

**THE DEATH**  
**FROM**  
**THE FRONTPAGE**



# **THE DEATH FROM THE FRONTPAGE**

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Action

# **THRILLER**

All names of persons, relationships and events mentioned in this book are fictitious. Resemblance to existing persons, relationships and situations is purely coincidental.

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# Introduction

“It all happened in a split second and both newspapermen were too surprised and shocked to react in time. There were three shots in quick succession, and the night instantly grew grayer and darker than it was.”

**A** puzzling article on the front page of the newspaper, before it is even printed, is the start of this action-packed police thriller. Murders, bombings and kidnappings bring fear and despair. Who is behind it, and why?

This is an action-packed police thriller where the reader will be constantly questioned of the how, who and why? Every time, everything turns out to be different than previously thought. New suspects come into the picture every time. Meanwhile, the atrocities continue.

The motive remains unclear and incomplete for a long time, and the leader of the great conspiracy is invisibly engaged in a grueling plan. One crime follows another, and the police are left in the dark for a long time. The perpetrators are ruthless and do not shy away from any form of violence, resulting in many victims.

Feel free to put the book down but know that your brain will continue to search for the answers to the questions you have. It will not let go until the book is finished, and you can wait under a different tension for Kees van der Wal's next thriller.





# THE FRONTPAGE

**I**t is eleven o'clock on Sunday evening and Peter van Santen is completely stressed out, mistreating his keyboard, to tell his story short and to the point, but with an unmistakable message. He only has fifteen minutes to get his story perfect.

He is so stressed because he feels that this article could become his first front page. For the past five days, almost without sleep, he had done his final research to corroborate and verify his story. He knew that if this article were published, it would be no different than the front page, and that it would produce several follow-up articles at the same time. He had kept it puzzling enough and brief for that. It could even become an item that would last for weeks, depending on the progress of the police investigation. That was actually the main reason for his stressed state of mind. The police did not know anything at this point. The only person outside of Peter who knew what he was going to write about was his editor-in-chief, Alfred van Dieren. Alfred and Peter had talked that day for up to two hours. This was something incredibly special for the editor-in-chief, who normally did not waste many words to make his decision about whether or not to publish. So today was different than usual. Alfred wanted to know everything, wanted Peter's guarantee that his sources were legitimate, and even threatened that if it turned out not to be the case, he could immediately pack his things. Peter had persevered and so he was now racing against time to get a perfect and hopefully sector one front page article to his name.

At ten to twelve he picked up the printout of his article and walked to the office of his editor-in-chief, who was already waiting impatiently.

“Well, you know how to make it exciting again. Bring on that article, we have just ten minutes left.” Peter handed the printout to his editor-in-chief and gritted his teeth as his boss read the article and lifted his head.

“Damn it Peter. You are sure, yes? Are you behind this hundred percent? You know what the consequences are if any part of your story does not add up, right?” Peter nodded and could hardly keep his legs still, he became so nervous again. Yet his ambition prevailed.

“Yes Alfred. I am sure, and I take all responsibility. Will it be the front page?” “Of course it will be the front page,” his boss replied.

“This story has multiple sequels, and it starts on section one. People will want to know the bottom line. This article is just a warm-up for the real thing. But get your chest wet. As of today, you no longer have a private life, and that could take a while. Anyway, if everything you write is correct then this will all turn out to be worth it. Fortunately, I have seen that I can immediately give it an agreement, I have not been able to discover any errors. I will check with the editor, and I will be right back, then we will have a cigarette outside, but as I said before, I want the follow-up article on my desk tonight. Now we can still go back, we can just let it die a quiet death. Once we post details, and those details should follow soon, there is no going back. Come to think of it, that is not enough. I need to see more of your evidence. Tonight we will discuss how we are going to dose all this.”

At half past one in the morning, Peter van Santen and his boss were smoking a cigarette in front of the main entrance of ‘The News of the Day’. Alfred van Dieren was about to put out his cigarette when the men were startled by the noise of an approaching motorcycle. Before they really knew it, the bike stopped right in front of them, and they saw the rider pointing a gun at them. It all happened in a split second and the two newspapermen were too surprised and shocked to react in time.

There were three shots in quick succession, and the night instantly grew grayer and darker than it had been. At least, that is how Alfred van Dieren felt, because when he heard the motorcycle disappear in the distance, when he looked to the side he immediately saw that Peter van Santen no longer had any feelings. He was dead, hit by three bullets, one of them in the head. It was a terrible sight, but the shots had alarmed others as well. The night receptionist and security guard at the same time poked his head through the door, took in the situation for a moment, then immediately turned around to alert the police. Then he went outside again where more people had gathered from the office by now. The guard made it clear to everyone that they had to go back inside so as not to destroy any traces. Fortunately, they listened and in the lobby of the building the arrival of the police was awaited and despite the ban there was a lot of smoking and little talk.

It did not take fifteen minutes before a whole caravan of vehicles arrived in front of the main entrance. Police cars, an ambulance, and some civilian vehicles. Alfred was the only one who had remained outside, but at a certain distance from the dead body of his former journalist, Peter van Santen. The two detective-looking men who had just got out of one of the civilian vehicles came straight for Alfred. It had already become clear to him that a doctor had arrived, who was now bending over the body to examine it. One of the detectives approached Alfred.

“Good night, my name is Swart, I am a detective in the homicide department, at Doelwater station, and this is my colleague, Detective Brand. Did you find the body? Or were you present when this crime took place?” Alfred seemed to awaken from a trance and gave the detective a sheepish look at first but produced an answer anyway.

“I was there, I stood next to him, we smoked a cigarette. His article, now what? Is that what this was about? Peter, why? I do not understand.” The detective had some trouble understanding all of Alfred's words, so he asked for clarification.

“What do you mean by his article? But wait a minute. Brand, take the gentleman inside and have him shown to a room where we can speak to him later. Then come back here.

After we have had all the preliminary information from the doctor, and have looked around for a while, we will return to the man.” Detective Brand took the editor-in-chief inside and Swart walked over to the doctor. He did this in a roundabout way, first walking to the road because it had already become clear to him that they were dealing with an outright liquidation, which would have taken place from the road. When he reached the road, he called two uniforms to him and ordered them to cordon off the entire road opposite the building, search for traces and look for any bullet casings. He himself glanced around briefly and then went to the doctor, where when he finally stood in front of him, Detective Brand arrived again.

"Have you got anything for us, Balthasar?" The doctor, Balthasar van Drunen, looked up at the detective and answered in his familiar crackling voice.

“Yes David, I think so, although I do not think it will get you very far in the investigation as this does look like a professional assassination carried out by a sniper. One bullet through the forehead, two through the heart. All three shots were deadly, so pick yours I would say. Other than that, there is little for me to say at this point, for it may be clear that there will be no doubt about the time of death. You just have to look at that on the footage from that camera over there,” and then the doctor pointed obliquely up to a corner of the building.

“Sharply noticed Balthasar. Well, there is also a witness to the whole thing, so that will not be a question indeed. Ok, Victor, then let us have a chat with that witness and let the doctor and our forensic people do their job here. Balthasar, when you are done with the body, you can have it picked up.” Then he walked forward, back into the building, with Victor Brand following.

"Where did they put him? Do you know?" Swart asked his assistant, who nodded no.

"No, the guard took over, we have to ask him. In fact, after that witness, he was the first to take a look outside the door."

"Okay," Swart said. "Then we will talk to him later, but first ask him where we can find that witness." That was not necessary because the guard already came up to the men and spoke to them.

"Gentlemen, shall I take you to Mr. van Dieren? I have taken him to his office, where he is now waiting for you. You may not know this yet, but Mr. van Dieren, Alfred, is the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, and the victim is one of the journalists, Peter van Santen. They had gone outside to smoke a cigarette, and a few minutes later I heard the gunshots. It was complete chaos here from one moment to the next. I stuck my head out the door and immediately saw that it was wrong. People slipped out to look and I immediately stepped outside and told everyone to go back in, which luckily worked. Only Mr. van Dieren stayed outside. I then waited for you inside, at the same time making sure no one went out." Detective Swart paused before responding until the guard opened a door that led to the editor-in-chief's office, whom they immediately saw sitting behind his desk, still visibly distraught. Then the detective thanked the guard and told him they would return to him later. He also asked the guard to make sure no one would leave the building without permission from the uniforms at the door. They knew that no one was allowed to leave the building at this time. Then, when the guard had left, Swart closed the door behind him and his colleague, and they took the seats in front of the editor-in-chief's desk. Detective Swart began to address the man in front of them.

"Mr. van Dieren. I understand that it will not be easy for you now, but we will have to ask you some questions." Before he could start with the first question, the telephone rang on the editor-in-chief's desk.

Swart motioned for him to answer and listened. “No, do not delay anything. That article is included, section one, front page.” He then immediately put the receiver back on the hook, giving the man on the other end of the line no chance to engage in a discussion. Detective Swart asked the editor-in-chief if the conversation had anything to do with what happened, to which the man replied.

“Yes, and no, I do not know. I cannot get it all yet. Peter, the victim, was working on a story that will surely be front page news for the next few days. I have decided to just print it, that is the least I can do for him.” Swart asked if he could get a copy of the article and the editor-in-chief immediately made sure it came out of the printer behind him within seconds. He took it from the printer and slid it to the detective. Then Swart produced his second question.

“Now can you tell us exactly what happened outside, please in detail, from the moment you stepped out.”

“Well, there is not much to say about that. So we had gone outside to smoke a cigarette and were standing in front of the main entrance when suddenly a motorcycle with a man in black stopped in front of the gate. Before we knew it, the man pointed a pistol in our direction, fired three shots and sped off again, toward the center. I was totally stunned and looked next to me and saw Peter lying on the floor in a pool of blood.

I saw the wound on his forehead and also clearly saw that he had also been hit in the heart area, so I immediately realized that he was dead. I must have been in a kind of shock state because the next thing I remember is you suddenly standing in front of me. You already know the rest.” Still not satisfied, the detective continued.

“Can you tell us more about the bike and the rider?” The man sighed but answered anyway. “He was dressed completely in black, with such a full face helmet on, and the bike was also completely black, I cannot make anything more out of it. Those shots went extremely fast, so it must have been a semi-automatic pistol.”

"Do you understand weapons?" Now it was Detective Brand who asked the question. The editor-in-chief shook his head and answered.

"No, not really, but I once saw an article that explained a few things about the difference between a revolver and a pistol, hence. Listen, I still have a newspaper that needs to go out on time, can we resume this conversation later? I want that newspaper to reach our readers in time and I want to preface Peter's article and write a side article about what happened. I have to get this all sorted out within half an hour." The detective had no objection to this because there were no details known that could trigger someone, and it would also be impossible for him to prohibit the article from being posted.

"Okay, Mr. van Dieren. You can go, but please stay available. Can we use your office to talk to your security guard?" The man nodded and left his office, whereupon Detective Brand went to fetch the guard and after they had both taken their seats again, Swart started asking his first question.

"Good sir, can you give us your name first and tell us how long you have been working here?" The guard answered in a clear voice.

"My name is Ferdinand Braat, and I have been working here for two years now, but I started at the head office as a mail runner seventeen years ago and eventually ended up here in security.

Today, this means that after normal office hours, the security guard also takes control of the reception, as the building is actually open twenty-four hours a day. But before you go any further. Can I just say something, otherwise I might forget?" Detective Swart nodded in agreement and the guard continued.

"Yes, it may not mean anything, but I want to say it anyway. This week I noticed that on several days, usually after five p.m., a white van was parked outside the gate. I never saw anyone get in or out, and I thought it was strange.

I wrote a note of it in our logbook, with the license plate number of the bus. I was able to read that via the security camera at the gate.” Detective Swart was impressed and complimented the guard on his acumen.

“That is welcome information, Mr. Braat, and speaking of the security camera, how many cameras are there, and how long are images kept?” Both detectives saw the man looking up at an angle and mentally counting the cameras.

“There are six outside, and inside every public space has two, so no cameras in the offices. Oh, and there are also cameras in the production departments. Images are stored for a year, after which the image carriers are erased and reused. There is a special room where the material is kept, in the basement. That room also has cameras and is closed with a code lock of which only the chief guard, which is me, the editor-in-chief, and the head of IT have the code. At least, as far as I know. I do have a diagram for you on which you can see where all the cameras are located.”

“Very well, Mr. Braat. Still, I would like you to go out with us in a minute and show us all the cameras outside. Then we will walk with you again for the schedule. Actually, let us do that right away, we can also ask any other questions while we are at it.

We will simultaneously see if the crime scene can be released, then everyone can move normally again. I do not think we should expect anything useful from the people inside, we will see later if we need to ask anyone in particular. The head of IT will be one and of course we still have to talk to the editor-in-chief again. I am afraid the autopsy will not bring much news either, so that makes the information from Mr. Braat and any camera images our only traces for now.” By now they had arrived outside the main entrance again and Swart had another question for the guard.

“Where is the camera system hardware actually located, and how often are disks changed?” The guard had his answer ready immediately.



“Every Friday, the carriers are changed, time differs. The head of IT does this, I think purely when it suits him. The monitors are here at the reception, but there are several people here who can also consult the images from their own computer, which is why you can see at the editor-in-chief’s desk that he has a whole battery of monitors at his disposal. The recording part of the hardware is in the room in the basement, which I mentioned just before.” Detective Swart was satisfied again and had the guard show all the cameras outside. There were two to the right and left of the main entrance, two by the gate, which turned out to be always open, and two in the parking lot. They took it all in and were about to head back inside when a truck pulled through the gate and circled the building toward the loading bay.

“Yes, work continues as usual,” the guard noted. The first car will be loaded at exactly three o’clock, followed by four more. They work with a strict time slot of half an hour per car. Of course, the first car is for the longest distances, and so on. It is now two o’clock, I really must go now, because I have the task of being present at the loading of the trucks. Would you like me to take you to the editor-in-chief? He will be at the printing department now.” Swart showed a smile on his face again.

“You really know all about the ins and outs here, don’t you? And also about all the people who work here, I assume? But yes, take us to the editor-in-chief.” Ferdinand Braat opened the door for the detectives and let them in, after which he followed. Then he would walk ahead of them again and they would walk through a few corridors before finally walking into the printing department, already evident from the smell of ink approaching them. The guard knew exactly where to find Alfred van Dieren. He led the two detectives into a small glass office where they saw the editor-in-chief arguing vigorously with a man who worked in the printing department. Detective Swart was about to address the editor-in-chief when there was a loud noise. It was coming from outside, and it sounded like shots were fired again, but this time from an automatic rifle.

The detective looked at the guard and asked him where they could get out. Panic arose among the employees in the printing department, but Swart could not deal with it now. He ran after the guard who was going to a small door at the back of the department. He got there just a little before the two detectives.

“You can go out through this door and to the right of this space is the loading and unloading department, I think that is where the sound of shots came from.” Detective Swart cautiously opened the door and carefully poked his head out. At the same time he heard and saw a motorcycle with a rider dressed in black on it disappearing at full speed towards the gate.

A police car with two uniforms and with sirens blaring and flashing blue lights, still on the scene, followed the motorcycle, and Detective Brand was already calling for backup and an interception of the bike and rider. By now they could clearly see that the truck they had seen arriving earlier that night had been heavily fired upon and the driver's body was lying next to the truck.

Swart first checked the body, but immediately found that the driver was no longer alive. Then he looked into the loading and unloading area and saw bodies lying on the floor there, and he also saw that a number of employees were injured. A fire also appeared to have started at the pallet storage area. Brand picked up his phone again and also called the fire brigade and ambulances. Then he called their own doctor and colleagues from the forensics. Then he re-joined his boss. He had meanwhile determined that there were two more fatalities, and one what appeared to be seriously injured and three slightly injured employees.

# TOO MANY RIDDLES

Everyone from the production departments were gathered in the arrivals hall of the main building. In the printing department were only medical personnel and police, who dealt with the victims. Meanwhile, detectives Swart and Brand had received the support of two more detectives from their department and several uniforms were also present for surveillance and interrogation. The editor-in-chief had been taken back to his office and that was where Swart and Brand and their two colleagues were.

“Okay,” Swart started. Four dead, one seriously injured and three slightly injured. But no idea what the reason or cause of all this could be. The only thing we can hold on to at the moment and have to embroider on is Peter van Santen's article, and so we are back with you, Mr. van Dieren. But first this,” and then he turned to the other two detectives. Sas, you and Hugo go into the entrance hall, with the help of some uniforms and question everyone. If something special comes from someone, you keep that person separate and we will talk to him or her later. Make sure there are uniforms at the main entrance and at all other entrances and exits of this building. No one leaves this building without our permission. The gate must be closed and the media, which will already be present, must be kept at a distance. His detectives understood and left, after which Swart turned to his assistant. “Brand, find out if anything is already known about the pursuit of the motorcyclist or perpetrator. Oh, and ask that guard, Braat, to come over here. Also ask him to give you the license plate of that white bus he spoke to us about and have it checked.” Detective Brand picked up his phone again and Swart turned again to the editor-in-chief. “Mr. van Dieren, are you okay?”

It is quite something that happened here tonight." The editor-in-chief looked up from his thoughts, sighed deeply, and answered in a sad voice.

"Yes, personally I am fine, but my people, terrible. How am I supposed to tell their loved ones? It is awful, and why? Why?" The detective took over again for a moment.

"We will take care of those relatives, Mr. van Dieren, that is procedure, and we may also have some questions for them. What I would like you to arrange as soon as possible is to provide us with the personnel details of Peter van Santen, of you, and of the other victims. Oh, and also Ferdinand Braat's please." Just then, the guard entered the office, while Alfred van Dieren picked up his phone and called someone for the information just requested by the detective. Then he turned to Detective Swart.

"I am sorry, but I am thinking about the newspaper, however indifferent it may seem at the moment. We simply cannot afford not to have that newspaper published today. Maybe a little later, but it has to get out the door as soon as possible." Detective Swart understood this and already had the solution ready.

"I understand that Mr. van Dieren, but first our people have to have finished in the loading and unloading area. As soon as that is the case, you can continue the work with minimal occupation, under the eyes of our uniforms. However, I want you to arrange everything by phone, or with the help of Mr. Braat here, who can pass on any messages for you. You will remain here in this office until we give the clear signal. Brand, call for special support. I want the co-drivers of the trucks to be police uniforms, and each truck is also accompanied by two conspicuous cars, one in front and one behind the truck, with two uniforms in each police vehicle. They must have flashing lights and sirens.

Now," and he looked back at the editor-in-chief, "you can do your job, and we will go over that article.