Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Night Market

Written by Daniel Pembrey

Published by No Exit Press

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

NIGHT MARKET

DANIEL PEMBREY



NO EXIT PRESS

First published in 2017 by No Exit Press,
an imprint of Oldcastle Books Ltd,
PO Box 394,
Harpenden, Herts,
AL5 1XJ

noexit.co.uk
© Daniel Pembrey 2017

The right of Daniel Pembrey to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of the publishers.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBN
9781843448815 (print)
9781843449461 (epub)
9781843449478 (mobi)
9781843449485 (pdf)

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset in 11.5pt Garamond MT
by Avocet Typeset, Somerton, Somerset TA11 6RT
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

For more about Crime Fiction go to www.crimetime.co.uk / @crimetimeuk

CONTENTS

PART IV: NIGHT MARKET 7

PART V: CHOKE POINT 119

PART VI: THE RELEASE 223

WE FIRST MEET HENK VAN DER POL
IN THE HARBOUR MASTER WHICH CONTAINS
PART I, II, AND III.

Part IV:

Night Market

1

IF YOU GAZE INTO THE ABYSS…

'Don't go in there.'

I was standing outside a set of double doors on the nineteenth floor of the Ministry for Security and Justice. The brown-carpeted anteroom was dim; much of it was in shadow. I'd been summoned for an after-hours meeting.

'Not yet,' the man added.

He was the assistant to the justice minister.

'What's this about, anyway?' I asked.

'I'm unable to advise,' he replied, his dark features dimly lit by his computer screen. The soft clacking of his keyboard resumed.

I eyed my watch again. My wife was waiting back at our hotel to have dinner. Apparently, global-security considerations no longer respected office hours.

I paced over to the tall windows. It was dark outside and The Hague's skyline winked, orange and white. The westward panorama took in the twin white towers of the International Criminal Court and, far ahead, I could make out the inky darkness of the North Sea… landmarks in the case of Rem Lottman, a kidnapped politician who'd been working for the energy minister, Muriel Crutzen. The case had brought me into contact with her, and she'd encouraged me to consider a job here in The Hague. I still didn't know exactly what it involved, but perhaps I was about to find out.

I turned back to the assistant, about to say something, when the double doors to the ministerial office flew open and there he stood.

'Henk,' he said, appraising me. 'Is it OK to call you Henk?'

'Is it OK to call you Willem?'

He smiled and stepped forward, shaking my hand firmly.

Willem van der Steen was of medium height and a stocky build, with wiry grey hair. His white shirt was open at the neck; his sleeves were rolled up. He looked like he'd be a tough bastard in a fight.

He was a vote winner, '*strong on law and order in uncertain times*'. '*We Dutch remain liberal – within limits*' was another of his election slogans. He was known to be a copper's friend. He'd started off in the force and gone on to run Southern Regions. In some ways he'd remained an old-fashioned bruiser – but now he was one with formidable powers.

He released my hand and led me into his office. There was a pattern to the appearance of these ministers' rooms, I was discovering: modern, workmanlike, unpretentious. In van der Steen's case, I glimpsed an oil painting in the shadows: a marine vista, choppy seas. A ship sat in the centre, listing, valiantly holding its course.

There was a circular glass table strewn with papers. A phone sat in the middle.

'A conference call ran long. The Americans like to keep us late.'

It begged questions that I couldn't ask.

'Drink?' he asked, closing the door behind us.

The offer surprised me.

'Still or sparkling?' he added, correcting my misapprehension.

'Still.'

He poured a glass for me, emptying a small bottle of water.

'Please, take a seat.'

I sat on the opposite side of the table.

'You come highly recommended,' he said, emptying another bottle – sparkling – into his own glass.

'Indeed?'

He sat down. 'The energy minister.'

No surprises then… or none yet.

I waited for him to go on, struck by a tightening sensation in my chest – a wariness of what might be coming.

'You're over from Amsterdam?' he asked. It was as if he were softening me up with small talk. He knew where I was from, surely.

'Just for a few days.'

He studied his fingernails, which were slightly dirty. It looked like he might have been doing some gardening, and not quite managed to scrub away the soil.

'What I'm about to tell you, I'm sharing in confidence. Is that understood?'

'Of course.'

I wondered how much was in my file. Did it mention that my wife was a former features writer for *Het Parool*, the Amsterdam daily newspaper?

'We've got a situation over in Driebergen.'

Driebergen, near Utrecht, was the headquarters of the old Korps Landelijke Politiediensten (KLPD) – the National Police Services Agency. The KLPD was now a unit within a single, newly merged Dutch police force. Not everyone had been happy with the unification. Office politics.

'What kind of situation?'

'There's a specialist team over there which is investigating child exploitation. You may be aware of them?'

I stayed silent, but I knew about the team… more or less. They always seemed to be in flux, given changing police priorities and public perceptions.

'It's a six-person team,' van der Steen went on. 'It needs to grow, but before we grow it, we need to clean house.'

'Oh?' I took a sip of water.

'We had a series of busts lined up. Mid-level members of what we'd managed to identify as a major paedophile network. The busts went bad.'

I noted how the minister used 'we' for what was being described as a tactical operation. The justice ministry oversaw the police of course, but van der Steen's words implied an unusual level of involvement.

'We now believe we've identified a kingpin in the same network,' he went on. 'In your neck of the woods, it turns out, Henk. We can't risk an operational failure this time.'

'You say the bust went bad… How?'

'All the addresses had been hastily abandoned by the time the arrest teams arrived. Cleared of any computer material, cleaned almost forensically. Every single one.'

'Addresses in Holland?'

'Three of them, yes. The other addresses were in Belgium, Luxembourg and southern England.'

I gave a low whistle.

'All recently vacated.' His words reinforced the point.

'A tip-off?'

'Almost certainly, but by who… that's the question.'

'An insider – a plant?'

'That's one theory. A theory that needs proving or disproving, and fast.'

'And you want me to look into it?'

His grey eyes held mine. They shone in the low light, like steel.

'Why me?' I asked, shifting in my seat.

'Four reasons,' he said, holding up the stubby fingers of one hand. 'Evidently you're a man with experience of life.'

I was fifty-six. 'Thanks for reminding me.'

He smiled, briefly. 'You've got an outsider's perspective. At least, that's what I'm told. Don't underestimate the value of

being able to sit outside the tribe and see what's going on, in ways that others can't.'

Funny – the energy minister had told me they needed me 'inside the tent' after the discoveries resulting from the Rem Lottman case. Now they wanted me back outside again – but under their supervision. Things evolve.

'And as I said, you come highly recommended. We wouldn't be having this conversation if you weren't.'

I nodded impatiently. 'That's three reasons. You mentioned four.'

He locked eyes with me. 'There's no one else willing and able to do this, Henk.'

In my thirty-plus years as a policeman in Amsterdam, I'd seen a lot. But child abuse cases were known to be different. The images that the investigating teams had to look at each day, the victims' stories they encountered… you can't leave that stuff at the office, can't go home and forget about it. It gets into your mind, your dreams.

'If you take this assignment, it will change you,' van der Steen warned.

'Does that point to an alternate explanation?' I said, stepping back from the precipice of the decision he'd asked me to make. 'That someone on the team turned? Went native?'

Turned into a paedophile, in other words.

He shrugged. 'That's another possibility. These operatives have to stare at a lot of images. Perhaps, yes, it could… *release* certain things in certain men.'

He was looking at me searchingly.

'I don't pretend to understand what motivates older men to become interested in young children,' he went on. 'And let's be clear about this. We're talking about the sick stuff here, Henk. There's a lot of it going on all of a sudden. As many as one in five of us may have leanings that way, one police psychologist in Leiden is now loudly proclaiming.'

I took a sip of water, wondering what response that hypothesis had got from the psychologist's colleagues on the force.

'There's another point to consider – and I'm sure I don't need to spell this out for you as a seasoned policeman. Investigating the investigators: it's not for everyone.'

It contradicted the bond of loyalty among police personnel. I'd been in the army, which had the same ethos – though it was for reasons of survival there.

'A plant, looking for a plant,' I said meditatively.

He gave me a tight smile.

'How would that work?' I asked.

'We'd get you a regular job on the team in Driebergen. You'd be one of the guys. But we'd also pair you with someone from the security services.'

'A handler?'

'You could put it that way, yes. We'd work on your cover – give you an alternative identity of sorts.'

'My existing one's not unblemished.'

'I'd be suspicious if it was. You're a human being.'

There was a crushing silence.

Sexual exploitation, trafficking, drugs, corruption, aggravated assault, homicide cases even – I'd worked them all, but the one area of policing I'd stayed away from was child abuse. Every cop felt in their heart the Friedrich Nietzsche quote: '*Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you…*'

'I also read about your altercation with the Amsterdam police commissioner.'

My old friend Joost. In abeyance since the Lottman case, but still there… still ready to cause problems in all areas of my professional and personal life.

'Take this assignment, and that problem goes away.'

I didn't doubt the justice minister's ability to make it so.

'And if I say no?'

He paused, choosing his next words carefully.

'Then, like the others I've offered this assignment to, you'll walk out of here. You'll forget this conversation ever happened and, as agreed, you won't mention it to anyone. In your case, Muriel will no doubt send you off to some other ministry. Somewhere easier. Environmental protection, maybe…'

I grimaced. 'Just how important is this to the justice ministry?'

He leaned forward, pressing his palms onto the table. 'I'd say it was vital… but that would be understating it.' He paused for effect. 'You can judge the decency of a society by how it treats its women and its children. If we're not protecting our children, then what the hell *are* we doing?'

He was good, van der Steen. He knew what drove us. The real coppers that is, not the Joosts of the world.

'It's an unusual case,' he continued. 'Outwardly, it's all supranational networks, technology, and collaboration with counterparts from other countries. In another sense, it's a classic little locked-room mystery.'

'How so?'

'At least one of the six men – yes, they're all men – in Driebergen is rotten. Your job, if you think you're up to it, is to determine which, and to ensure that the rot stops there.'

I tried to visualise the airless environment I'd be entering, the smell of it – but couldn't quite get there.

'How do you know the insider is on that team?'

'If you decide to proceed, you'll see the file.' He paused, and then asked with finality: 'Is the mission clear?'

I found myself nodding slowly, and added a more emphatic nod.

'Think about it,' he concluded, sitting back again but still scrutinising me with those steely eyes. 'Talk to your wife – *in general terms* – about a possible posting in Driebergen. You're married?' he asked, as if he might have misheard or misread something.

'Yes.'

I eyed the painting over his shoulder. The ship, attempting to hold its course in the gathering storm, listing badly.

'With a daughter,' I added.

'Then think it over.' His lips twitched. 'But not for too long.'

2

THE FILE

'*Driebergen?*' my wife asked, mouth agape.

'Keep your voice down.'

'Don't tell me to be quiet, Henk. It's not The Hague, nor Delft – like we agreed!'

'No.'

'What do you mean, *no*?'

'No – you're right.'

We were sitting in the bar of our hotel. The lighting was low; the room was full of flat, grey shapes and figures. I was tired of negotiating everything with everyone. Wasn't life supposed to become easier as you neared retirement and cast off children and responsibilities? My life seemed to be going in the opposite direction.

I signalled to the barman for more drinks.

Petra clamped her hand over her cocktail glass, narrowly avoiding the candle flame as she did so. It guttered.

'OK, *one* more drink.' I corrected my order, raising my empty, sudsy glass.

'But why Driebergen?' Petra demanded.

'Because it's the headquarters of the old KLPD.'

'I know that. I was a features writer once, remember?'

How could I forget? I felt like saying.

'You were talking about a role with one of the ministries here,' she said. 'Why go there?'

'Because the minister asked me to.'

A fresh Dubbel Bok arrived. *Thank God.*

Petra's face was screwed up with incomprehension in the flickering light. As soon as the barman left she said, 'Which minister?'

My voice was low. 'The justice minister. It's a confidential assignment. They've got a problem with one of the teams there, and that's about all I can share.'

My wife had been a journalist for as long as I'd been a policeman. In putting up a 'Do Not Enter' sign, I might as well have confessed everything on the spot. It was just a matter of time.

But I was taking van der Steen's warning seriously.

'Well,' Petra said, crossing her arms, 'I'm not leaving Amsterdam without good reason.'

'Last week you said that you couldn't wait to get off the houseboat and be nearer Cecilia in Delft.' Cecilia was her favourite cousin.

'Oh, I'll be getting off the houseboat all right,' she said. 'And finding dry land. In Amsterdam, close to our daughter.'

Our daughter Nadia wouldn't be leaving the nation's capital any time soon. Her social set could only countenance living in one Dutch population centre, and it certainly wasn't Driebergen.

'Should we get something to eat?' I suggested. 'It's late.'

'*Too* late.' Petra sniffed. 'I'm no longer hungry.'

I sighed exasperatedly, craning my neck. 'Can I see a menu?' I asked the barman.

'We only do snacks. The restaurant, over there, serves food.'

'Of course.'

We sat in silence.

Finally I said, 'OK. I'll tell you the mission I've been asked to undertake, but you mustn't share it with anyone.'

'As though I would!'

'*Anyone*, Petra. Not Nadia… *no one*.'

'Why would I share it with Nadia?'

'You won't.' I paused. 'And you must promise me that.'

'Fine,' she said.

'Van der Steen wants me to look at the team investigating child abuse.'

Her eyes narrowed.

'One of them is suspected of passing on police information to suspected paedophiles.'

Her head dropped.

'They need to plug the leak.'

'Why?' she said, looking up again, her face screwed up in a silent wail. 'Why this, of all the roles you could have taken?'

'Because someone needs to do it.'

'But why you?'

'Would you rather I crossed the road?'

'Oh, don't do your lone-knight thing with me, Henk.' Petra had her head in her hands.

She was right about most things, but not everything.

No one is.

'Child abuse.' She was mumbling. 'There's a reason child offenders live in mortal danger in prison and the rest of society –'

'Well, maybe if there were more women on the team in Driebergen, things would be different.' I was thinking about Liesbeth, a team member of mine who had a knack of winning trust and gaining insight into cases. She was the one who'd helped me break open the Lottman kidnapping case, with an early interview she'd done…

'So it's women to blame now, is it?'

'That's not what I'm saying. I'm just speculating that it's not healthy to have an all-male team –'

'Therefore, some unfortunate woman – or group of women – must now bear a further cost for these men's depravities?'

Jesus, was this not difficult enough without turning it into a full-on gender war?

'Looking at those images changes the neural pathways,' she cried. 'It rewires the brain!'

'Please keep your voice down.'

She shook her head. 'If it's true of legal porn, it must be doubly so with this.'

I was about to challenge her on the pornography point but her words rang true. I thought again of those six men in the office in Driebergen…

'I don't want you looking at that stuff.'

'All right.'

'I'm serious, Henk. I don't want that stuff in your head, and in our house, and in our bed!'

'All right, dammit! Then I'll make that the condition with van der Steen – I'm there to watch the watchers, but not to watch. Now, can we please get something to eat, before the restaurant shuts down and I shut down, too?'

*

At the justice ministry the following morning, van der Steen's assistant led me into a small meeting room. A beige paper file marked *Confidential* sat on the polished wooden table.

'You can't take it away,' he said.

It felt like an unnecessary piece of theatre – I had my smartphone with me, able to photograph anything inside the file.

'In a few moments, someone from the AIVD will drop by to introduce himself.' The Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst is the Dutch secret service, charged with 'identifying threats and risks to national security which are not immediately apparent'. It carries out operations at home and abroad, working with more than a hundred different

organisations and employing over a thousand people – all of whom are sworn to secrecy about their work.

'My handler?' I clarified.

The assistant didn't answer my question.

'I'll leave you to it,' he said.

The door clicked shut behind him and I opened the file. There appeared to be two parts: a review of the operation van der Steen had mentioned (the bust that had been lined up and failed), and then an overview of the team in Driebergen, SVU X-19.

The nomenclature was familiar. 'SVU' stood for 'Special Victims Unit', the 'X' denoted that it didn't appear as a matter of public record, and the '19' distinguished it from other teams operating in that same capacity.

Conscious that I had little time before my handler arrived, I turned back to the beginning, scanning each page in turn. There are different ways to digest files but I like to avoid reading ahead, instead reliving the experience of the investigation – what was known at which point.

As I discovered, Operation Guardian Angel had grown out of a routine police check in Liège, Belgium. A Belgian police team had paid a house call to Jan Stamms, a convicted sex offender, to ensure that he was abiding by the terms of his early prison parole. They took a cursory look around Stamms's suburban, semi-detached house, including his basement – where they heard a distant cry. The lead officer assumed that the cry had come from the neighbouring property.

Luck (or its absence) can come in many forms in police work, and in this case it was a throwaway remark by the lead officer's partner, Veronique Deschamps, to the neighbour, who happened to be out in her front garden: 'That's quite a pair of lungs someone in your household has,' Deschamps reported commenting.

'But I live alone,' the neighbour replied, perplexed.

Veronique Deschamps then insisted on a more thorough search of Stamms's property. The first team still missed the sealed-up door in the basement, so good had Stamms's handiwork been, but his clear nervousness prompted them to persist and bring in search dogs, which quickly found the location of a passage down to a second basement.

In the concealed chamber were two four-year-old boys, a basic latrine, cameras and lighting equipment… plus a computer with editing software and thousands of hours of video footage. The room also contained a set of workmen's tools.

The twin boys required immediate medical attention. The video footage was too distressing for the local police team to review. However, by interviewing Stamms over a thirty-six-hour period, they elicited a confession to the existence of a video-sharing venue on the Dark Web called 'Night Market'.

I found myself nodding admiringly as I read the report. The Liège team had covered an impressive amount of ground before handing over the case to the Belgian Federal Police, who in turn discovered that Stamms had tried to resolve a payment problem with a bank in Amsterdam. The Federal Police speculated that the payment he'd expected to receive there was in exchange for his supply of video footage. A growing belief that the network was centred in Holland caused overall control to pass to Driebergen.

The door opened and the assistant asked, 'Do you want a drink, by the way?'

I blinked in consternation. 'No. How much longer do I have?'

'A few minutes.'

'Who is my handler, anyway?'

'His name's Rijnsburger. You'll meet him soon enough.'

The name didn't mean anything to me. I waited in silence for the assistant to leave again, returning immediately to the file. There was a lengthy section on the build-up to the arrest teams going into the various different locations to apprehend the mid-

level suspects already mentioned by van der Steen…

I wanted to take in all the details. But more than that, I needed to get to the section on SVU X-19 itself. Van der Steen had suspected that the leak (resulting in the failure of the arrests) had come from SVU X-19 – only why?

If you decide to proceed, you'll see the file…

I flicked forward, thinking that there must be an elaborate Joint Investigation Team, with investigators from the various countries involved. Any one of them or their immediate colleagues could have had access to information about Operation Guardian Angel, and leaked it…

Aware that Rijnsburger might walk in at any moment, I skipped to the final section. Dumbstruck, I took in each of the SVU X-19 team members' short bios and photos in turn.

Manfred Boomkamp was a twenty-year KLPD veteran.

Jacques Rahm was from Luxembourg's Police Grand-Ducale.

Tommy Franks, formerly with the London Metropolitan Police's Flying Squad, was on secondment from the UK's national Child Exploitation and Online Protection agency.

Ivo Vermeulen represented the Belgian Federal Police.

And there was a fifth nationality involved: Gunther Engelhart was from Germany's Bundeskriminalamt.

SVU X-19 *was* the Joint Investigation Team. They'd built a mini states-of-Europe in Driebergen.

I sat back, and exhaled hard. Was it some kind of experiment? Did they believe that it would be more efficient to centralise the joint investigative work? Had the rationale been to avoid precisely the kind of intelligence failure that had then occurred?

And what of my ability to take on these men?

I leaned forward again, reaching into my inside pocket for my phone, when there came a rap at the door. It swung open to reveal a tall, white-haired man in a tailored navy suit. He was rheumy-eyed.

'Henk van der Pol?'

I didn't deny it.

'My name's Wim Rijnsburger, I believe the minister has mentioned me. We'll be joined by a psychologist shortly. Please, come this way.'