

ONE

No Place Like Home

Edda felt the rhythmic stomping of FC St. Pauli ultras under her feet. Squinting against the clouds of red flare smoke, she spotted her skinny dealer making his way down the steep steps toward her. Looming above his head were skull-and-crossbones flags and the massive gun turrets of a high Luftwaffe bunker from the Second World War. She smiled. No place like home.

She took a final drag off the Marlboro Red wedged in her hook, scraped the sparking butt against the steel railing, and headed down to the basement with quick steps. She knew her dealer was going to the squat, sweaty bar under the playing field. It was where they always made their little exchanges. And the big game with archrival FC Hansa Rostock was the perfect cover.

It looked like the Osis, who were separated from the locals by a swaying chain-link fence, had ripped a toilet out of the ground in the restroom on their side of the stadium. Three guys held it up above their pale SS-tattooed chests like some kind of war trophy.

Despite the stomping and roaring above and the reek of urine, beer, and reefer below, Edda's scalp tingled at the thought of another tight baggy of oxy. As she stepped through the doorway, something told her to move into the shadows, along the raw concrete wall covered with flags and oversized photographs of

the big game in 1986 that propelled St. Pauli into the Second National League.

Before her eyes fully adjusted to the darkness, she identified her target in the far corner of the room. Standing at the end of the crowded bar was a blond hipster with two days' growth of beard and a bulge under the arm of a too-new leather jacket. He seemed more interested in the doorway than the topless biker chicks next to him who were painting each other's breasts with brown-and-white St. Pauli stripes.

The better part of Edda wanted to warn her dealer, but his skinny shadow was already swaying in the doorway. Besides, that wasn't the plan. She was supposed to make an impression.

The narc edged his way around a throng of bikers, whose loud voices followed him along the walls. By the time the dealer saw the danger, it was too late.

Edda swung into the narc's path and punched him in the windpipe with the heel of her good hand. While he grabbed his throat and gasped for air, she kned him in the groin. Watching him collapse to the sticky concrete floor, she resisted the urge to sidekick him in the face. No sense in getting blood on her white boxing shoes. The Adidas Box Hogs had cost her two hundred euro at the sports store on Schanzenstrasse.

Looking up, she saw a throng of leather vests with one-percenter patches studiously avoiding eye contact with her. God bless St. Pauli, she thought. Everybody here knew the difference between an insider and an outsider. And nobody liked the cops.

Edda looked back down at the narc. Even if the moaning, groaning breeder had seen the trademark hook where her left hand should be, it didn't matter. Sure, she was out on parole. Sure, she had just committed two counts of aggravated assault. But she knew suits who outranked the narc in his own organization. And they valued her services, however unconventional.

In the parking lot outside the stadium, Edda jumped into the passenger side of a monster pickup. The door was covered with primer. It squeaked shut as the dealer burned rubber, fishtailing his way out of the lot in the shadow of the bunker.

For a brief moment, Edda wondered if he was stupid enough to lead the cops to her loft. But he made a smoking right at Feldstrasse, scattering cursing jaywalkers in his wake.

Within five minutes, the oversized tires were bouncing over the big round cobblestones of Schulterblatt. The bypass shocks made the ride smooth and spongy. Coming up ahead was the graffiti-covered Rota Flora, the command center of the “permanent revolution.”

Built in the late nineteenth century, the Tivoli Theater was renamed by self-described Trotskyites who occupied it about the time Edda’s daddy abandoned her and her momma in Frankfurt. Edda didn’t trust politics of any stripe. And she despised idiots who used big words to manufacture fake problems. She had enough real problems of her own. Like her daddy used to say: *God helps those who help themselves*. She was good at helping herself.

Just past the former theater, the big pickup made a sweeping right turn over the curb, narrowly missing a Smart car parked sideways, and bounced through the shadows next to the building. It made another right, this one a lot sharper, where the building ran out, and pulled to a sliding stop in front of a rusty steel door that looked nasty enough to impress its inhabitants.

Edda doubted it was blast resistant. Not that it mattered. After almost four decades of political limbo, the cops would never get the green light from City Hall to storm the building.

Behind the dealer’s stringy hair was the green lushness of Rota Park, with fresh raindrops glistening in the April sun. It looked a lot more welcoming than the door but was potentially more dangerous.

After killing the engine and grabbing the keys, the dealer rolled up his window and jumped down to the leafy ground, slammed and locked up, and trotted to the back entrance.

Edda squeaked open her door with her right shoulder, hit the mechanical lock, jumped down, and kicked it shut. Then she scanned the park for the best escape route. On the west side, the Rota Flora bunker—which had been re-christened the “Graffiti Hall of Fame” for obvious reasons—looked like a good place to lose any overly ambitious cops.

Behind her, the dealer hammered steel. Three long, two short.

Original, Edda thought. Why not do a full-on shave-and-haircut knock?

After somebody studied the dealer way too long through the peephole, the metallic one-two-three movements of a crossbar announced that he’d passed some kind of test.

Edda followed him through the half-open door. Her big mission, after all, was to make it inside.

Just past the threshold, she saw a pretty young thing slam the steel door and reverse the bolt with another three-part motion. The girl had bright blue eyes, dirty blonde dreadlocks, and red Doc Martens. Edda’s upper arm “accidentally” brushed against pert breasts.

The little girl showed no sign of alarm. Her eyes got even brighter as they studied Edda’s face and then worked their way down to the Box Hogs and back up. They stopped briefly at the hook but didn’t linger. Patchouli was in the air.

“My name’s Indigo,” the girl said. Her warm hand touched Edda’s bad upper arm a heartbeat too long as she passed, leading them through a long hallway covered top to bottom with insanely overlapping graffiti, posters, and stickers. All politics, all the time, Edda thought.

After they crossed the second threshold, Indigo slammed and bolted a second steel door behind them. The scraping metal

sound reminded Edda of Hahnöfersand, her involuntary home away from home, but the optics were completely different. The whitewashed plaster and gray tiles of the prison were the perfect backdrop for splatter marks when somebody got shivved.

This place was just the opposite. It was visually violent to the point of self-parody. Edda was pretty sure luminol wouldn't emit telltale blue glows on the walls. Too many words, not enough action. Despite their big talk, the "revolutionary" squatters would never have the prison experience. At most, they would get forty-eight hours in U-Haft, bail, and immediate parole. Edda figured they had the backing of weasel politicians who got a thrill out of reliving their university days as young socialists, the so-called Jusos.

The three of them emerged into a huge room that must originally have been the seating area. The two-story-high ceiling was supported by surprisingly thin iron posts. At the back of the stage, in a kitchen area set off by a sink, cupboards, and an old teak dinner table in bad need of refinishing, some kind of meeting was under way.

The walls of the theater featured enormous iconic posters of historical revolutionaries like Rosa Luxembourg, Che Guevara, and Martin Luther King. All had that Red Square devotional look. More originality, Edda thought. She had been hoping for somebody more robust, like good old Uncle Joe Stalin, hand in trench coat, overseeing gulags and mass starvation.

Patchouli tingled Edda's arm again. Indigo led her up the creaky steps to the stage.

"Who's your friend?" demanded a pale forty-year-old guy with a short, pale beard that didn't live up to his John Lennon glasses. From his perch at the head of the table, he was looking at Edda's hook like it was some kind of *faux pas*.

She had the impression he'd read a lot of thick, complicated books about the dialectic of the workers but had never done an

honest day's work in his life. Probably the prodigal son of a banker. One of those guys who studied for decades at Daddy's expense. He seemed to be in charge.

His comrades around the table had the usual Antifa uniforms: black jumpsuits and hoodies, unnaturally colored hair, nose and eyebrow rings, wannabe tattoos of clenched fists, heavy lace-up boots two sizes too big.

"This is Edda," the dealer said, stepping forward. "She just saved me from the cops."

Edda felt dreadlocks brush against her arm. They were even kinkier than Edda's bleached blonde corn rows. She hoped Indigo wasn't shaved.

"What makes you think she isn't a cop?" the pale guy said.

Good question, Edda thought. She moved away from Indigo. It was impossible to stay in character with all that stimulation.

The little girl seemed to get it. She stayed in place.

"Because she just beat the shit out of a narc," the dealer said.

The pale guy studied Edda's hook some more, like he was looking for traces of blood. Or trying to buy time to think up a clever rejoinder.

"You should've seen it," the dealer said, looking around his captive audience. "I think she broke his windpipe. You could hear it crack."

Let's not overdo it, Edda thought. You didn't kill for no reason. That's why she'd pulled her punch. Her handler had been clear about that. Disable the cop temporarily, not permanently.

The pale guy still wasn't satisfied. "How do you know her?"

"She's my best customer."

Edda's Box Hogs took a silent step toward the dealer. It was all she could do not to punch him. He made it sound like she was some sort of addict. She was a power user, not a junkie. There was a difference.

He looked back at her with the pride of ownership. His droopy Adam's apple jiggled up and down like a rooster's wattle. In her experience, that meant meth-head trailer trash, which he was.

"You into China Girl?" The pale guy was addressing Edda now.

"You hard of hearing?" she said, pivoting and stepping toward him. Like she was into *that* shit. Fentanyl was Russian roulette for losers. Oxy was a completely different level. It was a performance enhancer for winners. It got you past the bad so you could focus on the work in front of you.

"What?" The pale guy got a shade lighter.

"Guess so," Edda said. "But we can fix that." She held up her hook.

Dreadlocks blocked her view. This time, there was no patchouli. Indigo was almost an arm's length away.

Edda realized the girl was protecting her from her worst impulses. After all the trouble she'd gone through to get this introduction, it didn't make sense to assault her mark. She was here to gather information. That was hard to do when your source was picking up his teeth off raggedy-ass carpet.

Indigo turned and took Edda by her good hand, guiding her to a beat-to-shit couch that was half occupied by a Golden Retriever who snorted awake. He didn't look like he'd retrieved anything in a long time. Indigo nudged him aside and sat down, bringing Edda with her.

With Indigo's hot little hand in hers, it felt like a kindergarten romance. Edda stifled the idiotic grin she felt inside. It was like somebody had slipped her a happy pill. She had to pull herself together. Business before pleasure.

"Anyway," the pale guy said, addressing the other people in the room, "we have a lot of planning to do. May Day is just around the corner."

Indigo's fingers were now massaging Edda's palm in soft, slow, rhythmic motions. The girl had a calming—and arousing—effect.

Edda leaned back into the couch, mentally resting her head on Indigo's shoulder. It always happened when you least expected it, she thought. She flexed her hook. Like IEDs.

"I just got a call from Barcelona," the pale guide said. "They'll be joining us again this year. You know how important they are to the struggle."

Edda's muscles tightened. *Barcelona.*

Indigo's fingers stopped for a moment.

Edda felt the question but ignored it.

Ever since the G20 riots, the Polizei Hamburg was offering sizeable rewards for information leading to the arrest of the Black Block thugs from Barcelona who dropped big chunks of concrete from the tops of buildings onto riot cops on Schulterblatt. It was a miracle nobody got killed. Edda knew that TV cameras were the only thing that saved the demonstrators from a cop riot.

"Barcelona is sending some representatives tonight," the pale guy continued. "They want us to drill with them."

"Drill?" Edda said, sitting up. The pale guy didn't look like an athlete, let alone a warrior.

"That's right," he said, looking at a bong on the table instead of her.

"One thing I don't get," Edda said. She wanted to lean forward, but her hand was held back by Indigo's. And she didn't do anything about it. She knew that was a warning sign. She ignored it. That was another.

"I think there's a lot you don't get," the pale guy said to the bong.

Edda pulled her hand free and sat forward. "Why Schulterblatt?"

He looked up at her. "What?"

Strong fingers massaged Edda's trapezius muscle, trying to calm her down. Edda rotated her shoulders like in the ring. The fingers stopped.

"The cops will have an army waiting for you on Schulterblatt," Edda said. "It's the same thing every year."

“Was that a question?”

She took a deep breath. “Why don’t you take the fight to the enemy?” Or why don’t I just ram that bong down your crock?

“Excuse me?”

“Why burn down your own backyard? Why not burn down *their* backyard?”

He shook his head.

Edda’s hook twitched. “Don’t shake your head at me.”
Motherfucker.

He squinted at her behind his wireframes.

“RAF just got it done,” Edda said. In Frankfurt, her daddy’d told her all about the Red Army Faction offing GIs. Back then, he wasn’t allowed to wear his uniform off base.

“You want us to kill cops?” the pale guy said.

“You just want to maim them?”

He shook his head again, but she could tell he was thinking about it.

Of course, her handler wouldn’t approve. Then again, he didn’t know her motto: *My character is my cover*. She grinned.

“Something funny?” the pale guy said. “You got a joke you want to share with us?”

Us. Edda laughed out loud. “That would be telling.”

Indigo’s fingers were back in business. Even she knew the danger was over. And that the two of them would get to know each other very, very well.