

## **NOTHING BUT DELIVERANCE by Gisa Klönne**

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If ever a place became a home for me, then this one. I realize this now, for the first time, as I take my leave. I walk one last time through the silent rooms. The living room, never cozy, despite its furniture and carpets. The bedroom, where despair lurks. I look at the chair where I sat so often. The burden weighed more lightly there; I felt that you were near. I push the chair up to the table and make sure I really haven't overlooked anything. It hurts to leave this place - I didn't expect that. A new pain, joining the old one from the past.

The suitcase is light in my hand. I don't need much. I got all the important things out of harm's way years ago. I always knew that my time here was stolen time. That I couldn't stay, at least not forever.

The gloves cling to my fingers, a damp, living, second skin. Resisting the temptation to take them off, I blot sweat from my brow with my jacket sleeve. Borrowed time, borrowed life. I was angry at first when I realized they wanted to oust me here as well. Then I saw the chance that opened up. The opportunity to bring it to a close. Now, at last, after all these years.

One last look, a silent salute. Then I pull the door shut behind me and vanish in the shadow of the hedges. Now there's no turning back. I've made all the plans and preparations. Nothing will ever be the same again. I smile, thinking of our reunion. I hope you'll be merciful to me.

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The horse rouses her from her sleep, the white horse from long-ago nightmares. He'd been gone for more than a year; now he's back. Judith lies very still. The horse is a messenger, perhaps a warning. She knows he's trying to tell her something. A white horse stands on a hill amidst an archaic, surreally barren landscape, stands motionless and stares at her. It's only a dream, but she can't shake it off. She's caught in it, as she was after Patrick's death. Back then she trusted the white horse, even rode on it. Moments of happiness, night after night, inevitably ending with the horse bolting, throwing her to the ground. Judith sits up. Karl rolls over in his sleep, reaching for her. She strokes his arm and sneaks out of the room. Her heart beats too fast, there's a twinge in her lungs. The dream holds her captive, and yet she's wide awake.

It's hot in her attic flat, oppressive, though all the windows are wide open. Judith goes to the kitchen and drinks a glass of water, trying to focus solely on the cool of the tiles beneath her feet. She doesn't want to fall again, doesn't even want to think about how it felt. She sneaks back into the bedroom, puts on shorts and a tank top, and crosses the living room to the roof terrace. The city seems to greet her. The night sky, brownish from the streetlights and the neon signs, the muffled hum of cars and people, unable, like her, to find rest. She could take a beer from the fridge, drink it in the deckchair and try to count the stars. But that wouldn't help, it would only heighten her agitation, as she knows from experience.

She goes back into the apartment, puts on sneakers, slips her cell phone into her pocket at the last minute. She has to get out, move. Run away from the memories, from this dream with its premonition of doom, or maybe just from her damned nicotine addiction.

The streets are deserted, here too the heat is stifling, without a breeze. Suddenly everything seems unreal to her, as if she were sleepwalking, or had suddenly woken up in a city without people. Even the Rhine seems to be dissolving, narrower by the day. It has been closed to navigation for a week; its strength, too, is sapped by this merciless summer. Judith walks toward the Old Town. A jogger with a headlamp passes her, then a cyclist with no light. She walks faster, her mind still on her dream. The landscape was different than before, unfamiliar, and she didn't ride the horse. Maybe that's a good sign; maybe it's even a different horse. Or maybe the dream doesn't mean anything at all.

The Old Town lies cloaked in murky light. The bars and beer gardens have long since closed, but revelers still lounge on the lawns by the promenade, in pairs or small groups. She can hear their voices, snatches of music, laughter. In a close embrace, a couple leaves a lantern's light and strolls into the darkness. Somewhere someone's playing a guitar, singing about love, then shifting seamlessly to Bob Dylan. *The answer my friend is blowin' in the*

*wind*. Campfire protest music. The soundtrack to a different dream. Long ago, but not forgotten.

She thinks about Karl, his body, his hands, how good it feels with him, how right. She's about to head back to him when she hears the screams, inarticulate, terror-filled.

Judith starts running, toward the place where the screams seem to be coming from. It's not a conscious decision – her body reacts before she realizes it, the policewoman in her. Where? Who? What? The questions pound with the rhythm of her feet, carrying her to the spot where she saw the lovers just now. Now the couple has vanished as though into thin air. Judith stops and spins around. The light is diffuse, the shadows are deep. It's hard to survey the terrain. Another scream, somewhat closer, shriller. A woman's scream, Judith realizes. Almost surreal – there's still laughter, and Dylan.

For a few seconds, a train on the railroad bridge drowns out all other sounds. One of the streetlights in the park flickers wildly, making it even harder for her to orient herself. But the cathedral looms over the scene with stony calm. The cathedral, the philharmonic, and next to it the bridge.

Where, damn it? Where? The noise of the train fades away, there's no more screaming now, but Judith thinks she sees something move in a thicket by the stairs leading up to the cathedral. Is that where the screams came from? Judith runs toward it, sees a man slipping from the shadows. He looks over at her for a moment, then turns around and starts running.

“Stop! Stay where you are! Police!”

Her throat is sore, her lungs heave. The man doesn't listen to her, even runs faster. She sets out in pursuit. She has to stop him, at least get a look at him, his face, his clothing, something. Hopeless. Not a chance, he has much too big a head start. She stops, hearing the screams again, no, not screams now, more a lament, in English, “*No! No! No!*”

Sweat pours down Judith's face, her lungs burn, making her cough. The man from the thicket sprints up the stairs to the cathedral and vanishes from sight.

“*Help! Here!*”

A man's voice. He kneels in the shadow of the bridge, holding a woman in his arms. She trembles uncontrollably, her light minidress covered with dark smears.

Judith runs over to them, crouches down, feeling for her cell phone.

“Police. *Polizei. Sind Sie verletzt?* Are you okay?”

The woman doesn't even seem to notice Judith; the man reacts in slow motion, nodding and pointing behind him into the darkness. Another man lies there, motionless. The woman moans and starts rubbing her hands in the grass, hesitant at first, then faster and faster.

Unreality, but different now. The unreality of death, not that of a dream.

“Hello?”

Judith grabs the lying man’s shoulder; at that same moment she smells blood. She presses a button on her cell phone. The display sheds blue light on what was once a face. The woman behind Judith starts to vomit.

The display fades, and with it the bloody mask. Dream. Nightmare. She’s seen injuries like that before on photos in the police academy, but never in real life. She dials the emergency number, and at the same time she sees a gang of men running toward her.

*“My wife fell right into him,”* the American says into thin air. *“We were just looking for a place to sit down.”*

Judith gets up and runs towards the men, trying to block their approach.

“Stop! Police! Stop right there!”

The men laugh. One of them actually starts running faster, as if she weren’t even there. Smelling the alcohol on his breath, she jumps in front of him, stopping him by thrusting her palm against his chest. He grunts, sways, steadies himself and looks down at her breasts, her shorts, her bare legs.

From the cell phone she hears the questioning voice of her colleague in the dispatch center.

“Detective superintendent Krieger, homicide squad 11, I need backup. Fast.”

Stammering her location into the cell phone, she sees more rubbernecks crossing the lawn. The American wakes from his lethargy as well and tries to help his wife to her feet.

*“Stay here. Please!”* Judith reaches behind her, clasps his shoulder and squeezes it. He gives in, slumping. His wife is lost in her own world anyway, crouching as though paralyzed, now and then whimpering softly.

The drunk forces his way closer, and two of his buddies follow suit. Photoflashes flare. Several of the bystanders have whipped out their cell phones and started taking pictures. Damn it! The situation is slipping from her grasp, completely out of control.

“Police! Homicide squad! Stand back!”

Judith grabs the cell phone from the nearest paparazzo.

“This is confiscated. Stop taking photographs!”

“Hey!”

The man makes a grab for her arm. She evades him. The mob jeers. The next train thunders over the bridge. Instinctively Judith looks up, seeing the figure of a man staring down at her. The same man who ran away from her just now? A witness? The murderer?

Now, here, long after the crime took place? And even if so, how could she prove it? She didn't even see his face.

A photoflash flares again, but this time she can't seize the cell phone, the paparazzo is too fast and too big for her. If she's lucky, the photos will only show her, not the American, not the victim. Luck. Bad luck. You think these are constants, forgetting how quickly one can morph into the other.

At last a siren rings out, followed by another. The crowd mutters.

"Here!" Judith yells out instructions to her colleagues. "Cordon it off – up on the bridge, too. Get the personal data, confiscate the camera phones!"

Two policemen unfold a blanket as a makeshift screen. One of them gives her a flashlight; she steps behind the blanket and leans over the dead man, forcing herself to look. An athletic man, blond, tanned. Maybe a tourist as well. Without bags. Without a face. What kind of a weapon is that devastating? What kind of ammunition? What a nightmare for a young couple on vacation, to stumble across a bloody mask in a seemingly secluded spot.

"Well, Judith, what do you think?"

She starts; she didn't hear her boss coming. Holding a flashlight too, he crouches down next to her.

"An execution," she says quietly, suddenly seeing the horse from her dream again, its shimmering hide, its steadfast gaze.

Millstätt lifts his eyebrows, studies the dead man, then her.

She wishes she were wearing something other than these shorts and this skimpy, sweaty top. She wishes certain incidents hadn't happened last year – then her relationship with her boss wouldn't be so complicated.

"It's your case, Judith," he says after a long pause.

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