and was mobbed by the press. She remembered how, in her

panic, she had contemplated fleeing back into the police station. The photo of Marnick Tanghe was still in the top-right corner.

‘Are you defending that man?’ said Graciette in a broken voice.

Everyone was looking at Graciette now, who was pointing at the screen with a trembling finger.

‘That villain,’ she said, ‘has my father’s death on his conscience.’

Tomás walked ahead of Kirsten and unlocked the car door from a distance, as if he couldn't get home quickly enough.

‘Did you see how happy your sister was with her scarf?’ asked Kirsten.

Without responding, he opened his door.

‘She thanked me three times,’ she continued.

Tomás leaned with his arm on the car door. ‘First we're late,’ he said, ‘and then it turns out that this Marnick Tanghe is to blame for my grandfather's death. That can kind of put a damper on the party mood.’

‘How was I to know your grandfather lost his house to make way for a Tanghe Projects apartment complex?’

‘It was the house that my great-grandfather built with his own hands. It's where my mother grew up and where we said goodbye to my grandmother.’ He paused. ‘It was terrible, the thought that we could never go back to that house again.’

He got in. She opened her door and sat beside him. ‘You know yourself that it's not the property developer who's to blame for taking the house, but the government,’ she said. ‘So it isn't directly Marnick Tanghe's fault.’

He started the car. ‘That doesn't matter to my mother. That expropriation business gave my grandad a heart attack six years ago. It happened the day after he received the letter about it. So, as she sees it, he died of grief – and Tanghe's to blame.’

‘I think she's exaggerating.’

‘And she thinks you're defending a double murderer.’

‘There's not even a body in the Mariana Sá Pimentel case.’ She realised how fierce she sounded, as if she were arguing in court. ‘Marnick Tanghe is innocent until the contrary is proved.’

‘Well, you’ll have to try your very hardest to persuade my mother of that. And she won’t be the only one.’

‘Thank you for your support,’ said Kirsten. ‘It’s exactly what I need right now.’

He sighed. ‘Sorry.’

She switched on her telephone, which she’d turned off at the start of the evening. With increasing astonishment, she watched the explosion of emails, WhatsApp messages and missed calls.

‘I’ve got some more work to do this evening,’ she said a little later as they turned onto their street.

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Just before midnight, Miguel quietly opened the door of the guest room. The hinges squeaked, but Ana did not wake up. She was lying with her face towards the door, her brown hair fanned out across the pillow, and she seemed to be smiling in her sleep.

Maybe it was just his imagination, and he was fooling himself about how happy she looked. Out of guilt. Those first few months after the divorce, he had felt so wretched for breaking his promise to his daughter. When he had held her in his arms as a new-born baby, he had promised her he would always be there for her. And seven years later, he had already been demoted to a weekend father, and even that was only once a fortnight. According to Joana, it was because of his work as an investigative journalist; not the irregular hours, but his obsession with the job.

‘Well, I can’t do things by halves, can I?’ he had said to her.

‘Except for in your marriage,’ was her reply.

Last year, Joana had met someone else, and it was at that point, when it was already too late, that he had realised he wanted to save their marriage. The worst part about the divorce was the prospect of all those days without Ana.

His daughter sighed as if she understood him. He gently closed the door again and walked to the living room, where he sat down on the sofa and picked up the remote control. Just before he had gone to Ana's bedroom, he had paused the recording of the TV news. Kirsten Hartogs was on the screen; he had pressed the pause button as the lawyer had left the police station and was surrounded by the press. Maybe it was not visible to everyone, but he could read the panic in her eyes, even though it lasted for just a fraction of a second before she pulled herself together. He had already watched the news item a couple of times.

It was the look of someone who was wondering what she had let herself in for. He recognised that feeling because he had been through it himself when he'd gone to such great lengths to investigate the forest fires that had been started deliberately, and subsequently had received death threats. And then there was that whole business with Pedro too.

As he looked at the memorial card for his dead brother on his desk, he felt his anger bubbling up. Even in a European legal system, an innocent man could end up behind bars while the actual culprit was still walking around free. Joana said his brother's suicide had made him bitter. Deep down, he knew she was right.

He let the news continue playing and watched Kirsten's firm response to the press once again: 'No comment.' Maybe she didn't realise yet that all eyes were on her now. It was an honour to get such a big case, but it could be a poisoned chalice if she messed it up.

Miguel turned off the television and thought about tomorrow. There was that guilty feeling again. If Joana ever found out that he had taken Ana anywhere near a shady informer, he'd see even less of his daughter.

But Sombra had said there was something fishy about the Mariana Sá Pimentel case. There was news to gather.

And sometimes you couldn't do things by halves.

\* \* \*

Around quarter past one, Kirsten switched off the desk lamp and pushed back her chair. She had answered most of her emails, updated her diary for tomorrow – including a visit to Marnick Tanghe in prison – and made notes about a drugs case.

Only now did she realise how tired she was. She stood up and yawned. Tomás had gone to bed an hour ago. He'd said something to her before disappearing into the bedroom, but she had been so busy that it hadn't got through to her. She'd just mumbled something by way of an answer.

On the table she saw the kitschy mug with hearts on that he'd given her as a joke for Valentine's Day two years ago. The real present had been inside the mug: a trip to Paris.

She read the note next to the mug.

*See you soon. I'm waiting for you. Don't let your tea get cold. xxx*

She washed the contents down the sink.

On her way to the prison, the rain was coming down hard. Kirsten turned on her car radio and caught a snatch of the morning news.

‘... divers from the fire brigade have been brought in to search near the cruise terminal for Mariana’s remains. This is believed to be the result of an anonymous tip, but this has not been officially confirmed.’

News might come at any minute that the divers had found something, thought Kirsten. She kept glancing over at her phone on the passenger seat beside her. If the body were found, there might be DNA traces that did not lead to Marnick Tanghe.

*But what if they did?*

She turned onto Rua Marquês da Fronteira, where the prison was located. The impressive building was directly opposite a residential neighbourhood. The entrance, with its two round towers and battlements, always reminded her of a medieval fortress. But the bars on the windows and the secure walls undermined that idyllic image. The rain made it seem even gloomier this morning.

She parked her car and took a look in the mirror before getting out. She’d not had nearly enough sleep and, even with the make-up, her tiredness could be seen under her eyes. She picked up her bag off the passenger seat, tried in vain to smooth out a crease in her dark-grey trouser suit, and then got out. Her shoes tapped on the tarmac as she walked across the car park under an umbrella. In spite of the lack of sleep, she had still been clearheaded enough to take the right shoes from the wardrobe this morning: black court shoes with no metal buckles. During her internship, she had sometimes been in such a hurry that she’d put on the wrong shoes or accidentally worn an underwired bra. The beep of the metal detector in the prison always felt like a defeat, as if she had not read her case file with sufficient care and had overlooked important details.

That was not going to happen to her today. The right shoes. A sports bra without underwiring. It felt a bit snug though. That made her think of Graciette, who yesterday had mentioned in passing that a strapless wedding dress would not be right for Kirsten. She had also reminded Kirsten again that they were booked in for a fitting at an exclusive bridal fashions store later this month. That had all happened before Marnick Tanghe came on TV and the bomb exploded.

Tomás had said that morning that they had to find some way to make it up to his mother. Which promised to be even more difficult than defending Marnick Tanghe, thought Kirsten. And that was not going to be an easy task. The morning newspapers had already set the tone. ‘The angel and the devil’ was only one of the many headlines of the articles that already seemed to have the course of Tanghe’s trial all mapped out.

Kirsten pressed the button to the right of the high-security door and announced her arrival. A moment later, the door swung open. She walked up to the reception and handed over her lawyer’s pass. It was going to be a busy morning. In addition to Tanghe, there was another client on the list that she’d had to submit in advance. The officer at the desk gave her a badge with her photo on it.

She walked down the corridor and left her handbag, umbrella and telephone in one of the lockers. Then she passed through the metal detector without any problems and walked on to the room where lawyers had to wait until their client was available. Experience had taught her that this might take some time. As she entered the room, the conversations around her stopped. Some of the lawyers gave her a nod, but most of them just stared at her. The discussions soon got going again. As Kirsten sat down, she tried to interpret what had just happened: presumably a mixture of curiosity, envy and hostility.

After about half an hour, a guard informed her that the interview room was free. She got up and headed over there. It was a clinical room with no windows, just two chairs and a

table. The door opened and Marnick Tanghe was led in. In his prison garb, he looked completely different from the day before.

He sat down and raised his hands in a helpless gesture. ‘I can’t do this. There’s a guy in here who killed his mother with a knuckleduster because she wouldn’t give him any money.’

‘I realise that this must be a nightmare for you, Mr Tanghe,’ she said.

‘Can you promise to get me out of here?’

‘No, I can’t do that. And any lawyer who did would be lying. But I can promise you that I’ll do everything I can to ensure the best possible outcome. So I’d like to go through again exactly what happened on the night Mariana Sá Pimentel disappeared.’

‘I’ve already told you, haven’t I? I worked in my office until ten in the evening.’

‘Was that a regular thing?’

‘I’m a hard worker and I do long days. You know what they say: If you stand still, you go backwards. Hard work is what a company needs to function. If anyone thinks otherwise, I throw them out. And that’s what I said in that interview with *Público*.’

‘Which interview?’

‘A piece about foreign entrepreneurs in Lisbon.’

‘So anyone who read that article would have known that you often work in the office until late at night.’

‘It’s not like I make a secret of it. I’m proud of it.’

‘And after your long day at work, you walked straight home at around ten?’

‘I’ve already told you a thousand times that I went nowhere near that missing woman.’

‘Someone claims you did. He says you walked down the alleyway to the back of Mariana’s house that evening. You have also confirmed to the examining magistrate that the witness’s description matches the clothes you were wearing at the time.’

‘But I wasn’t there.’

‘Did anyone see you on the way home?’

‘Not as far as I know.’

‘Can anyone confirm that you arrived home at around twenty past ten?’

‘Monique and Gilles were already asleep.’

‘Didn’t your wife wake up?’

‘No, because of her sleeping pills.’

‘Do you often walk from your office to your flat in Principe Real instead of going by car?’

‘It depends.’

‘On what?’

‘On whether I need a bit of fresh air after a day at work. It’s only a fifteen-minute walk.’

Marnick Tanghe looked like he could do with a very long walk after his day in the cell.

He slammed his hand on the table. ‘I should be sitting at my desk now instead of inside this madhouse. How are they going to keep things straight without me? And what’s going to happen to our company if people think I murdered that woman?’

Kirsten couldn’t help thinking of Graciette’s chilly glare and her words: ‘double murderer’.

‘I’m sure your staff will do their best to keep everything running smoothly,’ she said.

She chose not to mention the damage to the company’s reputation. Marnick Tanghe already had enough on his mind at the moment.

‘It took me years to build up Tanghe Projects here,’ he said. She could hear the fury in his voice. ‘You have no idea how much opposition I encountered and how hard I had to work to stay afloat.’

A thought shot through Kirsten’s mind: Just like I have to do at the office.

‘But I’ve always believed you can achieve anything you want if you work hard enough. I provide employment for so many people, and a lot of the city’s old neighbourhoods have been reinvigorated thanks to us. And now all of that’s being wiped out. Is this the thanks I get?’ He sighed. ‘So what’s going to happen next?’

‘You’ll have to appear before the judge soon,’ said Kirsten. ‘The day before that, I can take a look at your file. Then I’ll come back here and we’ll go through everything and decide on our strategy for the hearing.’

‘I didn’t do anything to that woman. I swear it. I don’t understand why they’re blaming me for it.’

‘It’s up to us to prove them wrong.’

‘Could you do something for me?’ asked Tanghe. ‘Could you go round to see Monique and Gilles today?’

‘It’s highly unusual for me to visit a client’s family at home, Mr Tanghe. Why do you think it’s important?’

‘So that you can tell them personally that I didn’t do it. And that they have to believe me. I’m innocent.’

It was already around noon when she walked across the prison car park to her vehicle, checking the messages and emails on her phone. It had stopped raining by then, but the stream of messages on her phone continued unabated. The press kept insisting on a reaction or an interview, and some of them wouldn’t hesitate to put words in her mouth.

Just before she reached her car, she stopped.

Of all the emails that had come in, one stood out, sent from an address she didn't recognise. She read the message, which was written in Portuguese.

*DO YOU STILL DARE TO WALK THE STREETS ALONE?????*

Kirsten fought back the urge to look over her shoulder, deleted the message and got into her car. As she was about to drive off, there was a loud knocking on the window. She jumped when she saw Carla standing there.

'I've been hanging around here for a while now,' said Carla. 'Hoping to see you.'

Kirsten lowered her window. Lawyers from other firms were walking across the car park.

'It's great that you've got the Tanghe case,' said Carla. 'But I think you need all the support you can get. Particularly now that you're all on your own at the office.'

'What do you mean?'

'Watch out for Isabel.' Carla looked around nervously. A lawyer in a nearby car was staring in their direction. 'It's too risky to stand around here. Call me, Kirsten.'