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**THE HUMANE KILLER**

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**For George E. Lasker**

## Content

MURDER IN AN OLD PEOPLE'S HOME	8
MURDER OF A VICTIM OF AN ACCIDENT	18
MURDER OF A MONGOLOID BOY	26
MURDER OF A CANCER PATIENT	35
MURDER OF A SICK, BUT SATISFIED HOUSEWIFE	44

## MURDER IN AN OLD PEOPLE'S HOME

Chief Superintendent Georg Burg comes home from work exhausted. For half a year he has been kept busy by a serial killer who has murdered ten sick or handicapped people during that time period without even bothering to obscure the murders.

The killer's approach is not typical for a serial killer, who kills most of victims using the same method. This is why this killer who Georg Burg and his colleague Superintendent Antje Huber have to deal with is somewhat uncanny and strange.

There are no distinct clues with regard to the killer as yet. The only thing that is known is that acquaintances or relatives of the victims contact the killer through want ads in an unknown newspaper.

But after a hard workday with three hours overtime Georg will not hear of it any more. He enters through the door of his apartment and hangs his cardigan in the wardrobe. He can smell the goulash. His stomach begins to rumble, which virtually pushes him into the kitchen. But if he could foresee the implications of his current case, he certainly would have lost his appetite.

In the kitchen with nothing lacking Georg's 42 year-old partner, Caroline Sommer, is sitting at the dining-table with their daughter Sabrina.

"Finally, here you are at last!" Caroline welcomes him with an irritable voice.

"I'm sorry but I had to work overtime one again."

Sabrina says annoyed with hunger: "Can I start to eat at last or do I have to wait for milord to sit down first?"

Soon afterwards the plates are filled with goulash, noodles and tomato salad. Hardly has Sabrina's plate been emptied when she jumps up from her chair and wants to go to her room. But Caroline calls out admonishing: "Stop! First we clear the table and we won't do that before everybody's done."

“Ah man, you’re a pain in the neck. First I have to wait for an hour till Georg turns up for dinner and now you tell me to wait till the last one is done. You can get stuffed!” Without waiting for a reply she puts her dishes in the dishwasher and disappears into her room.

Sabrina is Caroline Sommer’s and Georg Brug’s only child. Since the two of them have still not made up their minds to marry after 15 years of cohabitation, the girl has the surname of her mother. She is 14 years old, chubby and has long black hair.

Unlike him Georg’s partner is a spontaneous and relaxed person. Being five foot six tall she is shorter by a head. She likes to wear plain clothing, just like Georg. She has blond hair of mid length and wears glasses.

With the two of them done and the dishwasher humming, they are seated at the table again.

Caroline asks: “Have you finally made up your mind?”

“About what?”

“Well, whether you want to marry me!”

“I just can’t understand you. Back then, when you were still involved in the Women’s Lib, you thought as much of a marriage certificate as of dog shit and now you’ve been urging me for months to marry you as quickly as possible although we had decided never to commit that error.”

“Yeah, I know, but after all we’ve been parents for 14 years now and we have changed in other ways, too. If I think of what you were like when we met each other 22 years ago, when the students’ movement was just over... You weren’t exactly one of those people with bourgeois views. And when I look at you now, with your regulations at work often being more important than the ten commandments are to a Christian, I might as well drop my principles not to marry.” Georg interrupts her: “All right, and you’d love to have another baby before you’ve become too old, don’t you?”

“Exactly. And I don’t care if it sounds corny but I’ll stand by it. Besides it’s stupid to be against a civil marriage out of sheer spite only to prove that we haven’t turned into bourgeois people yet. We already have – years ago!”

Georg replies annoyed: “All right, but certainly I won’t decide today if I’m going to take that final step towards the bourgeoisie, as you call it, or not.”

Caroline wants to comment on that but Georg just gets up without a word and goes to the living room where he sits down in his armchair and switches on the TV news.

In an old people’s home lives 87 year-old Maria-Luise Wochner. Unlike her room mate, who gets visits every day, Mrs. Wochner is only visited once a month by her nephew. In addition, her three children come to see her for Christmas, Easter and her birthday. This has been the case for more than ten years. What makes things even worse is that Mrs. Wochner has been confined to a nursing bed for a year now and can only get up with other people’s help. This is the reason that she has been thinking more and more frequently about death, about suicide. But she doesn’t have the courage to do it. For she is afraid that her suicide attempt might fail so that, on top of her current living conditions, she would have to face even more difficulties.

A geriatric nurse enters Mrs. Wochner’s room. The nurse is 28 years old. Her face shows the strains of everyday work. In the dark room there are two beds with bedside tables and a small round table with two easy chairs.

Only at sunrise can the bright daylight enter through a small window. As a result, the light has to remain switched on even in the daytime.

The geriatric nurse says: “Hello, Mrs. Wochner, let’s go for a little walk as usual, shall we?”

Mrs. Wochner replies with a grateful expression: "Ah, it's you, Mrs. Ganter. I'm so glad. I don't want your colleague around. She always treats me like a little child."

Mrs. Ganter does not react on that remark but helps Mrs. Wochner to slowly get out of bed.

Mrs. Wochner often thinks that if all the nurses were like Mrs. Ganter, life in the home would be more tolerable. And moreover, if one of her three children came by with her grandchildren every day or at least twice a week, she would certainly not yearn for death as much. But her sense of loneliness is stronger than her will to live.

For half an hour the two women walk up and down the corridor; one door is next to the other and the neon bulbs provide sufficient light.

Although there are newer and more modern old people's homes, old people like Mrs. Wochner cannot afford them. For she has been a housewife all her life and her husband, who died of a heart attack twelve years ago, was a construction worker and for people like that there is only room in homes like this one, where Mrs. Wochner, too, is waiting for death. A nursing care insurance does not help either since it only covers a certain part of the home's costs. The rest has to be paid for by oneself or by social security. But lest the authorities should pay too much, the needy are rather put in a cheap home.

Everyday life in a home like this is always the same for the occupants: get up in the morning, provided that one is capable to do it, wash, dress and then have breakfast. Afterwards there are even occupations offered like for instance drawing or knitting. Then there's lunch. Afterwards two hours of midday rest. Then it's tea-time and shortly afterwards it's time for dinner. Then some of the occupants sit in the corridors or in front of the TV waiting for sleep.

For occupants like Mrs. Wochner the day in the nursing bed seems

to last forever. Sometimes she has a chat with her room mate but there is little opportunity for that since she spends a lot of time outside the home with her visitors.

Mrs. Wochner lies in her bed again and waits for her nephew, who comes to see her once a month. This time, however, she is not sure if he will come. For the last couple of times she has asked him to contact the killer through the address she received from one of the occupants, so that her life might come to an end.

It's late afternoon and her nephew is standing by her bed. "Hello, Aunt Maria-Luise."

She lifts her hand and looks at him smiling. "Hello, Gottlob, I'm glad that you could come. I was afraid you would stay away today."

Her nephew is 52 years old, unmarried and of inconspicuous appearance.

He pulls a chair to the bed and sits down. "So, Aunt Maria-Luise, how are you?"

"Well, what can I say? You know that I while away my time here in my bed the whole day. If it wasn't for Mrs. Ganter, I'd have nobody except you."

It is clear to him that she is about to ask the same question as the last couple of times. This time around he knows what the answer will be.

After a short moment of silence there comes the question, which sounds like a request. "Gottlob, won't you do me a favour and contact the killer?"

"Ah, Aunt Maria-Luise, if there was another possibility I would help you at once, but to hire a killer – I don't know if that's a sensible solution."

"Ah, Gottlob, we have talked so many times about it and it was of no avail. I agree with you that it would be better to find some



people I could live with. Well, it used to be different. Old people didn't have to look for anybody just because they had been put in a home. Us old folks lived with our families or the villagers till we died. But nowadays we have to await death alone and see it as a salvation from our existence."

"I know, Auntie, but I told you many times that it's up to everybody themselves whether they feel alright in a home. Take your room mate for instance, she gets visited every day and is enjoying the rest of her life..."

He does not even know why he is arguing with his aunt about that issue again since he has decided to give in today anyway.

Again she holds out the slip of paper with tears in her eyes. Her nephew is about to get sick. Could it really be a solution to put an end to one's life or another person's life? But in spite of his second thoughts he does what he has resolved to do today, takes the slip of paper and promises to take care of it.

A week later a want ad has been placed in the newspaper and the slip of paper destroyed.

The next day at about 10 p.m. the phone rings in the nephew's bachelor pad. He wonders who might call him up so late. Curious, he lifts up the receiver.

It is impossible to tell if the voice at the other end of the line belongs to a man or to a woman.

The voice says: "Are you the person who placed the ad?"

"Yes!"

"Right, so listen: Put an envelope with 30,000 marks in 10-, 20- and 50 mark bills in the locker number 40 at the central station together with all the necessary details and a new photograph of the person to be delivered so that I can carry out the order."

Gottlob does not like the part about the letter, so he says: "I have doubts about that letter, you might blackmail me with it!"

The voice at the other end replies: "Well, listen, I'm no blackmailer

but someone who helps suffering people to put an end to their life and in order to do that I need sensible, written details about the person together with a risk premium. And I certainly don't want to blackmail you, or do you really think that I could report you to the police? But if you want to be on the safe side buy yourself a typewriter to write the letter on and then get rid of the typewriter so that they can't tell that the letter was typed with it. Don't leave any fingerprints on the stationery or anywhere else! And don't take a photograph that is known among the person's acquaintances or relatives. That way not only will you protect yourself against blackmail but also against giving the police any clues to yourself by mistake." Now the killer speaks more slowly and clearly: "Place the key directly on top of the locker but take care that nobody sees you. That would be all!"

The line is cut off.

At 11:30 p.m., two days after the phone call, a night nurse is sitting in the ward. She is taking a sip of coffee when a lights flashes up. The nurse murmurs: "Oh, what's wrong again? It's already the third time this evening that somebody's ringing."

Hastily she takes another sip of coffee and walks to a room where there is a woman who cannot go to the toilet on her own.

An unknown figure takes advantage of that and sneaks into Mrs. Wochner's room.

In the room, Mrs. Wochner and her room mate are fast asleep. The figure takes a cushion, sneaks towards Mrs. Wochner's bed, bends over the bars of the nursing bed and presses the cushion firmly on the victim's face. As a reflex, she tries to gasp for breath but the old woman is much too weak for that.

When the day shift does its morning round and discovers Mrs. Wochner's dead body, there is a lot of excitement at the home. Not because there is a dead person in bed, this is nothing special, for

there is more dying here than anywhere else. But the fact that there is a corpse with a cushion on its face makes it clear to the day shift that the killer, who has been talked about in the papers, the radio and TV quite often, must have struck again.

One hour later the murder squad is investigating on the scene of the crime. Georg Brug looks around.

“Hello, Mr. Brug!” an attractive 32 year-old blonde calls out.

Georg turns around and sees his six foot tall colleague Antje Huber. For half a year she has been the successor of his old colleague, who retired.

In Georg’s opinion she looks exactly like a woman should look like. She has long blond hair and an athletic figure. The woman simply looks like the main character in a corny pulp novel.

She asks: “So, was it the Humane Killer again?”

“Yes,” Georg curtly replies.

The killer got his name from the media because he exclusively kills people who are ill, handicapped or old. It came to a point where some newspapers, radio and TV stations discussed the question whether the Humane Killer murders at all or just relieves people from their suffering.

Mrs. Huber asks: “So, are there any clues already?”

Georg replies: “Yes, there’s a nephew who regularly came to see – what’s her name again?” He looks at the file he is holding in his hand. “Right, Wochner, Maria-Luise Wochner.”

“Has he been notified already?”

“Yes, I’ve already done it. He should be here any minute.”

Lights flash and a reporter comes up to them: “Chief Superintendent Brug, was this the Humane Killer’s eleventh victim? Are there any new insights already or are the police still in the dark?”

“No, there are no insights yet so would you please go now so you don’t get in the way of the investigation here. You can get more information from our press office.”

But the reporter remains persistent and makes a couple of photographs until two police officers show him to the door.

In the meantime the nephew has arrived and is being interrogated in the ward by Georg and Mrs. Huber.

Before long he admits with sweat on his forehead: “Yes, I have hired the killer to eliminate my aunt!”

“But why?” Mrs. Huber asks concerned.

“Why, why? Because my aunt has been pestering me for weeks to take care of the Humane Killer.”

Georg replies: “Well, as far as we can tell you have done that conscientiously. But tell me, are you sure you don’t remember the newspaper through which you contacted the killer?”

“Well, like I told you before, I burnt the note my aunt gave me.”

Suddenly the door to the ward is jerked open, Mrs. Ganter, the nurse, rushes in, jumps towards the nephew and screams: “You filthy pig! Only you can have hired the killer! Why did you do it?”

Mrs. Huber holds Mrs. Ganter by her arm and tries to calm her. But Mrs. Ganter gets louder: “It’s the easiest thing to slaughter a weak person like a sick animal instead of spending a little time with them!”

The nephew looks at her pale as a ghost and tries to justify himself: “It was my aunt’s dearest wish.”

Mrs. Ganter calms down a bit: “Pah, how humane of you!” Now she raises her voice again: “So it didn’t enter you mind to spend a little more time to see your aunt, so that she might not have been so lonely, did it? You’re just as rotten as many of the occupants’ relatives. First you put these people, who have worked their whole lives for the family, in homes and then you don’t give a damn about

them! Little wonder that people like your aunt see death as a relief from a life where you feel like a burden.”

Mrs. Ganter stops. The nephew is silent.

Now Mrs. Huber speaks: “You’re not so wrong, I guess, but please go now,” she says gently pushing him out of the room.

A short period of silence. Then the nephew regains his voice: “So what will become of me now?”

Georg gets up and looks out the window: “It depends on the judge. The charge might be incitement to murder and you would have to face prison.”

After these words are spoken, the door is opened and two uniformed policemen take him away in handcuffs.