

# The old stonebridge

It was a cold evening. Thick fog lay all over the big town; over the river the fog was particularly thick. Most trees had already lost their leaves. In this uncomfortable weather most people stayed at home. But one lonely person was walking along the river. If somebody had watched the person he would have seen a well dressed woman with a black coat. Her blond hair was twisted to a beautiful bun. She seemed to be sad. It started to drizzle and she took out her black umbrella to protect her hair.

Elisabeth went faster "It wasn't such a good idea to go for a walk", she thought. Now she only wanted to be at home and out of the rain. When she went over the old stonebridge she noticed that she nearly was at home.

Suddenly she stopped, a cold feeling was in her stomach. A shudder ran down from her neck. She could not move anymore. Everything was silent, she could not hear any noise. There, at the big old oak a boy was hanging. The dirty rope around his neck was twisted around a thick branch. He had blond hair, blue eyes and he was as dirty as the rope. Suddenly Elisabeth heard a loud high noise. She needed a while to notice that it was herself who screamed and she stopped screaming. After a few seconds she began to move. She took out her mobile and phoned the police.

When the police arrived they found Elisabeth standing on the bridge, the phone at her ear staring at the boy. "Are you the woman who called us?" She turned her head and looked into the face of a young policeman. "What did you say?" she was irritated. "Are you? The woman who called us because of the boy?" asked the policeman again. She nodded slowly.

"We have to take you to the police station because we have some questions." He took her arm and brought her to a police car standing next to the bridge. When she looked out of the window she saw a few other policemen taking the body of the boy down from the tree.

At the police station they asked her a lot of questions. She tried to answer them as well as she could. Two hours later her friend Zoanne came after Elisabeth had called her. Zoanne spoke to the policemen and then she brought Elisabeth home.

She helped Elisabeth to sit down on the couch in the big livingroom and brought her some tea. Then she sat down next to Elisabeth. "Why?" it was the first word she said since they were out of the police office. "Why?" Elisabeth asked again but Zoanne did not know what to say, so she only shook her head helplessly. "Why did he have to die? He was so young! What a god is that who lets children die? What a cruel world is it? Why do people have to die? Oh, my poor husband, he had to die too! I've got only you." She began to cry. "What did the policemen say why he died?" "They said it was suicide, but..." "Never! I think it was murder." Elisabeth's voice got louder and louder. Zoanne tried to calm her down. "I think the same as you. I will do all I can to find the murderer, if it was murder!"

Zoanne did not know yet that it would not be easy to do what she had promised. The next day when she was sure she could leave Elizabeth alone for a few hours she went to the police station again. She asked for some news about the boy, if the policemen already knew who the boy was and where he lived, but they did not tell her anything.

Suddenly a young goodlooking policeman came to her "Everything's alright with Elisabeth?" he asked. "Euh... yes. How do you know her?" Zoanne was surprised. "Oh, I met her yesterday. I brought her to the police station." "Oh." "Sorry, I didn't introduce myself. I'm Daniel." "Hi, I'm Zoanne." They smiled to each other. "Do you know anything about the boy?" she asked hopefully. "Yeah...I really shouldn't tell it to you, but I'll make an exclusion." He said slowly. "What?" she was interested. He looked around but he could not see anybody. "Can we meet at 15 o'clock at the café 'Daylies'?" "Yes, that's very good." "Bye, see you." he said and disappeared into a corridor and left a happy Zoanne.

The café was not very full and Daniel was already sitting at a little table for two people. He pointed at the table and smiled. "Hello Zoanne. What do you want to drink? A cup of tea or a cup of coffee?" "Coffee's good, thanks." Daniel stood up and came back a few minutes later with one cup of coffee in each hand. "Thank you. How much does it cost?" "You are invited." "Thanks a lot.", she thanked him. "You're welcome."

After she had drunken a bit of coffee she asked him about the boy. "Well, I didn't know much, so after you'd gone I asked my colleagues.They told me about the autopsy." "And?" Because of her curocity she leaned forward to him. "There is something I don't understand. They told me that he had taken drugs, a lot of drugs." "What did you say, how old was he?" "He was about ten years old." "But I thought he hanged himself at a tree? That's very stange. And he was so young." She took a deap breath. "Do you know who he was?" "No we haven't that information yet."

"Can I see his body?" she asked bravely. "Euh... Yes, but let me think a moment. I think they will not say anything against it. Well, let's go."

It had not been a nice experience to see the boy. They had walked through a long dark corridor into a cellar and to an empty room. There had only been a green examination table. A white cloth had been lying over him. His skin was white and his small face was dirty. Why hadn't they washed him?Zoanne thought.

She was engrossed in thought when she suddenly stood rooted to the ground. She had seen the dead boy. He was walking on the opposite side of the street. That couldn't be true! Was it a mirage or was it only in her mind? Was she getting crazy?

Zoanne crossed the street and ran to the boy who went across a square. She asked him who he was. He stared at her and then he ran away, his friend followed him. She shouted "I saw you! You were lying dead at the police station!" The boy stopped and turned around. His friend stopped, too, a few metres farther on, and shouted: "Luky, come on! This woman is lying. She doesn't know anything about Miky! He's not dead! Luky!!" But

Luky had begun to walk into Zoanne's direction. He looked like somebody in a dream.

"What do you know about Miky?" he snarled at her. "Is he your brother? You look like him." she asked instead of giving an answer. "We are identical twins. No, we were, if it's right what you said." he said sadly. The boy's friend slowly came nearer until he stood next to the boy. "You are Luky, aren't you?" the boy nodded. "I'm Zoanne. Yes, your brother's truly dead. A friend of mine found him hanging on a tree near the old stonebridge. It was suicide." "No, Miky wouldn't murder himself. If he did it though, he would have said something to me. He told me everything. It must have been murder. But why do you know so much about him?" suddenly Luky was distrustful. "I think, too, that it was murder and now I'm searching for the murderer. Do you want to help me?" she tried to dispel his doubts. "Well, maybe..., can I think about it and we'll meet tomorrow at twelve o'clock at this well. Is that OK?" he answered cagily. "That's OK. Until tomorrow, Luky!" "Bye." he said and Zoanne went away.

The boys went to the well, sat down on the rim and kept silence for a while. "Do you trust her?" Luky wanted to know. His friend Tom deliberated on the question. Zoanne was a short thin woman with brown hair and brown eyes. She seemed to be very nice but she was an adult. And adults are normally cross and wanted to exploit children. She seemed to be different. And what about Miky? They had to help because without them he would never find Miky's murderer. At the end he only said: "I really don't know. And then, Miky: How should she know about him?" "Maybe she's a police officer and wanted to catch me? I'm blessed if I know." "No, I don't think that she wants to catch you or me. She could have done it a short while ago. I think she is really searching for the murderer and without our help she'll never find him." "That's true." Suddenly the tears began to roll down Luky's face. "Oh, Miky! My poor brother. Why did he have to die? His murderer will have to die, too! And if I have to kill him!" At the end his voice was bitter, ice cold and full of anger. "We will work together with the woman." Luky decided.

"Those last two weeks Miky was very tense, do you know why?" Tom asked. "Well, yes, he told me about a man who had threatened him. He was afraid of him..." Suddenly Luky stopped speaking because he had seen the man Miky had shown him. He pointed at the man at the other side of the square. "The person in the dark leather coat." The man had a muscular build. His black hair was very short and he looked very dangerous. "Come on. We'll follow him." Luky whispered. "OK, but we'll have to pay attention." Tom agreed.

They followed the man across the square into a small dark street. A few minutes passed and nothing happened. Suddenly he turned around and nodded. It was too late to hide themselves and their hearts began to run faster. They were sure that he had seen them but they hoped that he wouldn't recognize them. Then the man took out a mobile and spoke to somebody. They could not understand him because he was too far away. He walked on. Then they came to a bend and behind the bend they could not see the man anymore. There was a crossroads. On the left side there was a big square with a lot of people. Today was market day and on the square there was a big market. On the right there was a narrow street like the street in which they were standing.

They decided to go different ways. Luky would go along the street and Tom would go across the market. Within one hour they wanted to meet each other at the well on the square where they had met Zoanne. Tom ran over the market but he could not see the man. He stayed at the market for the hour and hoped that Luky would be luckier. At five o'clock he went to the well, but Luky was not there. Fifteen minutes later Luky hadn't

arrived yet and Tom began to be nervous. After half an hour Luky had still not arrive. Tom was very worried about his friend now. Where was Luky? Had something happened? What did he know already about Miky's murderer? Had the man recognized them and had he caught Luky? What should he do now? He decided to wait another half hour. So Tom waited... and waited ...and waited. The half hour had passed but there was no Luky. Tom thought about where his friend could be:

First he searched at the place where they were sleeping at night – no Luky.

On their favourite tree on a branch – no Luky.

At their hiding places – no Luky.

At the house of Luky's family, but they sent him away – no Luky.

Tom didn't know any other place to look for his friend. But suddenly he had an idea, it was his last chance. Befor he went to this place he went to the well again, but Luky wasn't there. Then he went to the river where Miky had died, but – no Luky.

Hopelessly he sat down on a stone under the oak and looked into the dirty water of the river. The sun had set and now there was twilight. Suddenly he saw something very strange in the water. It was nearly round and on it was a kind of fur. Tom stood up and walked to the water. Then the thing turned around and he saw what it was. It was a head. After he knew what this thing was he could see the rest of the body under the water. And then he recognized the face. He knew the face very well. It was Luky!!! Tom began to scream. He could not move. On Luky's forehead there was a bloody hole, a shot hole! How could that happen? Why did Luky have to die? First his twin and now he. Tom did not move while he was watching the corpse drifting down the river. When he could not see the dead body anymore he began to shiver. He lay down on the grass under the oak and his thoughts were running through his head. He was irritated and so he decided to meet Zoanne the next day. It was hours after midnight when Tom fell into a restless dream.

The next day Zoanne waited at the well for Luky but she could not see him. She saw his friend Tom instead. He looked very sad when he came into her direction. "Hello", she welcomed him, "Where's Luky?" "Hi." Tom greeted back. "Luky's dead." "What??? When? And why?" Zoanne was shocked. Tom told her about the man and their pursuit. He told her that he had seen Luky's dead body drifting in the river. And he told her about his therory that the man had killed the twins. "That's a possibility." Zoanne nodded. "But we have to find evidence to attest it." "We have to spy on the man." "Shall I show you my flat? Then you know where you can reach me if you have seen the man." Tom nodded and they went to Zoanne's flat. It was not far away from the well. When they reached the house Zoanne asked Tom to come in for a cup of tea and to warm up a bit.

It was a disorderly and homely flat and Tom liked it at the first view. They did not talk much while drinking tea. But suddenly Zoanne broke the silence. "Where do you live?" "I'm homeless. I live in the streets because my parents died when I was three. First they sent me into a house for children without parents. But the children were so cruel to me that I decided to break out a few years later. I think the adults were happy to have one

child less." "Really?" "Yeah, and then I met Luky and Miky and we got friends. It isn't so horrible to live in the streets as you think. Only in winter it's so cold that you can't sleep well." "Maybe you want to sleep here?" Zoanne asked hesitatingly. He did not know what to say. He had not had the idea that she would make such an offer, but he was suspicious. "Well,... maybe....If it's too cold outside I will come. Zoanne nodded "You can come and sleep here whenever you want but I'll not stop you if you want to go away."

"Do you want to come with me to meet my friend Elisabeth?" Zoanne asked. He shook his head "No, I want to walk through the streets. Maybe I'll see the murderer? Who knows?" With these words he stood up and went out of the flat.

He had not been long out in the streets when he saw the man coming out of a house. Tom followed him to another big house. He waited behind a dustbin for the man to come out again. But after half an hour the man had not come out yet. Tom decided to run to Zoanne to tell her that he had found the flat of the murderer. At the moment he arrived Zoanne was just closing the door. "Huh... what happend?" She asked in amazement. "I've found the flat of the murderer." he gasped. "Oh,... where does he live?" "I've got to show it to you." Tom answered.

Zoanne phoned Elizabeth and told her that she would come a bit later than planned. He showed Zoanne the house and crouching behind the dustbin they made a plan how to get into the man's flat. Zoanne left her mobile with Tom after she had shown him how to use it if somebody called. Then Zoanne went to Elizabeth and hoped that she would play the role to help them to prove the man's guilt.

Tom's first job was to get to know on which floor the man lived. He didn't know how he should find out. He was lucky, the man came back to the house. Obviously he had left the house while Tom had been with Zoanne. The man took a lift to get up. Now Tom only had to look at the number the lift showed when it stopped. It was a '04'. When the two women arrived he was standing behind the dustbin and boredom had come over him.

"Is he in the house? At which floor does he live?" Zoanne asked nervously. Tom nodded "On the fourth floor." "Very good. How long can you keep him?" She asked Elizabeth. "Long enough if you are fast." She answered she was very nervous, too. "OK, let's start then. It is no sense to wait a minute longer." With these words she went into the house and took the lift to the fourth floor. The two others had to hide, because the man should not see them.

Elisabeth's hands began to tremble when she pushed the bell. No answer. She pushed the bell again and now she heard a voice: "One moment please, I'll come soon." Half a minute later the door was opened by a man. "Oh, hello, are you Mr. Fernandez?" Elizabeth asked. She had read the name at the bell. "Yes, that's me. Ah, you are the new neighbour, aren't you? And now you surely want to get to know me." Elizabeth nodded and hoped that she would not do everything wrong. This first part had been working very well but now Tom and Zoanne had to come in. Mr. Fernandez walked into the kitchen without closing the door. That was her chance! Fast she made a sign to Tom and Zoanne and then she went into the kitchen. Now she had to distract the man from them and it would not be easy.

Tom and Zoanne tiptoed into the flat. It was a big flat with high rooms with expansive furniture. They went into the first door on the right side. It was a disorderly workroom. Everywhere there were lying pieces of paper, books and other things. On the table, on the floor and in the shelves every space was full. They searched the room after something to show that Mr. Fernandez was guilty. It was not an easy job because they did not know what they were searching for. Suddenly Tom found a plastic bag with some strange powder in it. Zoanne did not think that it was important but he insisted on taking it with them. So Zoanne put it into her bag.

Suddenly the phone rang. That was a catastrophe because the phone was standing in the workroom. As fast as they could they went under the table. It was no second too late. At this moment Mr. Fernandez came into the room. Their hearts were beating very loudly and Tom was sure that Mr. Fernandez had to hear them.

"Hello?... Oh, hi!..." suddenly Mr. Fernandez whispered "Can you call me back in one hour? I've company. ... No? Then speak fast. ... Have you killed him? ... That's good. ... Have you sold the stuff? ... I want to have the money tomorrow. ... At the big square at the well at 11 o'clock. ... OK. Don't forget it. It wouldn't be good for you. ... bye." "That's good, that's good." Mr. Fernandez murmured. He went back into the kitchen and told Elizabeth that he hadn't time anymore.

"And now, let's go!" Zoanne whispered to Tom and they ran tiptoeing out of the flat. "It was nice to meet you.", Elisabeth said, "Maybe we'll meet each other again." "Until next time and good bye." Mr. Fernandez agreed and Elisabeth left the flat. Elisabeth went out as fast as she could to the door where the others were waiting for her.

"The man nearly caught us! I thought my heart would stop. I've found a plastic bag with some strange powder. I think it could be a drug." Tom told her. "What? You didn't tell me that in the flat." Zoanne said. Tom shook his shoulders. "And how was it?" Zoanne asked her friend. "It was horrible. This toady! If I think that he killed children. How can a human be so different in different situations? Oh, I'm so sorry that I couldn't stop him." "Doesn't matter, nothing happened. We are all OK, aren't we?" The others agreed.

"What shall we do with the powder now? We've got to check it." Elisabeth said. "The best is to take it to the police." Zoanne answered. But Tom didn't agree with her. "They will keep it and we'll never get it back. And maybe they'll not tell us what it is if they know it." "I've got a better idea. I know a policeman. His name's Daniel. Maybe he'll help us." Zoanne countered. Elisabeth nodded "We can test it. We've anyhow no other choice to find out what kind of powder it is." So it was decided.

At the police station they did not have to search for Daniel because he was standing in the entrance. "Hi, Daniel. Can you come for a moment, please? I've got a question." Zoanne began, her heart began to run faster when she saw at Daniel. Interested, he came to them. "What's the matter? Oh, hi Elisabeth, how are you?" "Fine thanks." "We've found some strange powder. Can you test it? We've got to know what it is." Zoanne asked. "Of course. But how did you get it?" They told him the story. "OK. And when did he want to meet the person who called him on the phone?" "Tomorrow at eleven o'clock."

"I've got to have the fingerprints of the man. Do you think they are on the plastic bag?"

"Why not? But there are the fingerprints of myself, Tom and Elisabeth, too." "Can you come into my office, please?" Tom was very nervous. The police was taking his fingerprints! Then Daniel took the fingerprints of the plastic bag. There were really some other fingerprints. "I've got to bring the powder to a laboratory." "How long will it take until you have the results?" Elisabeth wanted to know. "I don't know, but if I say I need the results very fast they'll do it fast. I've got to take the powder there now. Do you want to come with me?" Daniel asked. On the way to the laboratory they spoke about how they could catch Mr. Fernandez.

"Can you come with a lot of policemen?" Elisabeth wanted to know. "I mean he's a murderer! And maybe a drugs pusher." "I'll do what I can." Daniel promised. The plan they made was good. Now Mr. Fernandez only had to walk into the trap.

The next day they met at ten o'clock at the police station. Tom had slept very well because he had slept at Zoanne's flat. Daniel on the other hand did not seem to be very awake. But he seemed to be happy: "I've got the results of the analysis of the powder." "And? What is it?" Tom wanted to know. "It was a drug. Heroin, and a lot of heroin." "As I said. As I said." grinned Tom. "Yes, as you said. But now we've got to know if he killed the boys and why. Let's go and get it done." Daniel had got many policemen. They were all in civilian clothes. In every street in the direction to the square a police officer was standing. And all over the square were police officers, too.

Mr. Fernandez and his accomplice were both very punctual. When the policemen tried to arrest the men they attempted to run away. The policemen stood in their way and arrested them. Mr. Fernandez cursed a lot. Suddenly he saw Elisabeth and he shouted: "You...you bloody slut! You'll regret it. Damn! Damn! Damn!"

In the end Mr. Fernandez confessed. He told the whole story:

"Yes, I am a drugs pusher. It's such a silly story, but OK, I'll tell it to you. One day, I think it was three weeks ago, one tiding had too many debts. I was so furious at him that I killed him with my knife. When he was dead I looked up and I saw a frightened child's face. Now I was furious with myself that I hadn't looked if somebody was there. The boy ran away and I followed him. I was faster and so I threatened to kill him if he told it to somebody. He was very afraid now and ran away. Two days later I thought about why I hadn't killed him. I was afraid that he might have told it to somebody and I decided to kill him, too. So I followed him and waited for a good chance to kill him. I had the chance two weeks later. I caught him and injected him a lot of heroin. I thought if the police thought that it was suicide they wouldn't search for a murderer. It came as I thought, the police didn't search for me. But the next day I suddenly saw the boy I had killed. You can imagine my surprise. And then he saw me. He followed me and I decided to kill him because I didn't know if I had killed the right person! It was such a tricky situation. After a bend I hid myself behind a dustbin and waited for the boy. He was there with his friend and they went different ways to look for me. I grabbed the boy and I gave him a bit of heroin because he was so loud. Then I drove out of the city and there at a bridge I killed him with a sho. Then I threw him into the dirty water of the river. Yes, that's my story. Damn, why did I tell it to you? You bloody policemen."

Andrew Fernandez went into prison for 18 years.