



pp. 311-319

They went down to the vault with the elevator. The cooled bunker was about fifteen metres long and five metres wide. All sides were clad with safe deposit boxes. Different sizes, different numbers. The pale granite floor mirrored the lights of countless spotlights embedded in the ceiling. At the room's centre was a bright white terminal which grew from the floor like a mushroom opening up its shielding cap above the monitor. As if the customer had to worry about rain while entering the box number and special codes. As soon as Samuel had entered the five-digit code, he heard a click and a small table slid out from inside the mushroom. Polished stainless steel, like in an operating room.

“Down there,” Fabienne said. “The safe deposit box is down there.”

Samuel walked over and pulled the box out of the shelf. If there was something to his spy theory, he would probably find different passports in it. The box certainly didn't feel very heavy.

“Do you want to be alone while opening it?” Fabienne asked.

“No, it's fine.” Samuel lifted the lid and discovered a long brown envelope. He took it from the box and knew instinctively that there were only sheets in it. An entire stack, stapled together to a thick bundle. He read the cover sheet. *Zero Growth Rate as Opportunity for Social Justice*. It was his father's dissertation. Samuel skipped through the pages. Graphs, headings, paragraphs. Things he didn't have the vaguest notion of. What was he supposed to do with it?

“Can I have a look, too, at whatever your father gave you to give you such great pleasure?” Fabienne asked.

Without a word, Samuel handed her the papers. An envelope fell out. There was neither anything written on it nor was it sealed. Like a card player with a fresh hand of cards, Samuel

let the pictures glide into his hand and put the envelope on the small table. Fabienne didn't pay any attention to him. She stared at the mathematical formulae and their multitude of variables, the meanings of which were explained in an attached list. Gross national product. Growth. Employment. Domestic demand. Export ratio. Fabienne seemed as if she actually understood what all of this meant. With furrowed brows, she turned the pages. Samuel looked at the pictures. The first two pictures showed a group of young people standing in front of an old fireplace and visibly forcing smiles for the camera. It seemed like the photographer had urged them to. Vincent hadn't changed much since then. Back then, he had already had the same haircut as today, a green turtleneck sweater and a cord jacket with sleeves too short for his long arms. His eyes were directly set on the photographer. Next to him stood a plump woman with long dark hair and glasses that covered half her face. "Do you know any of the people on the photo?" Fabienne asked and glanced at him sideways.

Samuel hesitated. He had never seen the woman. The dark-haired man on the other hand looked familiar. If you envisioned him with no hair and added thirty years, it could be Kaspar Weinfeld. The expression on the face, the sheer terror... Never would he forget it. He pointed at the man. "I... I believe this is Weinfeld. This is the man I saw die, right before my eyes. The first one to die. The one they showed on the news."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"And the others?"

"This man here is my father, next to him my godfather. I don't know the woman."

Fabienne hesitated. "But I do."

"You?"

She nodded. "It's Marietta von Dahlem. She... I met her once. She is... was very nice."

"And how do you know her?"

Instead of giving an answer, Fabienne put the sheets back into the box and tapped them lightly with her finger. "This forms the basis of *One* and of everything we intend to do with it."

"What are you talking about?"

Fabienne was silent for a moment and avoided eye contact. Then she took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry for?"

"That I lied to you. You were right, our meeting wasn't a coincidence. It was our plan. I'm Nina. I'm the girl you were chatting with. I knew you were the son of Vincent Pinaz and wanted to meet you at the city train station, but then the schedule for the demos was changed and the chaos was greater than expected."

Samuel felt as if someone had pulled the rug out from under his feet. “And the broken VW bus?”

“We kept you under surveillance from the beginning, even from the time of your arrival at the airport. Pablo told you how easy it is with the cameras. The taxi driver’s mother belongs to us. And Kyoti knows some things about cars as well. He arranged it all, so I could pin a small tracking device on you.”

“A tracking device? Like in spy movies? You’re not being serious, are you?” Samuel didn’t know how to react. He really should have been freaking out by now but the confession sounded so entirely absurd that he could only manage an incredulous shake of the head. Fabienne bent down, opened Badawi’s transport case, reached into it and held a small silver box, barely bigger than a finger nail, in her hand.

“But what for? What do I have to do with your cause? What do you want from me?”

“Your father is a genius. During the eighties, he was the leader of a student group searching for a new, fair economic order. Many of his and the group’s ideas form the basis of *One*.”

“You know the dissertation?”

“Only in parts. Kyoti came across excerpts from it on the Internet.”

“And how did they get there?”

“We still don’t know. We assumed your father had uploaded the excerpts to release them for others to exchange their ideas about them. That’s not unusual. Many academics work like that nowadays. We didn’t know from the start that the records were your father’s. They were published anonymously. Only after long research Kyoti found out. And then he discovered *One* in its game version and thought that your father or the group were behind that, too. There was the possibility that they had never entirely given up their plan to change the world. After asking other people that had been studying in Suisse at the time, we discovered the group. That’s how I met Marietta and tried to win her over for our cause...”

Cold rage flowed through Samuel when he realized the extent of this tale of lies for which he had fallen so easily. Everyone had been deceiving him! The entire time. “But my father isn’t interested in computer games,” he defiantly interrupted her, although he didn’t know exactly what to believe anymore. “He can’t have developed your game.” He looked Fabienne straight in the eye. “So, you were the ones killing all the others after all? That’s the reason for this entire set-up.”

“No, and this is our problem. Shortly after I had managed to convince Marietta to join us, she was murdered. Every person who could tell us how the plan for *One* was supposed to continue is dead.”

“Except for my father.”

“Yes, except for your father.”

“And what about me? What did you need me for? I can’t help you. I’m only a little, naive school boy who wants to go to his mommy in London and who has been fooled by a liar.”

Fabienne looked at the floor. “After your father had refused to contact us and nobody knew where the rest of the plans were, we had no other choice but to...,” she hesitated, “kidnap you.”

“Kidnap? What kind of nonsense is that? I am free. I can go wherever I want to.”

“No.” She held her mobile phone up to him. “They monitor our every step.”

Samuel tried to find the right words. He clenched his jaws. “And it’s part of the kidnapping to go to bed with the hostage to make him compliant, isn’t it? Was that Kyoti’s order or was it the *level of decision making*?”

“It wasn’t part of the plan.” She closed her eyes for a second. “It just happened. I’m sorry. Honestly.”

“I’m free,” Samuel angrily repeated. “Why should my father believe you anyway that you kidnapped me?”

“We sent him pictures.”

“What pictures?”

“Pictures of you. With the blindfold. With your injuries. They have convinced your father to help us.”

“And the phone call? What about the message on my voicemail?”

“We put that together on the computer to trick you to come here. We had to make you open the safe deposit box for us. Your father only left that single credit card at the bank to access it.”

Samuel couldn’t believe it. “But that one time, when we were close to the headquarters, you wanted to throw me out. Was that only pretence, too?”

“No, it wasn’t.” Fabienne tugged at a strand of hair. “I wanted to call the entire thing off when I heard your father’s desperate voice.”

“And where is my father now?” he asked. “What have you done with him?”

“We don’t know where he is. We lost contact. After his arrival in Germany we made sure he got a mobile phone. Either he lost it or it doesn’t work anymore.”

“And if he’s dead?” Samuel asked anxiously. “What if the killer has already murdered him?”

“That’s rather unlikely.”

“Unlikely? Are you really that cold that the only things that count for you are probabilities and that stupid game? He is my father, do you understand? My father!” Samuel stuffed the dissertation into his rucksack and angrily slammed the box shut. “If my father is still alive, his life is in danger. Do you actually realize that?” He put the box back on the shelf with the other safe deposit boxes and took the transport case. Fabienne followed him silently.

Tobias Elsäßer. *One*.

© S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt, 2013.

Translation by Eva-Maria Martus

They got on the elevator. Fabienne dialed Kyoti's number and told him what was going on.

She said that Samuel knew everything and that the remaining documents had not been in the safe. When they arrived back in the lobby, Samuel stopped and took a deep breath.

"You really do not have anything to do with the murders?"

"No. I swear to everything that's important to me." She looked at her mobile phone. It blinked.

"Shit! The cops know where we are. A surveillance camera spotted us."

They carefully took a step out of the bank building. The entrance was located between two blocks of houses. If the police showed up now, they would be trapped. Fabienne stopped and looked down the street. Then, she opened a map on her mobile phone. Samuel toyed with the idea to run off. But where should he run? He didn't know where his father was. He would have wished to see him stand there, right in front of the bank, like the words on his voicemail had promised. But this message didn't really exist. It was only a fake, too.

Fabienne still stared at her mobile phone.

He could flee to the closest police station, but what next? What if they didn't believe his story? After all, there was an arrest warrant issued for him. He couldn't risk it. If his father was in fact next on the killer's list, any hesitation by the police would be his death sentence. Samuel himself had to search for him – and Fabienne would help him!