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*Deep, Dark Blue*

*A Zurich Crime Novel*

*Translation: Katy Derbyshire*

*'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air.'*

*Genesis 1:26*

*From a distance, the cormorants sounded like bleating goats. He could see their metallic-glinting heads appearing where he'd set the traps underwater. The orange storm lights were still flashing at the harbour. Those damn birds had made the most out of him coming late. The fisherman began to curse into his beard. In the old days, the cormorants had only rested here briefly on their journey south. A few years ago, though,*

*the colony had settled. Now, the nets often only held two or three nibbled perch when he brought them up. He opened his box of fire crackers, jumping jacks and flares, and lit several at once. He would associate the foul sulphuric scent with the birds for the rest of his life. With his empty nets and the incredulous look on the face of the employee he'd had to let go after twenty years of working together. As he brought up the weir trap, he left a voice message for a hunter friend who he paid a bounty for every bird he shot down. The winch's rattle grew slower – it was blocked. He pulled on gloves over his calloused hands. The rope felt like he'd made*

*a good catch after all; he shone his torch down in anticipation. He almost dropped it when a canvas shoe appeared, enclosing a bare foot. Where the pale trousers ended, soft flesh bulged out, shimmering violet-blue. He'd once seen a decomposing corpse in the forest, many years ago now. The skeleton face, shreds of skin still attached, had crept into his dreams for a long time after. He shivered. Swiftly, he dialled emergency services and was relieved to hear a human voice.*

*Ten Days Previously*

They say Switzerland's most beautiful towns are situated on both a river and a lake. Surrounded by water flowing from the snow-pure mountain range along an open valley, past densely populated banks. Until at last, the city itself rises from the blue like a dream. And there, on the northern edge of the lake's basin, alongside the still young Limmat River, is where the medieval heart of Zurich begins.

In *Chez Manon*, across from the Predigerkirche, the coffee machine commenced its service with a barrage of hisses. Tired faces vanished behind newspapers on wooden rods until Manon served up syrupy espresso in warmed cups. A conspiratorial moment of reflection before the shops opened and the tourists jammed the narrow streets. Close by, an ash tree ascended in a closed-in courtyard, only spreading its mighty arms above roof level. At its feet stood a small house with slate-grey window frames, and outside it stood a woman. She had a towel wrapped around her wet hair and was wearing a silk kimono that

slipped from her shoulder every time she bent down. Her feet were encased in earth-encrusted garden clogs, the kind sold in rural DIY stores. Rosa Zambrano clipped off a twig of verbena and was perfectly at peace with herself and the world. The world consisted of red-cheeked radishes growing in the nooks and crannies between summer pumpkins and beanstalks, or of courgettes basking in the morning sun, their saffron-yellow blossoms nearing perfection...

Instead of going for a row on Lake Zurich as usual on her day off, Rosa was in a rush today. She went inside the house, deposited the branch on the wooden table and climbed



the creaky staircase. The last injection had left a bruise on her belly. She rifled through her wardrobe for a loose summer dress. All the quicker to remove again later. A sudden whistle called her back to her morning ritual. She dashed downstairs, taking the kettle off the gas with one hand and reaching for the cast-iron sencha pot with the other. A present from her ex-boyfriend. She paused mid-movement and moved a step-stool over to the shelves instead. There was a brand-new glass jug on the top shelf. Rosa placed it carefully on the dresser and plucked herbs from their stems until only purple-tinted flowers were left. Once she'd poured boiling

water in the pot, the contents soon glistened like molten gold. Lastly, she fetched an empty ice-cube tray and divided the blossoms between the moulds, filled them with water and put them in the freezer compartment. Then she gathered up the leftover stems. They too would find their place: on the compost heap. Rosa went into the bathroom occupying a corner of the kitchen. She'd long been planning to convert the shed, where spiders and woodlice dwelled between neatly piled firewood from the city's forest. But she was reluctant to banish the freestanding bathtub on its varnished feet from the kitchen. It offered a

direct view of the Scandinavian wood stove, flames crackling away as she bathed. Like almost everything in the little house, the mirror Rosa now stepped in front of had been put up by her own hands. A silver-threaded lock of hair curled out of her towelling turban. She pulled a face and then smoothed her expression, rubbing blackthorn oil on her cheeks and neck. Next, she opened the fridge, more out of habit than anything else, and slammed the door shut again. Even if she hadn't been strictly instructed to turn up on an empty stomach, she couldn't have eaten a thing. In the garden, she placed her steaming teacup on a

side table and sat down on the deckchair beneath the ash tree. Rosa leaned back. The sun shone through the branches, casting fleeting patterns on her face.

The doctor's surgery was a little way out of town, in one of the lakeside areas named after the colour of the light that suffused the spacious houses at dusk. As Rosa cycled, the first mothers and fathers waited at the crossing outside Tiefenbrunnen station, on their way to the nearby city beach. The handles of their strollers were so laden down that the vehicles would have tipped over backwards without the counterweight of

strapped-in children. Picnic coolers. Folding chairs. Folding beach shelters. Rosa wondered whether it was all really necessary. And she didn't know the answer. How could she? On the traffic island, poplars swayed in the breeze. Just like the masts of the sailing boats anchored in the harbour alongside the concrete factory, which made Rosa think of chopsticks. Just after that, the plastic tables outside her fishing association's clubhouse flashed through the leaves. But a glance at her watch made her pedal faster. Outside the city limits, the surroundings began to change. The imposing fences and hedges grew higher, punctuated only by heavy iron gates. Raked

gravel driveways boasted limousines and SUVs with personalised number plates, expensive vanities regularly auctioned off to raise millions for the city's coffers. Outside a stately property with marble pillars, Rosa locked up her racing bike and freed the fabric of her dress from the knot she'd tied above her knees for the ride. A life-sized Buddha was enthroned beside the reception desk.

'Do you have an appointment?' The shrill voice was out of tune with the plashing of the miniature fountain on the counter. The assistant laid a carefully manicured hand over the telephone mouthpiece.

Rosa tore her eyes away from the Buddha, whose folded hands formed a bowl resting in his lap. ‘I’m running a bit late. Sorry.’ She cleared her throat. Then she gave a feigned-casual glance towards the waiting room to make sure no one was listening.

‘Your name?’ came the next ringing enquiry. The door was closed. Rosa answered, now speaking firmly: ‘My name’s Zambrano.’

Fingernails flew like arrowheads over the crowded pages of the appointment book. ‘Here we are: Zambrano. You’ve come for cryo-conservation?’

Rosa flinched.



The assistant crossed out the entry. ‘Doctor Jansen will be with you in a little while. But the examination room is free, you can go through.’ She gestured at a door at the end of the hall, then returned her attention to the receiver.

Sitting down by the large desk, Rosa put her hands to her ears. They were glowing-hot and almost certainly bright red. She shook her curls over them. Even now, she still felt she had to justify herself. Her middle sister Valentina was already a mother. And Alba, the youngest, would be joining the parenting club any day now. It wasn’t that she didn’t like her little nieces and nephews.

Quite the opposite: she regularly cooked for the whole family. Or at least as often as her work schedule allowed. But still, the jam and sauce stains left by greasy hands always reminded her of the empty space in her life. The age gap between her and Alba was bigger than to Valentina, but the longer they'd been grown up, the less important that gap became. And it was Alba who'd backed Rosa up.

‘Listen, you can get pregnant as a single woman as well, you know. If you don’t find anyone in two years, you can just go to a clinic abroad. You can get anything done there. Anything!’ Her youngest sister ought

to know. Her partner had been treated in a fertility clinic as well. Successfully, as evidenced by the big nine-month belly Katrin showed off at every opportunity, like a living trophy. Rosa was showered with regular unsolicited pictures, or recipes for drying the placenta after the birth. *Stop overthinking it!* She closed her eyes and attempted a breathing exercise, abandoning it after two rounds. Rosa doubted she'd ever learn to relax while doing absolutely nothing. She preferred to concentrate of the large-scale prints on the wall. The doors opened just as she was studying the structure of a sand dune and thinking about whether a

barren landscape in a treatment room spoke for or against a fertility clinic.

Doctor Jansen's hair was a tad too long to match the rest of his appearance in a white doctor's coat. His trendy canvas shoes, worn barefoot, were another irritant. They reminded Rosa of the skipper who was training her for her sea sailing licence. Like him, Jansen had crossed the boundary to middle age, but that made him all the more attractive. The Cupid's bow of his top lip contrasted with a five-o'clock shadow, though he was cleanly shaven. He seemed to be one of those people who never see problems, only ever solutions. At least, that

was how it had looked to Rosa at her first appointments a few weeks before, when he'd soothed her: *Then we'll buy you the time you need.* And showed her how to stretch the skin around her navel to inject the hormones herself.

'No need to get up,' he said now. He rubbed his hands with disinfectant, a routine motion that laid another scent over his aftershave. He greeted her in motion, not shaking her hand. Sat down and rattled the keys at his computer. Rosa turned away; she couldn't stand other people looking at her fingers as she typed. She noticed that the photo in the tasteful gold frame was gone. It

had caught her attention at the preliminary appointments because it wasn't facing the doctor's seat but at a slight angle. As if to show all the world how he wrapped his long arms around a woman's waist as her red dress billowed in the wind. She had one of those smiles... The kind that probably looked the same in all pictures. The couple were flanked by two no-less-perfect twin boys proudly displaying missing teeth. A picture-book family, Rosa had thought. While her rational side briefly wondered why that both repelled and attracted her, even after all these years.

‘I’ve got two or three last questions, and then we can start,’ Jansen addressed her abruptly. ‘We can delay the baby question somewhat...’ His Adam’s apple leapt up and down. ‘But of course, there’s no hundred-percent guarantee.’

So now he did want to cover his back. Rosa was secretly glad. That relativized the slightly arrogant impression he’d given her. Though it didn’t change the facts: her fertility was declining with every day, every hour, every second in which she hurtled towards her 38th birthday. And not just her fertility: by the end of her twenties, the majority of her bodily functions had already

passed their zenith. Since her thirtieth, the likelihood of dying had doubled every eight years. Soon, her cells would lose their ability to reverse mutations. In short: she ought to have launched herself upon the next best man! Instead, she was sat here, spending a lot of money on getting her eggs frozen. Rosa squinted at her watch. The doctor didn't seem to be in any hurry.

‘You haven't eaten for at least six hours?’

Rosa nodded. The homeopathic sip of herbal tea seemed like ages ago.

‘Have you ever had a general anaesthetic before?’



Again, she nodded, running a hand over a spot above her knee. Dead tissue had been replaced there by a thin skin transplant from her back, a few years ago. Rosa could barely feel the scar now. The pale raised mark only itched occasionally, when the weather changed. Suddenly, she felt as if all the strength had been sucked out of her body.

‘Great. Then let’s see if the trigger shot was a success.’ Jansen rolled his leather stool over to the examination chair. ‘Even before being born, a woman’s ovaries contain more than 400,000 egg cells. Fascinating, isn’t it?’ He pressed a button and the room darkened with a hum. ‘Most of them die before

puberty, though. Only around 500 ever come to ovulation during a woman's lifetime.'

Like the previous times, Rosa popped behind the screen and removed her knickers. Then she sat down on the chair, which spread her legs wide. The doctor inserted the ultrasound wand, and a shape shone out on the screen. It looked like a cross-section of a garlic bulb.

'Ah, there they are.' He pressed slightly harder and pointed with a trace of pride at the clove-shaped chambers. 'Seven magnificent specimens at once.'

Soon afterwards, Rosa was lying on a sterile couch in the operation room as an assistant tucked a paper towel under her face.

When she came round, her mouth was encrusted with saliva. Her throat felt sore, as if she hadn't drunk for days. She didn't know where she was. Didn't want to know. With the waves crashing in her ear through the open window, she sank back into a cotton-soft sea. The next time she woke up she felt better. She still had the Propofol drip in her arm. Rosa pulled her free hand out from under the cover and rested it on her stomach. She thought of the missing egg cells, now shock-frozen and stored at minus 196

degrees. And she wondered whether a child only comes about when one of them is fertilized. Or before that, when someone yearns for it.

‘I can’t possibly let you cycle in this condition.’ The assistant cast an accusatory glance at the bike helmet Rosa was just about to put on. She really did feel unsteady on her feet. She’d just push her bike, then. But the woman wouldn’t give in. Half an hour later, the van Stella used to take her ceramics to the nearby markets rumbled into the driveway. Rosa got into the passenger seat while Stella loaded her bike into the back. A tree-shaped

air freshener and a miniature dream-catcher dangled from the rear-view mirror. Rosa's stomach turned.

'Let's go, I can't leave Suki alone for too long,' Stella said as she pushed the empty dog basket up against the bike. 'You're looking very pale.' She walked around the car, handing Rosa a packet of ginger sweets.

'Alba didn't pick up,' Rosa mumbled as she put a sweet in her mouth. The wrapper crackled between her sweaty palms as she rolled it into a ball. Her friend Stella was less than a year older than her, but she'd always known she didn't want children. For her, they came with one big drawback:

dependencies. On the way back into town, Rosa told her what she could no longer keep secret. She hoped it wouldn't cause too much upset. And after that, there was only one thing she wanted: to get into bed and sleep for a long, long time. Thank goodness she'd taken the next few days off, just in case.

*One Week Later*

He would have wanted a different ending. A final version with a love as luminous as Perseid meteor showers in the August sky. A love like a summer's night in which life explodes – and everything is stronger, heavier and warmer. But he didn't manage it. Though he was still writing on his deathbed, Giacomo Puccini, the creator of the most famous operas of his time, left nothing but a sheaf of notes that didn't add up to a whole: *Turandot* was to remain a fragment.

Now one of the arias thundered out of the six-foot speakers concealed beneath fabric panels on either side of the huge screen. *Nessun dorma!* Night of decisions. ‘None shall sleep,’ the murderous Princess Turandot ordered. The woman who tested each of her admirers with a riddle – and had those who failed executed. Moritz Jansen inhaled with the rising voice of the tenor, as if that would enable him to draw everything into himself for all time. The sun, stored in the ancient quartzite stone floor. And the happiness that tickled up his legs in the form of Alina’s crimson-painted toenails. They were sitting in the middle of the broad plaza



stretching between Bellevue, the lake and Theaterstrasse, on the edge of the old town centre. Their blanket bore the remains of a picnic: stuffed vine leaves, goat's cheese and a baguette. In front of them, the opera house rose in the beams of the spotlights, shining for everyone that evening. Angels guarded from the roof with wings spread wide, accompanied by divinities in flowing robes, with swords and swans. On the plaza below, crowds sat on folding chairs, damp towels or simply directly on the ground. Alina poured the foaming remains of rosé champagne into their two cut-crystal glasses. She'd bought them at the flea market, along with the lilac

silk dress that looked a little like the kind of dress someone might imagine would suit a night at the opera, if they'd never been to the opera. He was touched by the thought. Aside from that, she looked enchanting in it. Usually when they met, she wore loose-fitting jeans, striped socks in sneakers and some kind of top that didn't get in the way of her lab coat. Her fingers pursed, she opened her bag. A clutch was essential with strapless dresses, Alina's flatmate had declared, thrusting hers upon her. Alina's face shone in the light from the screen as she sprinkled extra-finely-ground MDMA

crystals in the champagne, which was now lukewarm.

‘Tastes a bit disgusting.’ She raised her glass to him. ‘But it’s fun.’ Then she circled her glass, slowly and carefully, until the liquid began revolving too. And took a sip. Jansen knocked the bitter dregs down in one gulp. It wasn’t the first time they’d taken something together. But it was the first time they weren’t alone while they did it. Actually, he wanted nothing more than to lay her down on cool sheets. He leaned over to Alina, so close that he touched the sensitive spot on her neck, and asked if they should leave. He loved the way she smelled.

Citrus zest with a note of green wood, topped with clean sweat. He could happily skip the rest of the third act; written by one of the maestro's former students who had glued his notes together with sticky pomp. Too much Alfano. Too little Puccini.

He placed the high heels neatly in front of Alina. They'd been slightly further away, where their wearer had cast them off gratefully two hours previously. Then he shook the breadcrumbs off the blanket and laid it over Alina's bare shoulders. Hand in hand, they crossed the busy Seestrasse at the lights and strolled down the promenade towards Uto Quay, heading out of town

along the barriers put up for the next day's half-triathlon. It felt good to be walking through the night with his secret girlfriend, who wouldn't be secret any more now. And that Monday, they'd be going to the mountains for a few days together.

From an ever-increasing distance, they heard the final applause for the *Opera for All*, the sopranos, tenors and choir now bowing on the illuminated balustrade above the crowd. A film of salty sweat had formed on Jansen's top lip. Everything was soft and fluffy, melded with the music that filled his soul. Together with the exhilarating feeling that comes over someone crossing from one

world to another and noticing that their inner state finally matches up to the outer world. Something only possible in the right place at the exact right time – and in the right company. Laughter wafted on the air, light and round. His own or someone else's, it was all one. Waves shunted back and forth, not only on the nearby bank but also in Jansen's ears. *It wasn't possible*, a thought shot into his mind.

‘Puccini could never have found the ending,’ he said. There was a click as he released his locked jaw with a deliberate jolt. ‘It would never have been possible to finish the opera. Not as long as he – like the prince

in his story – wanted the wrong woman,’ he added. He felt the place where his wedding ring had been, until recently.

Alina looked out at the lake. ‘Did you speak to your lawyer again?’

Further out, ships swayed with lit lanterns, like fireflies. Jansen thought for a moment he’d spotted a motorboat he knew only too well. He had wasted two hours of his life there that afternoon. He was annoyed, but only briefly. He didn’t need it any more. Her power games. And certainly not her. Then the *Panta Rhei* moved in front of the shadow. And the cold blue-lit rail of the biggest cruise vessel on the lake simply

wiped it away. Jansen pressed Alina's hand even more firmly. It felt strangely hot and cold at the same time. At least he'd be able to manage matters with the woman who was still his wife, he hoped. Even though Alina doubted twenty years' marriage could be pressed into an amicable agreement just like that. Especially at the beginning of their relationship, she'd been convinced he'd disappear again one day, back to his wife. Since then, he'd done his best to convince her otherwise.

'Moritz? Did you hear me?'

'The lawyer... Sure, I'll call him,' he answered. At which the pressure in his jaw



intensified again. ‘But not until we get back from the mountains.’

The quay wall was lined with people, under trees and on benches. Gathered in groups around portable speakers blasting out music. Many different styles and yet all commercial and made the same way. But that didn't bother Jansen, not that night. Someone leapt off a jetty with a deep cry; there was a splash. They lay on their backs on the grass. Beside them were plastic cups of iced tea, pearled with condensation. When their mouths felt dry they rolled to the side over the wet dew. Drank in long gulps and savoured the goose bumps spreading all

across their bodies: *cutis anserina*, one of the most stimulating examples of the central nervous system's link to the skin, established at the embryonal stage. He heard Alina cracking melting ice cubes between her teeth. His telephone screen was still black. No messages. As Alina laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder, he felt her nipples through the fabric and felt himself getting an erection.

Everything turned in circles when Jansen stood up shortly after that. He brushed his hair out of his face, uncut since they'd been together. Then he patted down his jacket, feeling first of all for the memory card

concealed deep in his inside pocket. Ready to go public. Ready for the journalists he'd contact as soon as they got back from the mountains. Until then, he could hide the card in Alina's room; it would be safe there. Moments later, the outline of a villa came together out of the shade of high beech trees. Several bay windows, a façade of hewn sandstone blocks, and chimneys rising like towers lent the house an air of mystery. Especially as the clouds gathered. Treetops swept restlessly across the scenery. Shutters banged. There was a crash of glass somewhere. Further back, something twitched where the Alps unfurled above the

lake and the Vrenelisgärtli glowed on fine evenings.

‘I think they’re all asleep.’ Alina, wrapped in the picnic blanket, was trying to open the iron entrance gate – which was proving tricky. She pressed a finger to her lips. Giggling, they stepped into the imposing hall that opened onto the garden, darkened by cedars and yews. Inside, the heat of the day still hung on the air. It smelled of the cut flowers in high vases on a table by the entrance. Dahlias. Hortensias. Asters. The ballet hall with its polished floors lay silent. To begin with, Alina had just taken dance classes here to improve her posture,

awkward from all the standing in the lab. Then the chance had come up to take over a room temporarily in the shared house. It was at the top of the curved staircase they now crept up. A bushy cat curled on the sofa raised its head indifferently as they eased open the door. Street light shone through the stained glass, transferring the floral pattern to the pale fabric cushions. ‘Get out of here!’ Alina didn’t like pets. Perhaps the cat could tell. Or perhaps it just wanted to show her who’d been there longer. In no hurry, the cat strolled across the flokati rug to the exit, rubbing provocatively against Jansen’s calf in passing.

‘Scotch?’ Alina lit a few candles. Jansen slung his arms around her waist from behind. Bit into her earlobe, felt desire rising in him once again. She gently released herself and went over to the drinks trolley parked in front of a wall of pictures. Salon-style hang, she’d explained on his first visit. All different frames jumbled close together, round and straight, from tiny to mirror-sized. There were biological sketches of animals, a great auk, butterflies, the skull of a rhino. Between them snapshots: mother, father, daughter and son, in alternating combinations and chronologies. Monuments to memory like in all family albums, used to assure us of our

own existence. But the most important to Alina seemed to be a picture placed in the middle. It showed the earth floating in space. A blue-green hemisphere, veiled by clouds, rising behind the moon. Taken by an astronaut on Apollo 8, which had the mission to reach the moon – but found the earth.

Ice cubes rattled as Alina put the thick-based glasses down on the trunk she used as a coffee table. ‘*Earthrise*,’ she said, following his gaze. ‘It might sound like pathos. But the picture’s there to remind me when I get up every morning and fall asleep every night

that we're only guests on a miniscule cosmic oasis. In the middle of infinity.'

'What I keep wondering,' said Jansen, pulling her back in, 'is why we didn't meet much sooner.'

Alina laid her bare thighs on his lap and replied: 'Because I'd still have been a baby?'

He gave an exaggerated groan. Then he ran his hand along the inside of her leg.

'Seriously...' Alina said. 'Only a hundred years before that picture was taken, Jules Verne wrote about three adventurers getting shot to the moon out of cannons – and falling back to earth on parachutes. Pure science fiction, back then.'



Jansen leaned further back against the sofa, savouring the taste of smoky peat burning the back of his throat.

‘It’s a bit like us, nowadays,’ Alina went on, ‘imagining we could travel to a different solar system.’

He guessed what she was getting at. ‘Or our species beginning to develop according to its own rules. In its current version, Homo sapiens would be nothing but a staging post on an unending journey to a perfect existence.’

‘And sex would only have a function as relaxation...’ Alina said. She took his glass away and unbuttoned his shirt. He saw

himself reflected in her wide-open eyes. His lips began by brushing hers but soon adhered more firmly. Wandered across armpits and navel, down to the soles of her feet. Jansen had a sudden revelation that he could never have practiced this kind of sexuality, the way he used to be. But now everything fitted together perfectly. Alina spread her legs as he bedded her on cushions. Not losing eye contact, he sank onto the rug. As he sought her clitoris with his tongue, she began to move her pelvis slowly. He slid two fingers inside her the way she liked it; she took on his rhythm...

As she reached orgasm he was flooded with love and life, enough to dissolve body and soul, perhaps even time.