

ON TUESDAY CLOSED

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Crime Novel

All names of persons, relationships and events mentioned in this book are fictitious. Resemblance to existing persons, relationships and situations is purely coincidental. Certain names used in the original Dutch book have been changed or translated in English to make the story better readable.

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INTRODUCTION

Every day between five o'clock in the afternoon and nine o'clock in the evening, the bar of café-bistro 'Whites' is fully occupied with a colourful company of people.

People of all ages, young and old, who have the habit of ending their day there. Students, businesspeople, workers, but also people without a job, living on benefits or undeclared work. A mixture of conversations at the bar and many think they know the other, but nothing could be further from the truth. One day one of the regulars dies in an accident. Four days later, another bar guest commits suicide and another four days later there is a murder. The beginning of a cat- and mouse game. The beginning of a period of fear, envy, accusations, lies and deceit. Who is the killer? Is it a he or a she? Is it one of the bar guests, or someone from the staff? Then come the anonymous letters and mysterious incidents. It suddenly becomes a game, a game for everyone, but especially for the killer. The winner gets to unmask the killer and thus stop the bloodshed. But, before that happens, when it does come, secrets are exposed, and every death or murder brings the doom for one of the bar patrons. But the great exposure and total ruin takes place with the ultimate unmasking of the perpetrator. Whose downfall? A bar guest? A member of staff? Or is it the culprit himself? As mentioned, fear, tension, envy, accusations, lies and deceit, but also humour, comradeship, and a hidden love.

A story with so much mystery and so many different stories in the story, which will raise one question for the reader, but is that who the killer is, or is it who it was all about in the end?

THE DAY THAT EVERYTHING CHANGED

H*ey Abe! Did you hear it? Little Pete is dead. Killed on the highway crossing the road, there by the surf puddle.”*

Abe, the bartender, gestured with his eyes and cleared his throat, waving his head back. Jake, who had just come in with the announcement, understood the hint and saw the man sitting behind the bartender on the other side of the U-shaped bar. It was Karl, the partner of the just mentioned Little Pete. Jake, the mailman, who was normally the first customer in the bistro every day, saw Karl bent over, his face above his glass. The glass was untouched, and Karl did not seem to take in anything of his surroundings, did not even seem to have heard Jake's words. Jake was now standing opposite Abe at the bar, Jake in front and Abe behind the bar. The mailman leaned closer to Abe and whispered.

“What is he doing here, now? How long has he been there? I heard it happened early this morning, just before dawn. A strange time for Little Pete to be there at that time, don't you think?” Abe interrupted him. “Yeah, I do not know, he was already waiting at the door when I opened at ten, sat down at the bar, ordered a beer, and after I put the glass in front of him, he started staring at it. He has not taken a sip and has not said a word yet. I already knew what had happened. Suzanne had called me. She had heard about it from her neighbor, who had come home from his night shift and heard all about it when he had to stop there until they cleared the road.

And now we will stop talking about it, Jake. Leave Karl in peace. He decides when he wants to say something.” Jake shrugged and sighed. “Okay, you will not hear me about it anymore. Give me a beer, I need to recover myself.” And then he took his usual place at the bar, on the far right, close to the entrance to the kitchen.

The bistro was cleverly decorated. As one entered the bistro, the longest side was actually the width with the bar across the entrance, in front of the farthest wall. A U-shape, with the curve on the left and the open side on the right, which was opposite the entrance to the kitchen, and just before that it was possible to go to the right, into the restaurant. Left from the entrance door there was only a single row of tables with chairs, in front of the window, and where the bar was rounded, a somewhat larger space with tables and chairs began. The bistro was not large, seating about fifty, and at the bar there was room for another twenty, but there, when it was busy, people naturally stood near and behind the people occupying a bar stool. All in all, a hundred people the bistro could serve. It was owned by two brothers. Abe, who served as the head bartender and managed the restaurant staff, and Pier, who ran the kitchen and took care of the administration. They employed one full-time cook and a kitchen helper, as well as three part-time waitresses, of which Suzanne could actually be seen as full-time. Suzanne had just come in. It was eleven o'clock, time to prepare for lunch. But of course, she also immediately started talking about Little Pete, although she had noticed Karl and so she moved close to Abe, who was still standing at the same spot, in thoughts where he now got taken out of. “What is Karl doing here? It is terrible what happened to Little Pete. My neighbor saw him lying there, dead, terrible. Did Karl say anything?” Abe sighed again. “No nothing. He just sits there, staring into his glass and he barely moves. But leave him alone.

Apparently, he needs this, maybe he does not dare to be home at the moment. Let us not disturb him and just get on with our work. I have the feeling it could get busy this afternoon. Mark my words, at four o'clock this place is packed and there is only one subject people will be talking about." Suzanne shook her head resignedly and made her way to the kitchen where Pier and his kitchen crew were preparing lunch, as usual.

'Krimpen at the IJssel', a fairly large village, close to Rotterdam. With twenty churches from twelve denominations, Krimpen at the IJssel was originally a very religious village. But that is now rapidly changing, partly due to imports and the influence of time. Due to the size of the village, there are several shopping centers spread over the whole village. There is the Crimpenhof, the largest shopping center in the village, and then there are some smaller ones, such as The Terp, Stad and Landschap, and the Korf.

The Korf is where the bistro is located, on the outside of the shopping center itself.

It is half past eleven, normally half an hour before the first guests arrive for lunch, but today several tables are already occupied at this time. It is clear what the topic of conversation is, even though Karl is still leaning over his glass, seemingly not noticing what is going on around him, and no one to speak to him. Time passed like this, in a somewhat stuffy atmosphere, even though there had been more lunch guests than ever on Wednesday.

Earlier than usual, the first regular bar guests start arriving around half past three. The first is Charlie, a rather simple young man of about twenty-four, always looking for a job, which when he finds one, he usually does not keep for more than two months.

Charlie thinks differently than most guests and is not aware of any harm when he walks straight up to Karl, taps him on the shoulder and starts talking to him. Abe, the bartender, looks disapprovingly in the direction of Charlie, but he does not notice. “Hey Karl, I am so sorry, how are you? Would you like another beer? This one you are staring at is dead, throw it away.”

Everyone who heard it was shocked by the words Charlie used, even though they knew he meant well and probably didn't even realize what he was confronting the man next to him with. But the effect of his words was different than expected. Karl looked up, first at Charlie, then at his glass, and then at Charlie again with a wistful smile. “Thanks, Charlie, you are right, this beer is dead, just like Little Pete.” Then he leaned over the bar, glass in hand, and emptied the glass into the sink. “Yes please, this time I will drink it and toast to Little Pete with you. You are the first one today to say something to me, even though I have been sitting here since ten o'clock this morning. I do not feel like being home right now, so that is why I am here. Thanks for keeping me company.”

Abe had watched and heard it all and began to feel ashamed as he quickly poured two beers and placed them on the bar in front of the men. He understood by now that Karl had noticed what had happened around him during the day. Frank, the owner of the shipyard, had also entered now, taking the pressure off Abe. He took a seat at the bar, on the side opposite Karl and Charlie's. “Karl, my condolences boy. It is awful from what I have heard. I understand very well that you do not want to be home right now. Abe, when Karl has finished his glass, the next one is mine.” Now the spell was broken, and over the next hour more guests took the initiative to address Karl.

Karl let it all happen to himself, and he drank steadily, for free today. By about five o'clock the bar was packed, with two rows of people standing behind the guests on the bar stools. Yet it was different. The mood was still stuffy, even though a few guests tried to break it, by loudly giving a round, or by saying or doing something funny. It only worked intermittently and of course this had everything to do with the presence of Karl, who was still sitting at the bar and started to talk more and more. At those moments, the bar immediately quieted down, and everyone listened to what Karl had to say.

“Yes,” Karl began, getting up from his stool. “It is time for me to go. I cannot sit here forever, and I do not want to either. I have had enough to drink now; I can go home to an empty house. The hairdresser’s is closed, and for those of you who call yourself my customer, better find yourself another hairdresser because this place will not open again, not even under a different name or under a different owner.” Then he left the bistro, without looking at anyone and without saying anything more, only to Charlie: he tapped him on the shoulder as he passed and spoke a farewell word with his eyes.

As soon as Karl had left the bistro, the silence broke and suddenly there was noise again at the bar, of people talking, laughing, and chattering. Abe turned on the music system and within a few minutes the atmosphere was a lot happier, but still not as usual.

Four days later. It was Saturday, the day of Little Pete's funeral. At eleven o'clock in the morning it was time and Little Pete was taken to his final resting place and despite the fact that he and his friend Karl did not exactly have many friends in the bar, probably because of their sexual orientation, everyone was now present. It was busy, very busy. At least a hundred people were present, and all of them walked past the grave, first shaking hands with Karl and some comforting words, then taking the shovel to throw a shovel of sand on the coffin. Some (most of which women) carried a white rose and threw it on the coffin, others just used the shovel, or nodded their heads in the direction of the coffin before leaving the cemetery, many of them straight to bar- bistro 'Whites'.

Two hours later, while the bar was packed, Jake the mailman came in and went straight to where Abe was standing behind the bar. He just pushed the people at the bar aside and started talking, almost shouting, so that the bar immediately went silent as everyone looked up and listened to what Jake had to say in an excited tone. "He committed suicide! He jumped from the flat! He's dead now too! He jumped after Little Pete, right after he came home from the funeral. Karl is dead, dead." And then he had to take time to catch his breath and ordered a beer.

Abe almost let the glass he was pouring slip out of his hand. He recovered just in time. The noise in the pub became overwhelming, and Abe walked over to the sound system and turned it off. Not that anyone noticed, because everyone was busy with their conclusions and what was talked about from then on, that day, was not simply Karl's death or suicide.

The conversations were not about his jump from the flat, but more about those two gay guys who had been just a boring couple and never gave a round. Except for one person, who was completely absorbed in his thoughts, sitting at the bar, hunched over with his face above his glass of beer, which appeared to be untouched. It was Charlie, simple Charlie.

No one noticed, everyone was too busy with their hot subject, except Abe. He noticed it because he had often thought back to that day, four days ago, when Karl had sat there, in exactly the same way.

THE MYSTERY BECOMES FEELABLE

Again, four days later, Wednesday morning ten o'clock. Abe is still preparing the cash register when there is a loud banging on the door.

It is Jake, the mailman, who very emphatically asks for attention and calls out loudly to Abe to open the door. The bartender rushes to the door to open it whereupon Jake runs into the bar and starts talking, screaming excitedly.

"It must not get any crazier, haven't you heard? The Zipper got killed, shot just like that, when he was opening his storage box to load his trailer. I just heard from Charlie, who lives above that storage box. I was delivering the mail when I was stopped by the police because the street is still closed. I then called Charlie. By the way, give me a beer first Abe, I am still shaken about the news. What has been happening lately?" Abe started to get just as nervous as Jake and signals him to take a seat at the bar, while he quickly tapped a beer for both of them.

"Dead? The Zipper? Killed? Why the hell? I was actually expecting him here. I was just here extra early this morning. I was already here at half past six, because he had told me to be here at eight o'clock. He had another address nearby as well. And they flashed me for speeding over there, at the Algera bridge, damn it. He was to exchange that slot machine for another one, because this one had to be checked. And now you are telling me he was murdered? Charlie told you that? Are you sure everything he told you is correct? You also know that Charlie sometimes exaggerates things and sometimes fantasizes about it?" "No, no", Jake immediately responded. "It is certain. Later I also heard about it from one of the uniforms who stood there to stop the people.

I know him, and he confirmed to me that it was the Zipper, and that it had turned out it was a brutal murder in broad daylight. They later took Charlie to the hospital. He was completely in shock. Now I have to come to myself first, Abe." And then he poured his beer down in one gulp. "Just give me one more. I gave the mail I still had to do to a colleague along the way. I am not doing anything anymore today." Abe did the same. In one gulp he also poured his beer down and quickly put the glasses under the tap again. With the two glasses in his hand, he went to the other side of the bar and sat on a stool next to Jake, held one glass of beer in his hand and handed the other to Jake. The mailman took another gulp of beer and then took a large envelope from his shoulder bag.

"Here. Another weird thing. I found this envelope in my mail bag. I am sure I did not put it in there. Look, just your name on the envelope, and no stamp or sender." Abe also took another big gulp of his beer and took the envelope. His hands trembled with excitement as he looked at the envelope and indeed only saw his name. "What is that? This is a thick envelope, that is not one sheet of paper in here. That must be a whole pile. And you do not know how it got in your bag? Do you think this can be trusted? I am almost starting to believe it has something to do with that murder. Jake, what is going on here anyway?" Jake shrugged and sighed loudly. "Yeah, I do not know either, open it, or call the police, who cares. I do not like this at all. Give me another beer first. By the way, is Pier here already? I will take a look in the kitchen, you tap a few beers first, Abe."

A few minutes later, Pier came rushing out of the kitchen and walked straight to his brother, who was back at the bar where he had already prepared three fresh beers. The envelope, still closed, was laying on the bar in front of him.

Some guests were already arriving, and Abe became even more nervous, because there was quite a bit to discuss. Fortunately, Suzanne walked into the bar and Abe immediately got up and walked towards her, while he called his brother to wait. "Take a beer first, Pier, you will need it, I will be right over.

Suzanne, call Jenny if she can come and help and tell Bob, in the kitchen, to arrange everything himself. Pier and I have something to discuss. Ask Jenny for the service and do the bar yourself, until we get back." He did not wait for an answer and turned again. As he took his place behind the tap again, he told Pier and Jake to sit down at a table in the corner. He would pour three more beers and come too. After tapping the beers, he took the envelope from the bar and took everything to the table where Pier and Jake were waiting impatiently. When Abe was finally seated, his brother immediately started talking. "First tell me what is going on. I can no longer follow it all. What is that about the Zipper? Is this some morbid joke or something? And what about that envelope?" Abe came to his senses again and spoke.

"No, Pier, not a morbid joke, if it were only so. First of all, the Zipper actually appears to have been murdered, I believe while trying to load the slot machine intended for us into his trailer. He appears to have been shot. God knows what story is behind that, I cannot think of anything. They took Charlie, who lives upstairs, to the hospital.

He seems to have gone completely nuts." Pier interrupted him. "First open that envelope. We need to know what that means, now." Abe looked at the envelope in front of him and hesitated for a moment, but then he picked it up and opened it. He took a stack of A-4s out of the envelope and saw that the top one was a letter addressed to him, Abe White. He began to read at first, but soon began to read the letter to the others.

"To Abe White.

By now you have heard that the Zipper is dead. The police will visit you soon and ask questions. My message to you is: You are going to find me and that will bring one of you fame, or you all will die. Only one real murder has been committed so far, but if you make mistakes, more will happen. In this envelope you will find personalized letters for all participants in this game. The assignment is to find me and report it to the police, but be sure they catch me, else more deaths will occur. You cannot escape your participation, only with death, or with my capture. This envelope and its contents should never be shared with the police. If this does happen, it means death for all participants. Now put that envelope where it can't be found, the police will come soon. Find a time and place where you can meet and collaborate regularly. Other posts will follow. Pay attention! He or she who sins or talks, dies or undergoes a personal drama!

Pier was the first to speak, looking quickly at the names on the letters. "These are almost all our regular bar guests, and we and our staff. Put those letters back in the envelope and get them away from here, quickly. We need to make a plan first to get everyone together." Abe put everything back in the envelope and went to the bar where he hid it under a hatch in the floor. Then he came back to the table where Jake immediately had an announcement.

"Well, right on time. Look at the door. If those are not detectives, I will eat my hat." Two men in suits and long coats stood at the bar and talked to Suzanne, who then pointed in the direction of their table. The men were at the table within a minute. "Abe and Pier White? My name is Plat, detective Plat, and this is my colleague detective Berkwood. We have a few questions for you regarding the murder of Mister Cor Ritskes, which took place this morning. You had already heard of this incident?"

As always, Pier was the spokesperson for the two when he was with his brother. “Yes, that is why the three of us are sitting here together. Jake here, told us. Jake is the mailman in this neighborhood. I am Pier by the way and that is Abe, my brother. So, Jake came across the roadblock this morning when he was delivering the mail. Then he learned what had happened. Cor was a good friend of ours, we took over this bistro from him two years ago. Now he did the slots for us. He was supposed to come and exchange one of the slots just this morning.” The detective interrupted him. “Yes, we know that, and that knowledge has brought us here. We simply have to check every detail, hence our visit. So, had a specific time been agreed, and have you had any contact with Mister Ritskes before eight o'clock this morning? This also concerns yesterday.” Pier thought for a moment and looked at Abe. “The last time I spoke to Cor was last Sunday, here at the bar. He was here, often on Sundays between five and seven in the evening. Have you spoken to him further, Abe?” Abe jumped out of his thoughts at the mention of his name.

“Uh, yes, I spoke to him on the phone yesterday about that slot machine. He was supposed to be here this morning at eight. We may have talked for two minutes, that is all.” The detective resumed the conversation. “Do you have any idea of any of Mister Ritskes' problems? Did his business go well, do you think? What did he sound like on the phone yesterday?”

I would like an answer from you, Mister Abe. Why are you so nervous anyway?” Abe emptied his glass down his throat once more, and before answering the detective he called for Suzanne to bring some more to drink. “Why am I so nervous? That seems quite logical to me, and you cannot guess? A friend of ours has been murdered. A friend, whom I had on the phone yesterday, and no, nothing special, he sounded like any other day, happy, just the way he was. And his business? I do not know.