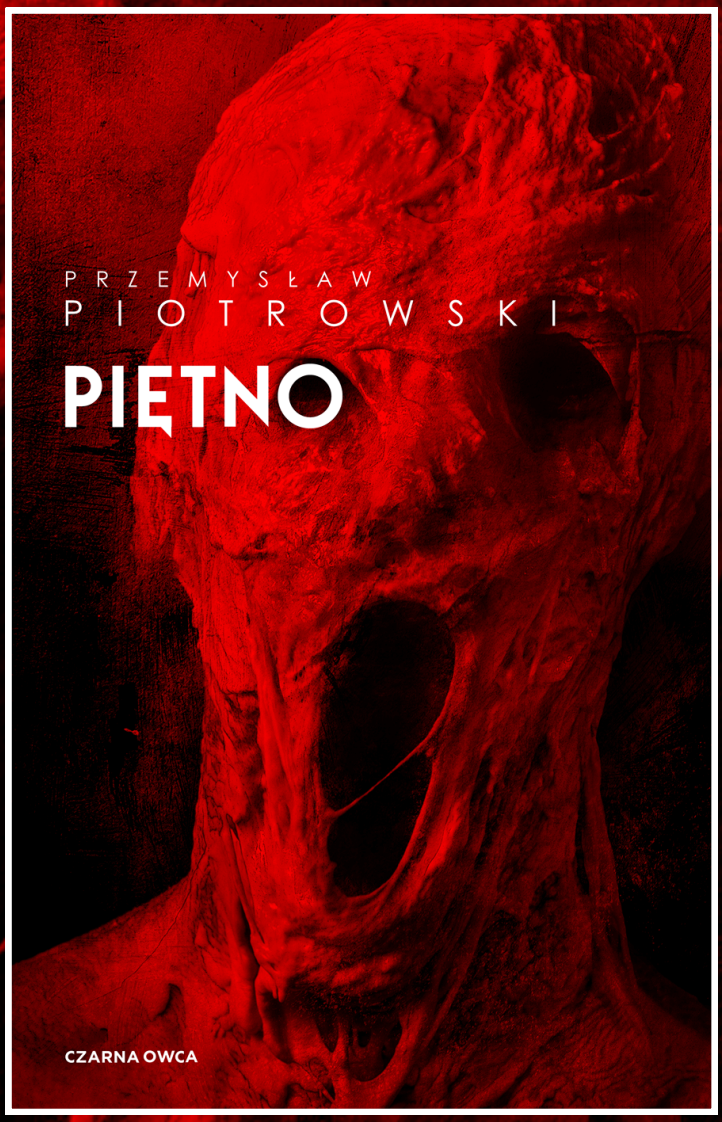


Przemysław Piotrowski
Stigma

Synopsis, Bio & Excerpts

Przemysław Piotrowski

About the author

Przemysław Piotrowski is one of the most popular Polish authors of crime novels and thrillers, political scientist and journalist.

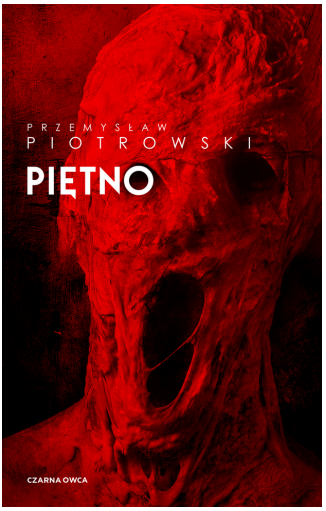
He takes a down-to-earth approach to writing, grounding his stories in reality. He has not hesitated to visit a morgue or retrace the steps of a serial killer in Colombia to gain firsthand knowledge. His novel *Pestilence* (*Zaraza*) **won the Crime Fiction category in the 2021** *Lubimyczytac.pl* **readers' poll**, and his books regularly place in the top three of that competition.

Piotrowski firmly believes that entertaining literature should be authentic, intense and evoke strong **emotions—after all, without them, why bother reading fictional stories?**

Stigma

Przemysław Piotrowski

Crime



May 2020
464 pages
English excerpts and synopsis available

4.0/2 891 ratings/ 325 reviews

7.7/ 9 414 ratings/ 1 684 reviews

The start of a gripping series with Detective Brudny – a story you won't forget.

Igor Brudny is a hardened Warsaw detective who has spent years running from his dark past. But now, he has no choice but to confront it.

In Zielona Góra, a town in western Poland, a man with an uncanny resemblance to Brudny is wanted for a gruesome murder. To clear his name and uncover the secrets of his origins, Brudny must return to his estranged hometown – a place he swore he would never revisit.

Leading the investigation is Inspector Romuald Czarnecki and his team, who are racing against time. The killer's shocking brutality suggests this is only the beginning. Brudny's sudden appearance only deepens the mystery. For Czarnecki, the detective might hold the key to catching the perpetrator.

But can he trust a man who may be tied to the crimes in ways he cannot yet imagine?

"Stigma" is a truly satisfying crime novel

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> **Over 85 000 copies sold in Poland alone**
> **Unconventional structure** – the reader learns about future events before the protagonists do
> **Igor Burdny is not a typical troubled detective** – his burden comes from a childhood past
> **The issue of pedophilia in the Church** is shown from the perspective of victims struggling with trauma


The shadow was back.

Stigma

Synopsis by Nasim Luczaj

Stigma is a crime novel set in provincial Poland and centred around the enigmatic **Detective Igor Brudny,** who finds himself caught up in a case involving a serial killer who looks just like him. As he joins the investigation, Brudny is forced to confront his dark past – a childhood of abuse in an orphanage run by nuns – and face the menacing shadow he's felt within him since he was small.

The novel opens on **Dr Filip Trochan**, a succesful family man who was also haunted by a mysterious figure in his youth. Leaving work one night, he encounters it again, disappears and becomes the primary suspect behind several brutal murders in Zielona Góra. The victims' internal organs are hung from so-called Bacchus figures – landmark statues dotted around the town centre.

We meet **Detective Igor Brudny** when his ex-colleague and past love interest, **Julia Zawadzka**, tells him about the case. She shows him photographs of the suspect, who looks just like Brudny and has a similar birthday. They must be brothers. The murders took place in Zielona Góra in the west of the country. Brudny originates from the area but hasn't been back in a long time.

Brudny sets off from Warsaw to Zielona Góra, where he meets **Inspector Romuald Czarnecki**, who is in charge of the case and senses that Brudny may be useful if difficult to cooperate with. Czarnecki can find no record of Brudny's past prior to his 18th birthday.

Meanwhile, two new victims, a bus driver and a retired builder, are found in the river. They appear to have been assaulted and had their organs taken out of them while they were still alive. Though Brudny has an alibi, his DNA is found at the crime scene. Czarnecki's team speculates that Trochan or both brothers may be schizophrenic, and **Prosecutor Krzysztof Lis** keeps pushing Czarnecki to reveal the detective's existence to the media. Czarnecki is forced to lock Brudny up.

Julia Zawadzka arrives to assist Brudny with the investigation. She visits **Archibishop Albert**, who used to be in charge of his orphanage. The archibishop tells her that Brudny killed someone as a child. Julia finds the name of Brudny's village of origin, Nietków, and has the detective released. They then visit Nietków's local church archives and find the house of an old altarboy, who reveals that, years before, him and his wife were given two twin boys to look after. One was soon taken away by a mysterious man in a suit. They took care of the other, presumably Igor, for two weeks, until a nun took him away.

Igor's girlfriend, **Oksana Szczypenko**, comes to visit him in Zielona Góra, but disappears before Igor returns from Nietków. Czarnecki offers to help Brudny find her, as long as he tells Czarnecki everything about himself in return. Igor confesses that boys in his orphanage were routinely sexually assaulted by priests. Trying to escape his abuser, Igor once pushed a priest down the stairs. He died on the spot. Igor was never assaulted again, but **Sister Gwidon**a got other orphans to mistreat and punish him.

Igor gets a phone call from Oksana's number. She has been kidnapped by the serial killer, and to keep Oksana alive, the murderer instructs Brudny to meet at midnight on a bridge on the river without informing the police.

Priest Adam Klich, in charge of Nietków parish, is murdered. Shown a facial composite, Brudny recognises Prosecutor Lis as both the culprit and one of the orphans who had abused him. Desperate for his past to stay hidden, Lis had changed his name and repressed his sexual identity as a gay man. During the course of the book, with the threat of his past coming to light, Lis also murders Sister Gwidona, and makes multiple efforts for Igor to be accused of the crimes.

Igor arrives at the appointed site. The killer calls and tells him to sink his car in the river. Igor lets the car roll down the hill with Julia inside and sets off to meet the murderer. Julia manages to escape the vehicle and follow a figure she sees carrying Igor on his shoulders to the serial killer's cellar.

Inside, Igor is imprisoned in a cage. Trochan is also trapped there, and his wife is about to be sawed apart. Oksana is hanging off a meat hook. The figure is wearing a potato sack over his head, and tells Igor and Trochan that they're about to witness him rape, skin and gut their loved ones, but then Zawadzka steps inside. She shoots him in the shoulder and chest. Julia throws Brudny the gun. He sets himself and Trochan free and runs after the killer, who has fled with Oksana.

The police arrive, but the Prosecutor has disappeared. Brudny chases the killer and aims his gun at him. The murderer takes the sack off and Brudny sees a distorted and grim version of himself. The killer, **Jan**, is also Brudny's brother, and wants the other two triplets to pay for not having experienced his traumatic childhood – their biological parents had abused Jan and allowed acquaintances to do the same for money.

Brudny fires at Jan, who falls into the river with Oksana. The detective is then hit by a bullet shot by Prosecutor Lis and also falls in. Jan tries to strangle him, but Brudny digs a branch into Jan's neck and his brother dies. Brudny crawls out of the river with Oksana, but Lis is on the shore, ready to fire. Then Czarnecki's bullet hits Lis.

The book ends a month after these events. Czarnecki and Brudny discuss what happened. All six of the murdered men had been Jan's abusers. The killer had dressed up as Brudny to lure Trochan's wife and Oksana, and spread Brudny's DNA using baby hairs his mother had kept after his birth. Jan was the shadow that had haunted both Trochan and Brudny, who were probably connected to their tortured twin by a powerful empathic bond. Brudny is cleared of all suspicion, while Lis is unlikely to get away with Sister Gwidona's murder. Czarnecki is looking forward to some time off when a new case appears on the horizon.

Nasim Luczaj is a Polish—English translator and prize-winning poet. She's an alumna of the NCW Emerging Translator Mentorship.

Stigma

Sample translation by Nasim Luczaj

Detective Igor Brudny was a man in his prime. He attached no importance to what he wore, so he almost always looked the same. He shaved once a week, sometimes every two, if he happened to have a lot of field work. Most of his colleagues saw him as a grump, but he didn't lose any sleep over it. On the whole, it even suited him. At least he didn't have to pretend and wish every single person a good morning when there was no use praising a day before sunset. He rarely had good days, but he knew how to appreciate them – usually come evening, in the company of his favourites, Jameson and Dirty Harry. These days it was Jameson, Dirty Harry and a pretty gorgeous Ukrainian girl who gave him what Jameson and Dirty Harry couldn't offer.

Detective Brudny was also a man with a rather complicated past. He didn't tell anyone, but Brudny wasn't his real name. He'd adopted this surname when he stepped into adulthood, decided to disappear from the place of his upbringing and cut ties with the world that fortune had chosen for him, once and for all. The one thing he transferred from that first life to the next was 'Brudny' – the Polish word for 'Dirty' in Dirty Harry. It was in honour of that ascetic cop played by Clint Eastwood, who was no less strict in his private life (or at least that's how Igor imagined him), that he took this new surname in the registry office. Save for a grimace from an exceptionally unpleasant pen pusher, who didn't hesitate to roll her eyes and make a comment, Igor never had an issue with his new surname ever again. Especially not once he moved to the capital and touched up his appearance to give the instant impression of a gloomy bastard.

Many a sad story lay hidden in Igor's past, but he didn't share them with a soul. He said very little in general, and if it weren't for his work, which largely consisted of asking questions, he probably

wouldn't ever so much as open his mouth. According to Igor, everything began and everything ended with words. Not just at work, but also outside it, where he felt like a bull in a china shop. And so he'd spent almost twenty years alone, his contact with women limited to the rare hookup he could afford to pay for with his pitiful policeman's salary. This had its advantages, because he didn't have to say a word, but the disadvantage was arithmetic, which there was no getting past, and so sometimes towards the end of the month Igor had to limit himself to bread, cheese and Jameson. Only a year ago was there some development on this front, with the sudden appearance of a chatterbox (with a strong Eastern accent) introducing several words that didn't end with a question mark into the tidy structure of Igor's life. He could live with that. Being a grump, not a fool, he understood that he could only get a thing if he let go of another. The decision to make a given move meant having to deal with the consequences. Action led to reaction. The mechanism (or fact of life) was very simple, but throughout his life he'd met many people who still didn't get it. These were the people he usually caught or shot at.

He liked simple means and clear methods. Transparent solutions and lucid answers. Black and white. Which made it all the harder to understand the meaning behind Julia's enigmatic and fucked-up phone call at two thirty a.m. on a Saturday.

He reached Giełdowa Street shortly after three. He stopped in his usual spot, on a small island overgrown with wild bushes, inaccessible to the vast majority of cars due to its overly tall kerb. He turned the engine off and tried once more to get his head around what his ex-partner from patrol had meant. Nothing came to mind, and he didn't like to be surprised. Not even by Julia.

[Igor arrives at Julia's house.]

‘Been out of Warsaw?’ She asked as she poured boiling water into mugs. She stood by the countertop with her back to him and a cigarette in her mouth.

‘No.’

Igor watched her shift from foot to foot. Her calves were muscular, her buttocks firm, but she didn’t have anything near a model’s figure. Small breasts and rather short hair didn’t do her femininity any favours, either, but still men chased after her like a bitch in heat. They adored her because she talked like a guy, drank like a guy and fucked like a guy. Julia *was* a guy, really, except Mother Nature had got things mixed up in the process of creation and, instead of the full ‘set’, given her only balls. Balls the size of watermelons, an undeniable fact no one ever put into question, not even the chief.

But today she was acting strange. They were thick as thieves, so Igor could sense it. And they understood each other without words.

She put out her cigarette and approached her friend with a mug of coffee. She sat down beside him and reached for another cigarette. Now that was a really bad sign. She opened her laptop.

‘For now only Leśny and I know what I’m about to tell you and show you. He’s on duty today.’

‘*That* Leśny?’

‘Yeah, him, that’s why he called me and not you.’

Ryszard Leśny was a man of the arrogant type Brudny despised. Two years previous, Brudny broke his index finger, which Leśny had apparently used to pleasure Julia, or at least so he’d bragged to his colleagues in the changing room. She treated sex instrumentally, so she didn’t make a big deal out of it, but Igor was far from happy. Leśny didn’t report it. You don’t tell on colleagues, so he let it go, best not mess with Brudny. Besides, the little shit was just a wimp. They’d

avoided each other ever since, so everything was back to normal – Igor tended to avoid most colleagues.

'So what's the deal with this murder?'

'Wish I knew.'

She took a drag while operating the trackpad with her other hand. Soon a photo appeared on the screen. Brudny had seen thousands like it, so he immediately recognised it as taken from a CCTV recording.

There was a man in the picture, kneeling by the wall of a tenement building. He was wearing a dark coat and a hood over his head.

'Who's that?' He asked.

'I was hoping *you* could tell *me*.'

Zawadzka brought more photos up onscreen. Each had captured the same man in different positions. He seemed to be working on something. His face remained hidden behind the large hood. Eventually a portion became visible on one of the photos, then the full face appeared in the next, though it was still very blurry. Julia kept clicking. Another. Then another. Igor felt an unpleasant shudder go down his spine. The image sharpened, zoomed in. Fuck!

'What the hell is that supposed to mean?' He exclaimed, clearly surprised.

'Right? That's why I was hoping you could tell me.'

'Where did you get this material from?'

'Zielona Góra's city CCTV.'

'Julia, this isn't funny…'

She cast him a look that should have made him drop dead on the spot.

'Okay, what's going on here? Who's that guy in the picture, and why does his face look like mine?'

'According to the local police, that guy's a certain Filip Trochan. He's a doctor and the founder of a private clinic in Zielona Góra. Married, five-year-old daughter, generally well-liked and respected. Except he's suspected for murder.'

'Filip Trochan…?'

Brudny's mood darkened. The photo had been taken at night, and it wasn't the most precise, but the police technicians had done their bit and got it to a point where the uncanny resemblance was visible. This could have been a coincidence – after all, we all have a doppelganger somewhere – but Brudny had long stopped believing in coincidences.

'Just to be clear. The guy in that photo not only killed the victim, he also cut out most of their organs and hung them from these…' Julia took a moment to search her memory for the specific name. '…Bacchus figures. They're these sculptures scattered across…'

'I know what Bacchus figures are,' Brudny cut in.

'Oh yeah. You're from round there, aren't you, Igor?'

The detective felt a pang of anger. Not at her but himself. He'd once revealed to Julia that he was an orphan who'd never met his parents and had grown up in an orphanage on the outskirts of Zielona Góra. Here was proof that everyone should mind their own business about other people's pasts. He ignored the question.

'All right then. We have a guy who's killed someone. Okay, he looks similar to me, he even lives near where I'm from. So what, Julia? So what?'

‘I’ve not told you his age…’

Brudny bit his lower lip and nodded his head to signal that he knew where she was going with this.

‘Let me guess. Thirty-eight.’

‘Bingo. And his birthday is the day after yours.’

She had a pretty strong point there. For a moment Brudny stared into space. Zawadzka gave him a second to piece it all together. He didn’t need long.

‘It could just be a coincidence. And it’s certainly not proof. Besides, the birthdays don’t match, do they?’

‘If I didn’t know you, maybe I’d believe you. But you don’t believe in coincidences, and neither do I. Besides, look at this.’

Zawadzka entered Trochan’s details into the search engine. Within a split second, several dozen articles about the doctor and his clinic came up, and with them a whole load of photos, mainly from symposiums and industry conferences. This time their quality left no space for doubt. The likeness was more than striking – Brudny and Trochan looked like two peas in a pod.

[Doctor Filip Trochan is introduced.]

He instinctively glanced at his Tag Heuer watch – his wife’s present for their ninth wedding anniversary, bought for a mere sixteen thousand Zlotys – and thought he was a happy man. Even if he did work his arse off, he enjoyed what he did and lived comfortably. He pressed the ‘-1’ button for the garage, where his brand-new silver SUV, a Hyundai Santa Fe, awaited for him to drive it to his residence in Jędrzychowo on the outskirts of Zielona Góra. His wife was probably putting Lenka to sleep now, because it was almost nine o’clock, her

bedtime. After nine, even if she tried to fight sleep by pinching her arms, she always lost to it miserably.

He thought it would be nice to spend a romantic evening together. Lately he was rarely home, made love to his wife much less often than he used to, and although she, a psychologist who ran her own office, hadn't decided to bring it up, he could sense something was off between them. It was the one barely perceptible crack in their relationship. Everything seemed absolutely fine, but somewhere behind the blanket of their love, mutual respect and years of habit hid a problem neither was willing to admit to. He disregarded it, telling himself he was overworked and had no time, but each month it would bother him more and more. He felt that someone or something had planted a seed that introduced a hint of disquiet into their model and orderly relationship. What was worse, it had germinated and let out shoots.

Today I'll play the gardener and cut off all the unwanted shoots, he thought to himself as he marched towards his car. I'll get some sushi on the way, and I'll buy an expensive Chilean wine (she loves Chilean wines) in World of Wines (I've not been there for ages, hope they're open past ten). We'll have a romantic evening together, and then we'll make wild and passionate love by the fireplace, listening to the crackling of burning logs. And once we've cooled off, we'll drink some more wine and repeat. We'll go even harder, even more intensely.

These thoughts further improved his mood. He had a plan for tonight, so he quickened his pace. He took his keys out of the inner pocket of his blazer and pressed the button. The headlights flashed, briefly lighting up the small semi-dark underground garage and shining onto the nearby wall.

Trochan stopped.

It only lasted a split second, but he could have sworn that someone was standing in the shadowy corner. Not a place where

anyone would have found themselves just like that. He felt uneasy, especially since the figure's outline seemed familiar. He was no wimp. He'd been training karate for years and though he'd learned to be humble, usually getting out of the way of potential aggressors, he certainly wouldn't give up without a fight.

He hesitated for a moment but pressed the button to unlock the car once again. As before, the lights flashed orange, but this time the figure didn't appear. He thought it was probably tiredness, but a sudden, deeply unpleasant shudder reminded him that he couldn't keep lying to himself any longer. He knew that figure. It had haunted him since he was a child, from his earliest years. In dreams, in dark corners, even in mirrors, which he didn't like to this day. Though it grew, filled out and developed together with him, it always appeared as a shadow, a being without a face. With time, the face began to take shape but remained blurry to the very end, making it all the more frightening. Especially when it opened its cavernous black mouth and let out that awful, mute scream, like the nameless figure in the famous Edvard Munch painting. While other children were scared of ghosts and monsters, he'd always been afraid of that hideous shadow.

Many years had gone by since he'd seen it last, probably at a student party. His friend had offered him a joint with the 'white widow', said to be the best weed on the market at the time. That was the first and last time he'd tried any drug.

Why was he seeing it again now? He nervously pressed the button for the third time, and for the third time the headlights dispelled the semi-dark with orange light. There wasn't anyone standing in the corner, no one was creeping up on him. The shadow had disappeared.

'You're exhausted, Dr Trochan,' he muttered under his nose and headed towards the car.

Just as he was grabbing the door handle, he heard a noise coming from deep within the parking lot. As if a small steel part had

rolled along the concrete and stopped somewhere in the distance. In the almost total silence, the metallic sound rang out with an eerie echo.

Trochan let go of the door handle and went to the back of the car. He opened the boot and took out his shovel. He considered simply getting behind the wheel, turning on the engine and going to get the sushi and wine, calling the police from his car and reporting that some suspicious person was loitering around the clinic's underground car park. The closest patrol at hand would stop by to check what was going on and maybe scoop up the homeless person, thief or whoever this individual was. But instead, he started walking, shovel in hand. Deep inside, he knew it wasn't a homeless person or thief. For a short moment he felt strong and tough, but when the metallic sound rang out in the darkest corner of the parking lot, he understood his mistake. Beads of sweat emerged on his temples, and his heart turned into a jackhammer. His mouth went dry, his hands shook, his throat clenched as if in a vice.

It had been almost twenty years since his last panic attack, but the debilitating feeling was impossible to forget. Within one split second, he felt paralysed. This was how he reacted whenever he sensed its presence.

The shadow was back.

'Who's there? Answer me, I can protect myself, I have a weapon…'

His own tone of voice surprised him. He was squealing like a five-year-old girl who'd just lost sight of her mum at the funfair. If the aim was to scare anyone, his efforts surely only had the opposite effect.

He decided that enough was enough. No more messing around. He retreated towards his car, opened the door and sat down behind the steering wheel, lying the shovel down on the passenger seat. He cast a final look at the parking lot and turned on the engine. The headlights shone with a strong, bright light, but their gleam failed to

capture the outline of any sinister figure, as he'd subconsciously imaged they would. Instead, his car was filled with the rhythms of some new hit in Spanish, which had caught his ear a few days before. The music made him feel safer. He shifted the gear selector to 'Drive' and slowly moved forward. As the garage gate lifted and he left the underground parking lot, he thought he must have exaggerated it all. The shadow was just an embodiment of his childhood fears and phobias. At least that's how his psychiatrist had once explained it.

Then he felt fear's ice-cold hands on his spine. He reflexively closed his eyes and prayed he wouldn't see what had just flashed before him in the reflected streetlamp light hitting his rearview mirror.

He heard panting behind his back and felt someone's warm breath on the back of his neck.

The shadow was sitting right behind him.

A moment later, the doctor collapsed into an abyss of darkness.

[*Having discovered he has a twin brother suspected for murder, Brudny travels from Warsaw to Zielona Góra to get involved in the investigation.]*

Brudny wasn't one to do things for show, but the expression on the task force team members' faces was priceless. For the next few seconds, which seemed to last for ages, everyone stared at him as if he were a ghost. Eventually the chief reached out his hand and introduced himself as Inspector Romuald Czarnecki.

'We're pleased to meet you too, Detective Brudny,' Czarnecki greeted him. 'I hope you're as good at the action as you are at making a show.'

Czarnecki tried to stay calm as a cucumber, although a storm of conflicting emotions raged within him. He was annoyed because no one had thought to let him know that the main suspect had a twin brother, a detective from the Met at that. On the other hand, he had the chance to find a strong ally in Brudny. So long as the Detective was willing to cooperate, of course.

'That's it for today. No change of plan, despite this unexpected intrusion,' he added in a firmer tone of voice. 'Everyone knows what they need to do. Ladies, gents, get cracking.'

The team members took their things and left Czarnecki's assigned office. The Inspector also relieved the assistant chief.

'Do sit down,' he offered Brudny once they were finally alone.

'I didn't mean to disturb you in your work.'

'Well... let's say you've only complicated it further.'

'Well... let's say this case has complicated my life.'

Brudny sat down opposite Czarnecki. They sized each other up like boxers the moment before the first gong.

'All right then, Detective Brudny. Either you promise me an honest conversation, or you can leave and not come back until I send my people for you.'

'Why suggest I might not be honest with you?'

'Are you joking, Detective?

'No, Inspector.'

'At least you're solid, and that's a trait I truly appreciate. I'm not saying you mean to lie, but given the situation we've found ourselves in, I'd rather make sure I'm not met with another surprise in

an hour or two. You must realise what position you've put me in, in front of my people…?'

'I've no intention of lying.'

'Good.'

'But as for surprises, I can't guarantee anything…'

'Do you have anything specific in mind?'

'Can I smoke in here?'

'I don't usually let my own people smoke in my office, but this situation is exceptional. I don't have an ashtray, but…' Czarnecki reached for a mug of coffee dregs and slipped it towards him. '…Prosecutor Lis always forgets to take out his rubbish. I'm used to it by now.'

'Thank you,' Brudny lit his cigarette. 'Ask away, though I may disappoint you.'

'We'll see.'

'I'm at your disposal.'

Czarnecki cast Brudny a defiant look. A little stern, a little fatherly, signalling who was in charge here. Igor knew all the experienced cops' tricks, but the inspector had made quite an impression on him. He'd definitely interrogated thousands of people before. He knew the ropes.

'You've not answered my previous question. Why can't you guarantee I won't have any surprises?'

'I think you know why, Inspector.'

'I'd rather hear it from you, Detective. Anyway, please just answer my questions. Properly.'

‘All right then. I’ll express myself as clearly as I can,’ Brudny took a drag from his cigarette. ‘The guy in the footage looks exactly like me, and I’m just as surprised as you and your people are. I’ve never seen or heard of him before. And now this doctor guy’s just marched into my life in his muddy boots, so here I am talking to you, though I could still be riding my beautiful girlfriend and drinking cold beer in my cheap flat in Saska Kępa. I don’t know anything else at this point, but I’m determined to find out. And I’m not leaving until I’ve understood what the fuck is going on here.’

[*Igor is haunted by his past.*]

That night, Igor Brudny had terrible nightmares. First he dreamt of Sister Gwidona, then Priest Filip, and finally of all the Mother Superior’s favourites, bald with missing teeth, kids she let off their leads when other foster children didn’t meet her expectations. Which he didn’t.

‘Krzysztof,’ she hissed like a snake. ‘You’re so remarkably dumb. Did your last penance not teach you a thing? Stupid kid. Now you’ll see. You’ll learn that only suffering can ennoble a sinful soul. I’ll make sure of it.’

She tried to break him many times but never succeeded. Since he turned nine and that fateful event, she avoided him, and though she threatened him with severe punishment on multiple occasions, she never so much as touched him. She had Bolt, Dollop, Frenchie and a few other older foster children to do it for her. They’d beat him unconscious several times a week. Cigarette burns, electric shocks and sack tapping were part of his everyday life, and he regularly fell asleep tied to his bed, unable to go to the toilet. Having learned their lesson from the past, there was only one thing they didn’t dare do. He once overheard Sister Gwidona whisper about him with Sister Bernadetta,

revealing to her that she felt the presence of a demon, that 'the brat carries the devil inside him'.

Maybe he did. He'd always felt that he wasn't alone. There was someone else living in his mind. Someone who had no face and always came in his sleep. Like a dark reflection of himself, a gloomy shadow from another dimension, searching for the gate to the world of mortals.

He used it to his advantage. To survive, he learned to live with it. Soon barely anyone had the courage to stay alone with him.

It had been so many years since he'd put all this behind him. But five days ago, the past had come to claim him.

[Another two murders take place while Brudny is in Zielona Góra. Brudny's DNA is found at the crime scene.]

'Are you sure it's not a mistake?' A slightly irritated Czarnecki paced around his office, a mug of steaming hot coffee in hand.

'I've put in a request for another test, but these kinds of errors don't really happen.'

'Explain this whole twin thing to me properly. For all I know, they have identical DNA. Am I right?'

'Sort of. It's true that monozygotic twins are almost genetically identical. Almost. That's what we thought up to 2005, when some inconsistencies were observed. In 2008 it was officially confirmed that there may be differences in genetic information between twins.'

'How does that work?'

'There are a few theories. They usually talk about the moment just after the cleavage of the embryo. Changes in the genome may

already start occurring in the mother's womb, for example when fighting for oxygen and nutrients, but they usually develop later, mostly due to environmental factors. Primarily things like past illnesses, diet, alcohol and cigarette consumption or lifestyle. The list could go on forever, really. We found these kinds of slight differences in a few segments of Trochan and Brudny's DNA.'

'What do you think that means?'

'I don't know, Romek. This case is more muddled by the day. Trochan's DNA was almost all over the place around those figures, and as for Brudny, the proof was a few hairs.'

'So they must have been in touch before?'

'Seems so.'

'And the samples from by the river?'

'I should get the results tomorrow…' Borucka glanced at her watch. '…or rather today, by noon. Once we have the pattern, it goes much quicker.'

Czarnecki clearly wasn't satisfied with that answer. He paced from window to cupboard as if he were wound up and this ritual would help him solve the case. Borucka watched him from the corner of her eye, because even though they'd worked together for years, she'd never seen him in such a state.

He eventually stopped pacing.

'And the whole schizophrenia thing? I know it's a genetic disease…'

'Yes, that's what I was about to say. We found genes that would indicate illness in both their sequences, but there were still differences. Although the NOS1AP gene most common in schizophrenics is clearly overactive in both, Trochan's risk of acute illness is, how do I put this,

higher. Not to go into too much detail, out of the one hundred and eight discovered genes responsible for schizophrenia, we detected four mutations in Trochan that make the burden much more serious than in Brudny.'

The inspector set his mug on the table and sat down on the chair. He hid his head between his hands and remained that way for a good while. At some point he raised his eyes to Borucka, who was seated next to him.

'So they both have it?'

'That's the issue. Maybe, but not necessarily. Same as with cancer. Some people have the genetic baggage and live to a hundred, others die young though no one in the family suffered before them.'

'At least Elka's theory has some basis,' he muttered under his nose, a little resigned. 'Now what about Brudny? I can't crack the guy. In theory I should arrest him, but what good would that do? If Brudny really is involved in this, he won't admit it. He's too intelligent...'

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