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Chloë

You never know why you do anything. But perhaps you find out why you did it later.

It was just after 7pm on a bright summer's evening when we arrived at Uncle Otto's villa. We'd slipped across the border from Austria that afternoon, and the scent of pine awakened my memory as I rang the bell at the gate house. I'd played in these Bavarian forests as a child.

- Hello. It's me, Chloë

Hans, Uncle Otto's chauffeur, immediately let me in, I'd known him all my life. I had a bunch of roses, and two companions, Wolfgang and Jürgen. We walked up the drive and into the hall.

Uncle Otto was a busy man, head of the Munchen Bank. As he rushed down the stairs to meet me, I marvelled again how his physique was at once so portly, yet agile. Perfect for childhood piggybacks.

- Chloë, Chloë, what a surprise!

- Uncle Otto. I kissed him.

- I have to go to America tomorrow. You know how it is. But we have tonight. You look well Chloë.

I could see he thought I looked worn out. I gave him the flowers.

- And your friends. Introduce me!

- This is...

- Otto Pozner, capitalist torturer and exploiter of the Third World, we are the justice of the people, said Wolfgang.

He pulled out his gun. Uncle Otto tried to stammer something, he gestured with his hands. It looked aggressive, but it was only fear. Jürgen pulled out his gun as well.

- Chloë, Chloë, is this a joke? said Uncle Otto.

Jürgen panicked and shot him in the chest. As Uncle Otto fell, Wolfgang shot him twice in the back. Hans attacked Jürgen. Wolfgang shot Hans too.

And me? This was my zenith, my summation. There are so many times I've done the wrong thing under pressure. I stood there yearning for the hide and seek of the forest. It had all gone wrong.

- We were supposed to kidnap him, I said

- So? We would have killed him anyway, said Wolfgang.

The blood turned the blue of the carpet purple. It was the 29th July 1977.

That night, Wolfgang slept with me. I didn't want to, but he was insistent, and hideouts breed a terrible intimacy. I enjoyed it in the end. I had to.

-You're one of us now, you're one of us, he kept repeating. I remember now as if he were still inside me.

Wolfgang always wanted sex after an action. It was the adrenalin I suppose. Jürgen sat in the car, endlessly listening to the radio news of Uncle Otto's death, constantly tuning into different stations, memorizing everything, contrasting and comparing to try and work out what the police knew. I think Jürgen wanted me more than Wolfgang, but he never did anything about it, and besides, Wolfgang had a way of asserting himself.

- I'm a doctor, he'd say. You never finished medical school.

What chance did I have? I left finishing school with a diploma in home economics.

Overnight, I was a celebrity. There were wanted posters in every town, on every billboard, or so it seemed. It's odd, but I'd always thought I was fat and ugly until I saw myself enlarged. They made me look quite pretty. My lips were too big, but they looked less big. My right eyelid, which had always drooped slightly, was less noticeable. But of course, I already looked quite different as I saw myself. I'd gone blonde from mouse brown, and soon, well, anyone loses weight after a year running from one hideout to another. My periods became irregular. I felt like the world's most hated school girl. Wolfgang and Jürgen said we were in this together, but we never were. They were just Red Army terrorists. Everyone hates them. But for me was reserved a very special kind of loathing. I was the girl who had turned on her favourite uncle. I was the girl who had betrayed the generosity of the parents who had adopted her from the gutter. The bitch! How

could she do it? But I didn't feel guilty for doing it. I felt guilty for not doing enough to stop it.

Why did mummy tell me I was adopted? I was seven. She always seemed more distant after that. And daddy started to tell me all the time it didn't matter, I was still his little girl. But I was no one's little girl, or so it felt. *Is that what made me do it?* I don't know. *Does it matter?* I know it's no excuse. Mummy always said she'd called me Chloë because Chloë was the Greek Goddess of blossom, and I was her little blossom queen. *Why wasn't that enough?* The newspapers said I'd turned against my class, but what was my class? Poor little rich girl or rich little poor girl. *Who was I?* I had a pony, riding lessons, private tutors, a wonderful wardrobe, and a Volkswagen Beetle for my sixteenth birthday. I loved all of it, but I could never belong with it. Or perhaps it was that I could never take it for a granted fact of life. I could never regard it all with the unspoken ease of the wealthy sure of their station. Uncle Otto did that so well, which is why he was my favourite. I realise now I had no dislike of money, I just lacked the confidence to claim it as my own. At finishing school, I felt like an orphan at the court of queens. Which, in the end, is what I was. I met Jürgen at a Tangerine Dream concert in Hamburg. I said I was sick of constant caviar and salmon gorging. He asked me to his squat. I met a man and a woman naked having breakfast together on the floor. Even the filth seemed sexual. Jürgen recited his poem about the Cultural Revolution, and gave me Herbert Marcuse to read. I didn't

understand a word, but I understood Jürgen's hatred. I confused it with a passion for justice. Jürgen inspired me.

Wolfgang came later, and overwhelmed me. Unlike Jürgen, he was already on the run. Unlike Jürgen he knew he could claim me. He had been in it at the start with Baader and Meinhof.

He had the confidence of the well connected.

- Andi and Ulrike must be freed, he said. It is our work of liberation.

And that was my downfall. I told him about the pony, and he laughed. I told him about the finishing school, and he laughed some more. When I told him I was adopted he said I was pretty. When I told him mummy and daddy had been good to me, he said I was dialectically naive. When I told him Uncle Otto was my father's brother, he had a plan.

- We will kidnap your Uncle Otto, he said. And Andi and Ulrike will be freed.

I believed him. It was my duty to set it up. Wolfgang said that if I didn't, knowing Uncle Otto was a complicit crime against the proletariat. *So I did.* Andi and Ulrike would be freed, and then Uncle Otto would go back to banking.

The rest you know.

Later, Andi and Ulrike committed suicide in Stuttgart-Stammheim prison, where I am now. I never met them. Wolfgang called them martyrs and was more convinced we were right than ever. Jürgen just kept listening to the radio. We all listened to it after an action, but Jürgen listened to it all the time. We listened to it

after actions against the French Ambassador, the Secretary-General of NATO, the Deputy Head of Interpol. Sometimes we listened to find out what the police knew, sometimes to find out what they didn't know, and sometimes to find out whether the target was dead or not. Jürgen listened the most because Wolfgang always needed to fuck me. He wanted to celebrate if they were dead. It was therapeutic if they weren't. Jürgen even listened after we'd shot those Australian tourists by mistake. Wolfgang screwed me more than ever then.

We escaped through Turkey and ended up in a Palestinian training camp in the Yemen. Or was it in Syria? *I can't remember.* And how on earth would I know? Wolfgang said bullets weren't enough, we needed bombs. Jürgen did a bomb making course. I learnt how to forge passports. I found out I was good at calligraphy, and I guess it was nice to be good at something. I think I met Yasser Arafat, but I'm not sure. Security was so tight. I did meet some Lebanese, a few Libyans, several Irish, lots of Angolans and some Azanian freedom fighters as they called themselves. It was overwhelmingly male, but it was a community of sorts. Briefly, it was the best I'd ever had.

In the end though, it was pointless. We got back to West Germany at the start of 1980, and, quite simply, we couldn't move. We were wanted by too many people for too many things in too many places. My photo was still on the wanted lists. I still looked pretty. I found out daddy had died, and wrote mummy a card. Wolfgang found it and burnt it.

- You were never quite one of us, he said, you never were. *Not cold blooded enough.* We never really trusted you. Isn't that right Jürgen?

Jürgen said he thought it was time to split. Disappear. *Vanish.* So we did. Wolfgang got in contact with the Stasi, the East German secret police. Or maybe it was the other way round. Maybe Wolfgang was working for them all along. How can you know the truth? Does it matter? Anyway, Wolfgang got a job with them. Jürgen finished medical school and got a job working in a Dresden maternity hospital. I trained as an art teacher, and got a job in a night school in Leipzig, and, oh, we all met Erich Honecker, the East German president. He told me I was a heroine. He'd given me a passport. I didn't argue. I think our exploits reminded him of his time in the resistance against the Nazis.

After a couple of years, I met a sweet young man called Franz, who called himself a political scientist, but who was really a party hack. By night, he was Secretary to the Admissions Committee of the local Party, by day he was a foreman at a Trabant factory. Franz was a good Communist in the same way middle-class women are good at flower arranging. He knew the form, but never questioned the concept. He was never my life, but he did become an important part of it. But of course, I always felt guilty, because he never knew of my past. I told him I'd come to the East because the life-style was so much better than the West. He was naive. In a small kind of way, I grew to love him.

And Franz was selfless. I'd just become pregnant when the principal of the night school called me in. He said they were very impressed with me, but that he'd read my file, and the Party thought I was capable of great things.

- If you want me to, I can get you a place at the Moscow Institute to study whatever you want.

My teacher training would count as a degree, so I could go straight on to a doctorate. He was certain the Party saw me as a great asset. Naturally, I discussed all this with Franz, who, bless him, said he was right behind me. We had a girl, Stephi, and off to Moscow I went.

Franz and Stephi followed with the year, and although Franz found the language impossible, he seemed content, busying himself with the domesticities I had so happily abandoned. For him, I suppose, Moscow was the centre of the world. For me, "Calligraphy in 15th Century Muscovite Icons of John the Baptist" was the centre of the world, and I reveled in a new found confidence. Freedom of study brought freedom of expression in its wake. I never forgot Uncle Otto, but if I found no way of escaping my past, I did find a way of avoiding meeting it, sometimes for days at a time. If the past was still a nightmare, the present was a waking dream. I found out mummy had died, and the Soviet Embassy in West Germany sent a wreath. Franz was proud of me. Stephi was a healthy two year old. Sometimes, once for weeks at a time, I was happy.

And then the Berlin Wall came down. It did for Wolfgang and it did for Jürgen. West German law applied in the East, and they were actively hunted again. I decided to do for myself. I could still be in Moscow, but I could no longer pretend I was in a different universe. The end seemed inevitable, the present dream turned back into a waking nightmare. But I have all the notes for my thesis, and perhaps I will finish it in this prison. *I came home.* As the plane touched down in Leipzig, I realised that if I didn't want justice, I did want release. In the end, I couldn't bare a life spent running again. As I went through customs, I said to Franz,

- From now on, you are responsible for Stephi.

In a way he already was. But when he saw the police close together before the EXIT sign to arrest me, something in him knew. *Perhaps he knew all along.* Who can say?

I stood trial for the murder of Uncle Otto, and conspiracy to the rest. I'd always wanted to be an equal, but I never had been. After Uncle Otto, I'd only ever been in on the planning. It was good to see Jürgen. He had found a natural gentleness dormant in his diffidence before. Wolfgang was simply mad, but his unrepentant rantings made the best press. The newspapers found my admittance of guilt rather disappointing. I think they wanted a cosmopolitan justification, or a plea of guilt extenuated by youthful naivety. My lawyer suggested I try the latter, but I gave neither performance. I simply said,

- I accept my guilt for what I did. Personally, I know I have suffered for it, but I know society will not accept that is enough, and neither should it. I have no rationales, no explanations or justifications. I have only an overwhelming sense of stupidity. I did what I did not because I thought it was right, but because somehow, for some reason, I thought no human harm could come of it. I was never politically motivated. I was simply overwhelmed by a desire to belong.

Wolfgang and Jürgen got twelve years. I got twelve years too.