

PANDORA

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Table of Contents

Damsel in Distress.....	Núria Obradors.....	4
The Bridge.....	Lenore Hinkel.....	6
Clear Visibility.....	Juergen Kruse.....	11
A Hand to Hold.....	Núria Planas.....	14
Long Live Royalty.....	Helene Lebold.....	16
The Sexy Boots.....	Marie-Paule Olinger.....	18
Her Name is Francesca...Unyoung Park.....		20

Letter from the Editor

In this, our fifth issue of Pandora, we bring summer to a close with stories ranging from the light-hearted adventures of shopping on high street and high tea and royal weddings to the more serious topics of wartime Enkheim and the impact of death and dying. In-between we give you a delicious cloak and dagger caper set on the rugged Isle of Eigg in Scotland. As the egret is the symbol of eternal summer, we have chosen the cover to guide you through the perfect reading material for these last dog days of summer. I do hope you enjoy the stories in this issue as much as I have.

List of Illustrations

Egret.....	Lyle T. Reimann.....	Cover
DID.....	Núria Obradors.....	5
Enkheim.....	collection W. Krompholz.....	7
Air crash in Enkheim 1944....	collection W. Krompholz.....	9
Factory Mayfarth.....	collection W. Krompholz.....	10
Royal Coat of Arms...The Official Programme of the Royal Wedding.....		17
The Sexy Boots.....	Marie-Paule Olinger.....	19

PANDORA

PATRICIA BARTHOLOMEW, EDITOR

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Damsel in Distress

by Núria Obradors

Her peers in the Pest Control Agency called her the Lara Croft of the Everglades, but now she was sitting on the edge of the sofa in her tiny apartment, paralyzed by fear. She'd rather be capturing an alligator from someone's swimming pool. Instead, she was staring nervously at the closed door of the tiny bathroom, knowing that... thing was inside.

Through the thin walls, she heard the neighbor singing off key, and she was angry. How could that woman go about so carefree when that hideous, whitish figure was there, in the same building? She sighed in frustration, knowing it was irrational, but she couldn't help to shiver at the very thought of the little sleek bastard, and the mental image of that naked tail-like stub made a lump form in her throat and the water well up

in her eyes. She realized with horror that she needed to pee, but no, it couldn't be, it was only fifteen minutes since last time, when she'd found herself face to face with the nasty presence. Maybe she could use a bucket. She stifled a sob.

The door opened and closed, and she turned her head toward it, her eyes a desperate plea. "Honey, what happened?" asked her boyfriend, kneeling beside her. Her knight in shining armor.

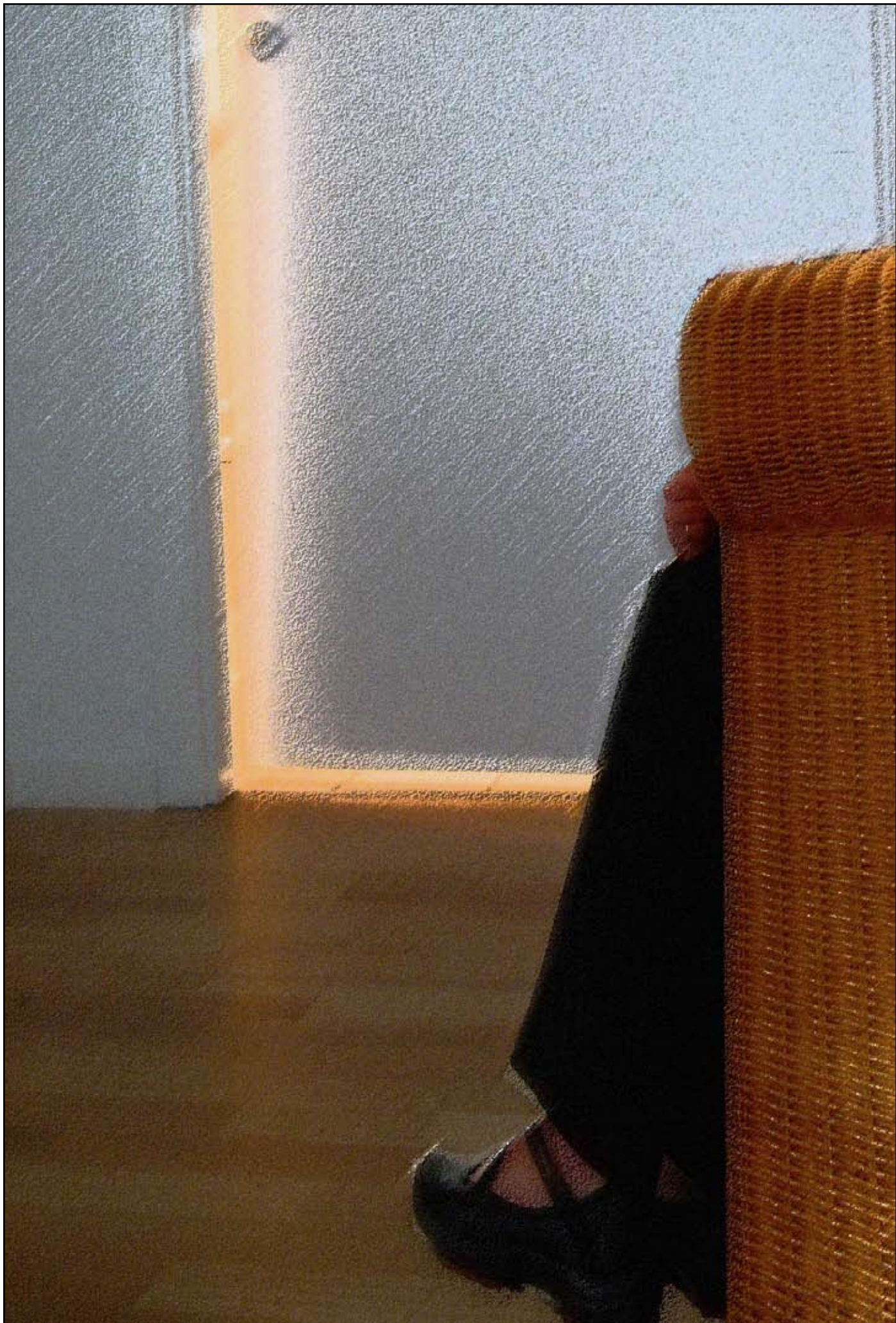
"It's in the bathroom", she whimpered.

"But what..."

"I can't even look at it!"

He dashed to the toilet and came back after what seemed like an eternity, the offending body in his hand and a relieved smile in his face.

"One line. We're not pregnant."



Photography by Núria Obradors

The Bridge

by Lenore Hinkel

At night Frieda sometimes could still hear their songs, beautiful foreign melodies waving down from the hills of Bergen. Sad and soulful sounds, full of passion and longing, sung by a multitudinous choir of men. She interrupted her sewing work for a moment, suddenly touched by the memory of the far gone past. She stared into space. While trying to listen to the dying sounds, she lost herself in the long forgotten times.

*

It happened on a bright fall day in October 1944. In the morning of that day Frieda stood at the window of the workshop and watched how a troop of prisoners passed their house. It was far before eight o'clock, and the streets of

Enkheim were still deserted. They were about sixty men. An energetic, good-looking Russian, who was carrying a thick wooden stick, led the group. In the back three old soldiers followed in long woolen coats, armed with carbines. Slightly bent forward, the guards walked with little shuffling steps, like old men do, while their shepherd dogs were running back and forth at the long sides of the group, as if guarding a flock of sheep. The expression on the faces of the prisoners was tense and inaccessible. "The Russians – they are the Neanderthals", the people in the village said.

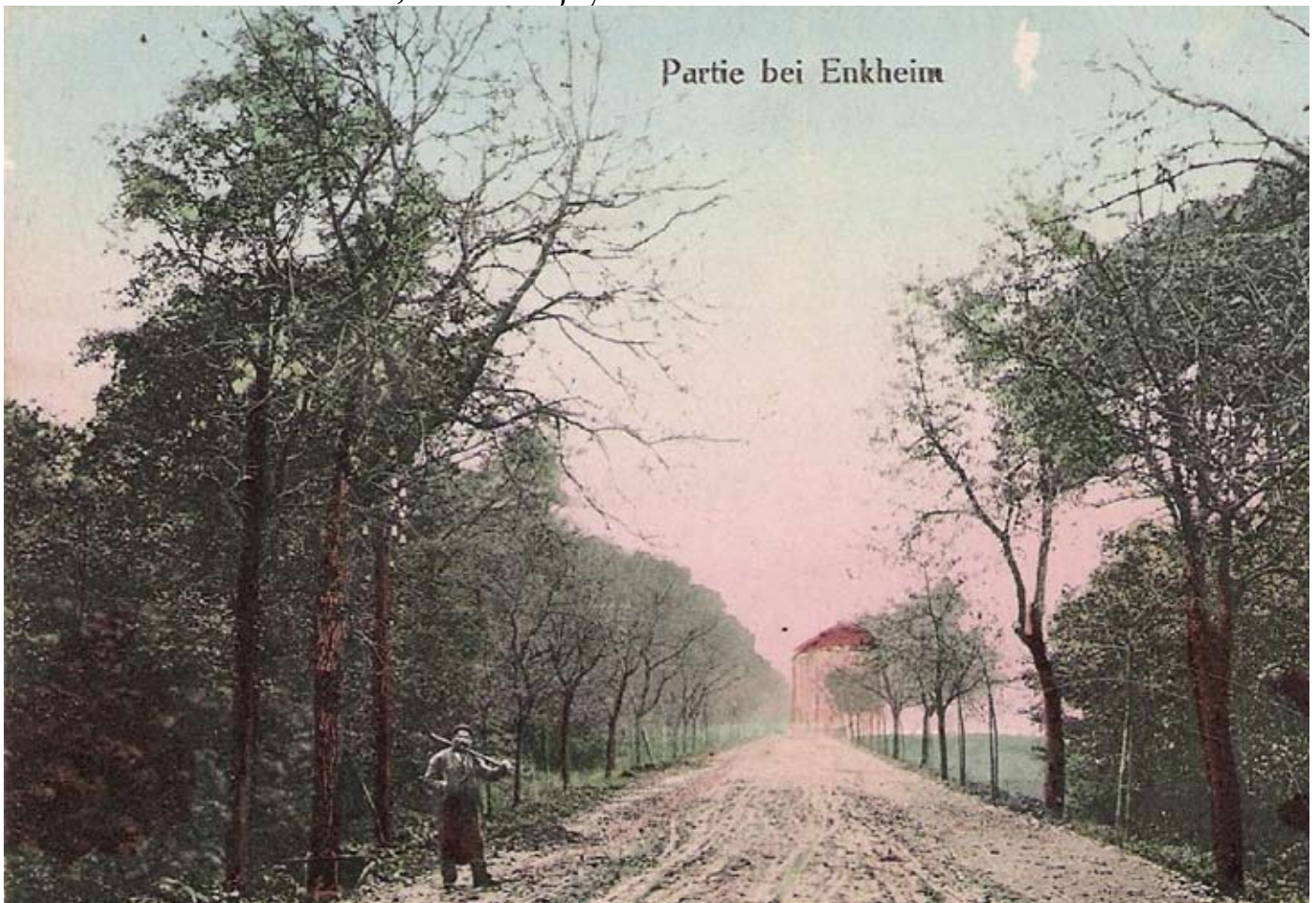
Frieda turned away from the window. The war was omnipresent these days, two brothers-in-law already dead, her own Willi missed in Russia. She stayed untouched by

the sorrow of others. She left the workshop and went over to the main house to prepare the breakfast. As she crossed the courtyard she almost slipped on an overripe pear. The pear tree carried again well this year, the ground was covered with windfall and the yard filled with the sweet, heavy smell of the rotting fruits.

*

The troop of prisoners left Enkheim and reached the road to Fechenheim. It was chilly this morning, Victor felt his fingers getting stiff of cold. As he looked up, the horizon was coloured in deep orange and red, the sun ball was not yet visible. There was little to look forward too, but every morning he enjoyed the moment when dawn was breaking. He sucked in the fresh, cool air. Soft calls of birds could be heard from different directions, not the joyous

welcome concert as in springtime, but more a cautious exchange of messages. Their group entered the wood and his thoughts wandered off to his wife and the children. “What would they be doing right now? Iryna would surely be up already, busy with all the morning tasks – fetching water from the well, feeding the animals, heating the stove, while their little ones would still be hiding in the pile of blankets and pillows on the big bed, enjoying the coziness and warmth of the place left by their mother, moving and whispering enveloped in some role-playing games.” He always loved to hear the gentle giggling of his children in the morning. His eyes filled with tears when he remembered the warmth and the sweet smell of his baby daughter.



Enkheim, Forest track to the Mainkur, postcard of 1915, collection W. Krompholz

*

In the afternoon the already low standing sun had warmed up the air, the sky was deep blue and cloudless and the beech trees in the forest gleamed in many colours. Frieda was on her way to the nearby factories in Fechenheim. She pushed a buggy and had two little children with her. Her own son Fritz was sitting upright in the buggy, chatty and good-tempered after his afternoon nap. The five-year old Hilde was trailing behind her, stirring up the dead leaves by her scuffing feet. They were to meet Hilde's mother right at the entrance to the factory at shift end. Since they left home in time, there was no hurry yet. Frieda let Hilde stroll in her own pace, while she herself was looking out for boletes and blackberries. They might gather some on their way back home.

*

In the late afternoon the troop of Russian prisoners was again in the wood, on their way back from the factories. The group was smaller than in the morning, only accompanied by two guards. There was little resistance to expect from the exhausted, half-starved men. Victor stared at the ground and tried to keep an exact distance from the comrades in front of him. He had to fight against the weakness in his limbs. He didn't feel any hunger, his only desire was to stretch out on his pallet and close his eyes. "One step, next one, another one ...- oj matuschka, what was this?" He was startled out of the concentration on his feet by the sudden droning of a plane. "Hostile bombers on their way to Frankfurt", he

thought at once. The droning increased and came closer and closer. The noise of the aircraft seemed to be everywhere, right above them and at the same time all around them. Something was different. The roar didn't ebb away, as it normally did. The guards had stopped. They all listened to the threatening, shrill mechanic howls that constantly grew bigger. Victor felt how the vibrations were buzzing in his ears. Through the noise he heard someone shouting: "It's coming down. The plane is falling." He felt a strong shiver inside his body. For a moment he stood motionless, alarmed but helpless. Then he turned his head and saw the guards fleeing. He looked at the comrade next to him. In his eyes he saw pure panic. Instinctively they all started to run, terrified by the deep long drawn-out sounds, that now dominated the air. Then there was all of the sudden this little bridge, in the middle of the forest. They all had learned to run for cover. Within a few seconds they got all under it. Victor crouched to the ground and hid his head under his arms. The earth was muddy and soggy, this place was swampland. But he didn't care; he even grubbed his face deeper into the dirt.

*

Suddenly Frieda noticed the approach of an airplane, she was thinking at once of an attack. "Could this be? Normally the attacks take place at night-time", she thought by herself. Appalled she looked up in the sky, but she couldn't spot anything through the treetops. It seemed to her as if the plane was pretty close, aiming directly at Enkheim. The noise of

the engines became louder. Frieda got scared, her heart was beating very fast, her hands became wet of cold sweat, thoughts were crossing her mind in a mad speed: "They were in the middle of the forest. Where should they find a shelter?" Hilde was running towards Frieda. Frieda couldn't understand anymore, what she was shouting, since the threatening humming of the plane was ear deafening now. She pulled Fritz out of the buggy and grabbed Hilde by the hand. Then a thought shot to her mind. "The Brückelchen – we've got to hide there". She started running with Fritz in her arms and Hilde at her hand down to the little bridge, which stabilized the road from Enkheim to Fechenheim. As they reached the bridge, Frieda shrank back. The place was already occupied. A troop of prisoners was crowding under

the bridge.

Frieda hesitated for a moment, the children's screaming was piercing high now and they clung tightly to her. Some of the men looked up. As they saw Frieda with the two little children, they smiled and opened their arms widely. The noise of the airplane was that loud now, that Frieda was half mad of fright. With the flight instinct of an animal she ran with the children towards them. They took her and the children into the middle of their group, pressed them to the ground and protected them with their own bodies, as if they were setting up a roof for them. Nobody spoke a word. The children were quiet again – either too terrified or consoled, Frieda didn't know. Then she heard the dull sounds of a heavy crash from the direction of Enkheim and at the same time she felt the ground quake. What fol-



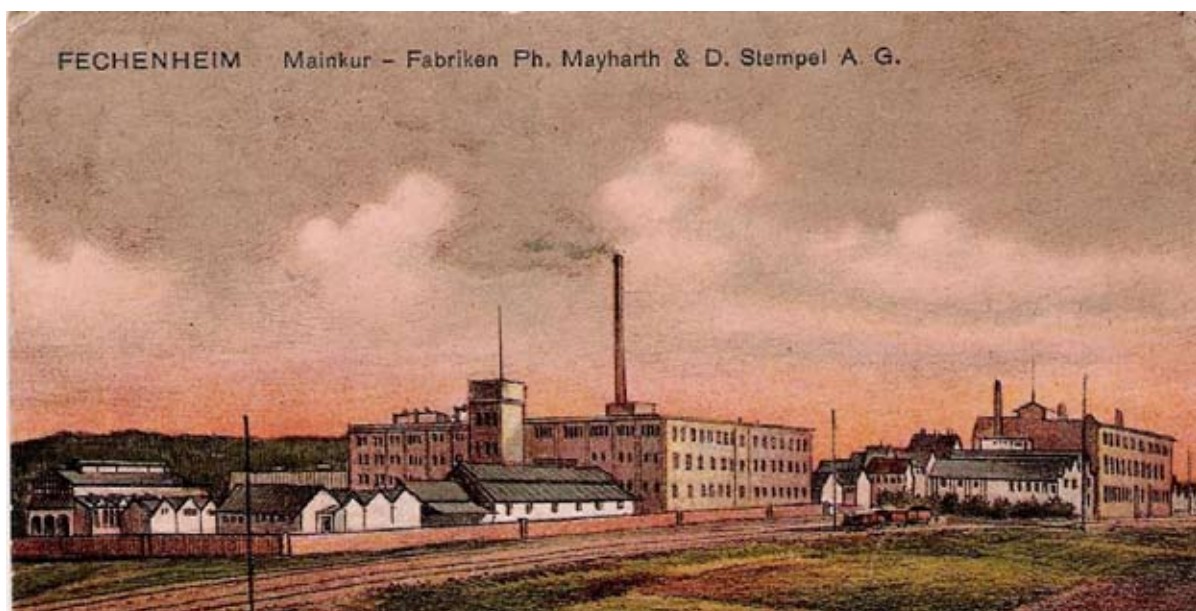
Air crash in Enkheim 1944, private photography, collection W. Krompholz

lowed was complete silence. As suddenly and unexpectedly the danger had come up, it disappeared in less than a minute into nothing. Everything was over. The Russians gestured her something, probably tried to explain to her what happened, but she didn't understand them. The men were getting up quickly, forming a troop and disappeared into the direction of Enkheim. Frieda freed herself from the torpor she had been in, got up and looked at the children. Both were plastered with mud, hair and faces blackened by dirt. However Fritz smiled and held a little paper airplane in his hands. "Where did you get this from?", she asked. "One of the man gave it to him", Hilde quickly said. "Neanderthals - ", Frieda shook her head, on her face appeared a determined expression "no - humans like we are".

*

The other morning the troop of prisoners marched again in its' usual formation through the streets of Enkheim.

"Pick it up, pick it up, the guard is not watching", his inner voice commanded. But his body refused to obey. His arm trembled as he reached out for the half rotten pear, which was placed next to the small ditch at the edge of the road in Enkheim. It looked as if someone had laid out the windfall on purpose, so accurately the pears were lined up along the ditch. Victor wanted to bend down and quickly snatch one, but he couldn't. His back had memorized the pain of the dozens of received club beats. Paralysed by fear, he failed in overcoming his inner resistance. His feet marched on and the row of pears was gone.



Factory Mayfarth, postcard of 1924, collection W. Krompholz

Historical Note:

From March 1942 to March 1945 about 110 Soviet prisoners of war were registered in Bergen-Enkheim. They were kept imprisoned in the halls of a local inn in Bergen. During the day the prisoners were forced to work in the armaments factories of the nearby Fechenheim. After the war one of the Soviet prisoners stayed in Enkheim and married a local girl. In the last years of the war Bergen-Enkheim was often affected by the air attacks of the allied bombers, which were on their way to Frankfurt. In 1944 one of the hostile airplanes crashed into the Triebstraße of Enkheim.

Clear Visibility

By Juergen Kruse

“Thank heaven; the fog is lifting. High time it’s clearing up. Look over there, darling. The long line is the ridge. Pure pitchstone. Cleadale Lodge lies on the other side.”

“You know there’s something I still can’t understand. You’ve never told me what really happened that night. It’s so unlike you, as if you’d slipped into a different person.”

“Don’t exaggerate. I’m not the Jekyll and Hyde of the Inner Hebrides.”

“I didn’t mean that. The CCTV film is of the usual bad quality, but it shows two persons leaving the bank vault and getting into the car the police identified as the vehicle used in the crime. You’ve been cleared. You’re just a citizen who found a body in a car and reported it to the police. I think *The Mail* is right. “Perp kills side-kick to get away with loot,” was its headline. But why didn’t he take the loot? Maybe, he panicked.”

“Whatever, it was my chance. And now for the very last time: I didn’t kill him and taking the loot is just theft, sort of not handing in lost property. Yet, they can’t close the case until the killer is found. But that’s not our business. Our business is going up to An Sgurr tomorrow morning, and that I can’t do without you. The cavern is basically safe but can be slippery at some places. I may need your help getting out again.”

“Trust me, darling, I’ll do my best. And as to the tricky path up to An Sgurr you’ve told me about, you needn’t be anxious. You go ahead and I will follow closely behind. I won’t look down and everything will end well.”

Both smile and fall silent. “You can bet on that,” she thinks. He thinks, “May be, she loves me. May be, it’s just the prospect of getting rich.”

The woman who has been eavesdropping on this conversation walks to the railing at the windward side of the ferry. From there she has a better view of An Sgurr. It’s the second time she has seen this bluish-grey rock whose cliffs jut out of the rolling moorland like the fin of a shark. She and her younger sister were here some weeks ago to play through their plan. Besides, it was a good opportunity to practise their climbing skills together, their common hobby since early youth.

*

The woman at the railing is the embodiment of everywoman, of medium height, not yet forty, fairly slender, not actually a beauty but a likeable face, and in her comfortable outdoor garment and trekking boots she looks like one of the tourists who think the beautiful island of Eigg worth of a quick detour.

The woman readjusts the earpieces

of her MP3 player that's not an MP3 player but her covert listening device. She doesn't care that she is not permitted to use such a device. She has a reputation for despising red tape procedures.

"It makes work easier when getting older, and, anyway, skiptracing is a job for the younger staff," were her thoughts when she was stepping out of the dodgy IT-shop with the newest spy equipment in her bag. During the last years, she has been growing more and more tired of hunting down stolen property. The Picasso painting she had brought back was worth several millions, and she didn't even get a fraction of it as reward. Nor has she got any other compensation for her fifteen loyal years with the agency. Not a single promotion in all these years. And now this, first cutting down her travel budget and then, some weeks later, the order to submit a detailed work report each day. "Must be one of my co-workers who'd spread rumours to the pen pushers. But no need to worry. If everything goes well, and it'll go well, then the next summons will be the last one," she thinks while the ferry is sailing along the jetty at Galmisdale to land at the Caledonian Pier. The passengers shoulder their daypacks and begin clattering down the iron stairs to the lower deck.

The two targets of the illegal bug-ging don't know that they will enter the island as Mr and Mrs Hoard. Operational HQ gives every target person a code name, and these two have become Mr and Mrs Hoard. Mrs Hoard says,

"The car's over there. Let's buy

something to eat and then straight away to Muck Cottage. The less they see of us, the better. Anyway, I've told the girl from the car rental that we're bird watchers. She wasn't surprised."

Now Mr Hoard's voice, "That's my girl. Always cautious. But let's stay calm. We're not on the run. Don't forget I'm not a suspect."

Mrs Hoard again, "May be I'm over-cautious. Perhaps naïve. After all, I've no experience in these things."

The skiptracer stops eavesdropping, puts her high-tech gear into her windbreaker and enters the office of Smart Power, the regional energy company, on the other side of the wharf. She comes out in the company's blue overall and walks to the blue company car with the golden SP logo on both doors. The backup team has arranged for this cover as well as for Cleadale Lodge as her residence for the time of the operation.

Some hundred meters down from Cleadale Lodge lies Muck Cottage. You see it on the tip of a long, small promontory lashing out into the bay like the forked tongue of a sea serpent. The skiptracer doesn't care that her listening device doesn't work at this distance.

She enters Cleadale Lodge and remains unseen until next morning when she is pointing her field glasses at Mr and Mrs Hoard, who are briskly coming up the causeway. The couple gets into their car and drive the coastal road southwards. Time for the skiptracer to tune in her tracking equipment. The signal comes in clearly and marks route and position of the car on the electronic map. The car stops at the small

parking where the mountain path to the top of An Sgurr begins.

Half an hour later, the skiptracer parks her company car at the foot of the SP wind turbine that stands not far from the parking. She takes out her field glasses and watches Mr and Mrs Hoard slowly gaining altitude until they reach the oversized sign warning hikers not to go beyond this point. There, Mrs Hoard stops for a moment, turns round and gives a double thumbs up. Then she follows Mr Hoard into the narrow gorge.

At the end of the gorge begins the exposed section of the path, which is a small, barely visible climb to the upper part of a steep crag. Be careful not to lose your balance here. It's more than forty meters before your body hits the ground, and your remains will probably never be found. Daylight doesn't reach the bottom of the crevice and electronic tracking doesn't work there. It's a dead zone. But if you've overcome the exposed section, you reach the Barmekin, this hotchpotch of granite boulders whose countless nooks and crannies have made it an ideal hiding place since Olaf the White, Norse king of Dublin, raided the shores of Scotland in the ninth century.

The skiptracer follows her quarry into the gorge. It takes more than four hours until she reappears. She now carries a backpack of a kind you'd use on a kayak trip for keeping your valuable things dry and secure.

In her car, she puts the dry-bag on the passenger seat and drives back to Cleadale Lodge to enjoy the peaceful early summer afternoon. It has become a cloudless and calm day. The warm sun, the leisurely swish

of the waves lapping the shore and the occasional shriek of a seagull transport her to the bay of Amalfi and there to the charming Tuscan villa she and her sister will now soon be able to buy.

She wakes up about five o'clock. A cold breeze is coming in from the mainland. "They shall wait no longer," she calls herself to order and goes inside to mail her report to Operational HQ. But read the text yourself, "Target persons took direction to An Sgurr. Lost track in difficult terrain. Target persons have not yet returned. If not back by 10:00 tomorrow morning, search Muck cottage for clues to identify Mrs Hoard. Take afternoon ferry to the mainland and return ASAP."

Mr and Mrs Hoard did not turn up, and the following search of the cottage proved to be a failure. The skiptracer returns car and overall to Smart Power, buys a ticket and boards the next ferry. There, we see her standing at the railing looking down to the pier. She watches a young woman coming up the gangway. Judging from her waterproof outerwear and the dry-bag she carries on her back, she might well be one of those girls coming over for a sea-kayaking weekend during the season. Looking at each other, the younger woman thinks,

"Justice has been done. This devil has paid the price at last for killing my poor Max." The skiptracer thinks, "Even if we'll have to be very cautious from now on for a very long time, I've finally been compensated for all what the agency has done to me."

A Hand to Hold

by Núria Planas

I was sitting next to him as he lay in his bed, when he asked me:

“Could you hold my hand? I’m scared.”

I looked into his eyes.

“Yes, I’ll hold your hand. Don’t worry.”

His eyes were not able to focus very well, but they still could ask one last thing.

“You know? I don’t want to be alone when this happens, but do...don’t worry, soon I’ll be gone,” he said nearly whispering. One of the edges of his mouth made a little movement trying to depict a smile.

“I’m not in a hurry,” I said while I leaned towards him to be sure that my words reached him. Even though I smiled faintly, I had the feeling that my heart was beating fast. I was not so comfortable with the whole situation.

“You are a nice doctor; I am sure you are a nice mom as well,” he said while I felt a slight pressure from his hand that was holding mine.

“Thanks; you are a nice person,” I told him sincerely. I had been working for a while as a doctor and I had seen many dead people, others dying, and so many times I had lost a patient trying to save him! However, I had never accom-

panied a person dying. That was different, and I think, I was somewhat scared as well. "Let me know if you have any pain," I whispered while I touched gently his forehead with my free hand.

"I... I'm fine, thank... you. You make me... feel better. It's nice not...to be a... alone in the... these mo... ments," he said with a thin thread of voice. At that moment, the monitor started beeping letting me know his heart activity, peacefully, was slowing down, down.

I looked at his eyes; slowly his eyelids rolled down without forgetting to show one last sign of gratefulness. At the same time, I felt him losing his grip.

Gently, I removed my hand from his loose grip, I stood up, I turned off the monitor, I removed the nasal cannula from his

nose that until that moment had been administering oxygen and gently, with my left hand, I caressed his eyelids making sure his eyes were closed.

When I was about to leave the room, I felt a couple of tears sliding down my cheeks. This was the first time that I cried after a patient had died. And I realized that I was crying, not because a patient of mine had died, rather because a nice person had allowed me to know the human side of the act of dying.

Before I reached the knob of the door, I turned around, I looked at him for the last time, and I whispered, "thank you."



Long Live Royalty Confessions of a German Addict

By Helene Lebold

Royal weddings are always so moving, are they not? What a pity, I didn't see Kate and William live on their great day! Of course, that day wasn't a great day just for the two of them, no: the whole world was watching! And so were the girls.

We met a few days later, because I needed updating. How emotional we all went, when Erika started telling us about everything she had seen on T.V.! "All these lovely dresses! All these important people! And all these hats!"

"Weren't some of them quite eccentric?" I dared to ask while discreetly handing over the first hanky.

"That's a question of Royal etiquette!" Petra, well informed as always, shared her insights with us not only as far as Royal headdresses were concerned but also explained family constellations: who, during the service, had to sit where and why, and, yes, that wedding dress was one to die for. If ever she was to marry again, there should be enough money to buy such a beautiful dress!

"My Prince shall come one day", I hummed, and Erika hissed "but never on Sundays", this being an old joke of us tough business girls. It worked immediately: Petra, a tax consultant, reminded us of the exorbitant amount of money that is devoured by such a Royal event.

"Didn't they get millions and millions only by selling the T.V.-rights?" I knew my part very well: asking the right questions to make the girls continue indulging in what they had seen and handing over hankies whenever needed and by doing so keep my own emotions under control.

"And the bridegroom actually drove the car himself!"

"Wasn't that just fishing for a modern image, telling: Alas! Royalty finally has arrived in the 21st century!"

"May be, but, oh, this was such a lovely picture!" Erika and Petra mutually agreed on this, both obviously far away on a planet called Romance.

*

Several slices of cake and even more wet hankies later they were back on Earth again. Thanks a lot, Catherine and William, we had a really great time recollecting your great day: nice chat, nice cry - nothing missing! In honour of the occasion Erika had even prepared a Frankfurter Kranz cake, and

freshly brewed coffee had helped to devour most of it. Of course, all three of us are confessing Britfans and therefore Royalists. We do strictly agree, though, on the following: enjoy your royal afternoon with all your heart, go back to work the next morning, and let Royalty stay abroad.



The Ceremonial, the Marriage Service and the Procession
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©The Registrars of the Convocations of Canterbury and York, 1965, 1966.

The Sexy Boots

By Marie-Paule Olinger

Manolo Blahnik shoes. The Rolls Royce of shoes. The must-have shoes of Ladies who lunch. I never considered taking out a mortgage to get my hands on a sexy pair of dancing boots. Yet one rainy January morning a friend called with the news that Manolo had a big sale going on in his Chelsea boutique. All excited at the possibilities at getting a pair of Sex and the City shoes, we decided to meet up at 9 am at the shop. It was pouring with rain as we approached Church Street, and to our dismay we hit a queue about 800 meters long. The well-heeled greedy Chelsea crowd had risen at dawn. In true English fashion they waited stoically whilst sipping their Starbucks coffee. Rain and wind kept drumming against umbrellas, tearing at coats and hats, while the air sung with anticipation. Full of hope, in high spirits, and braving the elements without a protective umbrella, my friend and I joined the queue.

Snake like, the queue of several hundred moved through the pouring rain. After two hours, three coffees and a sandwich later we finally approached the

tiny boutique. Like Cerberus, Manolo's sister guarded the entrance. Two people out, one person in. We watched with frustration, longing and envy as customer after customer went in and came out. With a smug smile each lucky vixen left the hunting field, carrying bags of precious Manolos like trophies to behold. As the hours slowly passed, the rain not only washed away my good mood, but my good nature as well. The green-eyed monster of envy took hold of me. Whilst grumblingly waiting in line, soaked to the bone, I was adamant to buy a pair, no matter what. The long wait had to be worth it, after all!

Finally after three hours, soaking wet, raindrops and greed clouding not only my eyes, I made it inside. The aroma of exquisite leather and a kaleidoscope of perfumes wafted through the tiny boutique. Sauna-like, heat blanketed the chatter of the ladies who pushed and shoved. So I pushed and shoved in return, my eyes roaming wildly through the shop. Desperate to locate my dream sexy boots that would fit my slender feet,

I turned into one of those air headed women I used to bicker about. Frantically my eyes darted over the shelves. Nearly breaking my wrist I grabbed pair after pair, checking for size, and defending my prey against the other hunters. After a while the wild chase left me exhausted and dishevelled, and I nearly gave up the hunt, when my heart skipped a beat as I located the most exquisitely designed high heeled suede boot on a top shelf. Ostrich feathers dramatically adorned the back of the leg and I made a dash through the crowd, and went for it. Abandoning all dignity, my arm shot forward grabbing the boot by the heel and holding on to it for dear life. Counting my lucky stars that the size was in my league, I pushed through the sweating hordes of women and called the sales girl.

Gratefully I let myself sink into a golden Empire armchair. The velvet red cushion welcomed my exhausted body, and with steam coming out of the seams of my wet coat I put my trophy to the test. Ha! The boots fit like a glove. A little bit tight may be, the heels on the extremely thin and dangerously high side, but my legs looked stretched, elegant and ever so sexy. Parading up and down in front of an ornamented golden mirror, the black-green feathers sparkled and whipped in delight as I put one foot carefully in front of the other. Doing the honours a few

times over the red carpet, standbys and sales girls went 'Oh' and 'Ah', and feeling dizzy from all that excitement, I was led like a lamb to slaughter to the front desk and invited to sign the cheque.

Dazed, but with a smug smile glued to my face, I carried my oversized trophy out of the boutique. My friend had waited with bags of Manolos, and the envious stare of the growing queue followed us all the way to Kings road. On the way home however my sexy boots must have shrunk in their box. Trying them on at home they were so tight that they gave me claustrophobia, and the dangerously high heels brought me to the brink of vertigo. Walking from room to room was a major undertaking, let alone doing a sexy dancing number.

The sexy, must have boots, were not designed for dancing wildly through the night, instead to this day they linger a lonely existence in their designer Manolo Box.



Photography by M.P. Olinger www.mpo-art.com

Her Name is Francesca

By Unyoung Park

Thirteen years ago, I left the morning land where togetherness and belonging are highly valued. I came to the evening land; to the land of individualism and enlightenment. On a lonely stumbling journey to my enlightening, I met Francesca.

The first thing that struck me about Francesca was her long hair. It was dark brown and had light waves. It eventually made her look much younger. Once, a friend of her eldest son took her as the girlfriend of her own son because of her hair. She had a baseball cap and a big t-shirt and picked the son up from school. His friend saw them from the back and thought they were a couple. Indeed, Francesca radiated youth, and her hair contributed to it.

I saw Francesca for the first time in the corridor of Volkshochschule while I was waiting for the teacher of the creative writing course. While I was writing my final thesis, I attended the course. It had started in autumn, and Francesca came to the course in winter. On that Tuesday morning, the sun shone brightly outside and the heaters inside warmed the air. I sat on a heater in the corridor and chatted with other course members.

I don't remember how Francesca approached us but I do remember her smile,

her long hair under a black hat and her long black coat. She stood in front of me and introduced herself to us. She was shy and had a native accent. One of the classmate poured questions on her and then said, "You are kidding! You want to learn to write with us!" I don't remember what Francesca said but I do remember the enchanted feeling evoked by her voice. She had a soft voice which completely dissolved in the atmosphere like background jazz music.

It can't be a coincidence that Francesca sang "Summertime" by George Gershwin. When Turkey was the focus land on the Frankfurt book fair, one of our writing friends invited us to the Turkish writers' meeting. There, Francesca sang the jazz music beautifully. Yet, the vulnerability of her voice was too quiet for me to perceive at that time. I knew "Summertime" interpreted by Ella Fitzgerald, who literally brought me to the bottom of the grief. Holding me in a powerful sadness, she left me with a faint smile. That was the "Summertime" which I already knew. But Francesca's "Summertime" was fragile and vulnerable.

Having majored in engineering

and singing, Francesca wanted to become a singer but instead, she became a secretary at the beginning of her career. That was her first story. Her narrative voice was full of rhythm and humour like her own voice in daily life. Francesca found her passion in writing and developed it. Much later, I heard a writing friend saying, “I envy Francesca because she speaks many languages so well!” At that time, Francesca was publishing online not only in English but also in German.

Francesca was born in London and grew up in Germany with her three sisters. Her father is American, her mother Italian, and she was married to an Italian, with whom she had two sons. Yet, one of her sisters said that Francesca identified herself with the English the most. One of the reasons was that Francesca’s ending of the emails with “Ta” or “Tata”, a very English way. Also, one of the writing friends who had been in London with Francesca for vacation heard Francesca saying how much she loved London. Francesca even wrote about it.

What, then, connected us? We were from different continents and had different cultural backgrounds. We would have passed by unrecognized if we hadn’t met each other in the writing course. Something must have happened in this writing course. What was it?

I remember a morning in the cafeteria at the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek with Francesca. She had a regular writing session there while I was doing research for my doctoral thesis. When I entered the cafeteria that morning, she was writing alone with a cup of tea. I don’t remem-

ber what we talked about but I do remember that Francesca had begun drawing the solar system on a paper. “You see? How big something might look on our earth, it can’t be big enough comparing to the sun. Everything is relative. Only if we are able to see from the other perspective as well, can we see the whole system. Only then, we can recognize that we are all connected to one another. We are all related to one another.”

I saw Francesca for the last time at her funeral. She had struggled against cancer for a whole year and given up on the very last day of October, 2010. Her long hair was gone because of chemotherapy, and so was her youth. It was not the Francesca whom I had known, but it was, indeed, the Francesca whom I had known. There was silence between us. Candle lights and even the roses emphasized the silence. Francesca was lying there motionlessly, and I couldn’t dare to ask her questions. Finally, I had to say goodbye to her.

Still, I don’t know how the writing connected us. But I do know that we had been a mirror for each other. Sometimes, it was a magical mirror, over which we showed each other as beautiful as possible. Sometimes, it was a telescopic mirror, through which we were able to see ourselves in wide scenery. And sometimes, it was a microscopic mirror, through which we could see ourselves in more detail. But most of the time, we had tried to reflect each other as real as possible. Like we had mirrored the West on the East and the East on the West, we will be mirroring the Heaven on the Earth and the Earth on the Heaven from now on.

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