

Die Autobahn

Stemweder. Western Germany

It's a chilly evening outside at the rock festival of Stemweder as all celebrate the final evening of the gathering, decadently. Band and crew sit around under the marquee attached to their camper van, in a field full of many more. They prepare to play the final set. Music pounds across the earth from the rig.

The sun had set; only scant, orange clouds remained, reflecting sol ray. Fluorescent strip lights trace circles as the waltzer goes round and round and round, the cart spun by a gypsie in denim. The machine blasts out an old-school sample, 'what can you do for me?' Passing on the horror show, screams and wicked laughter broadcast scary faces of notorious villains painted on the chipboard walls that form this haunted house. Freddie Krueger, Jack the Ripper, Damien. Kids ate candy floss and hot dogs then jumped carelessly, up and down, on bouncy castles.

The adults drank wheat beer from plastic cups and smoked rollups; passing a talking stick round the circle.

"When are we going to play our next gig?" Alice asked then handed the stick to the person on her right. "Tomorrow" they answer.

"Let's not think too far ahead, sweetie. First of all we have to get the rig and all the gear out of this place without gaining any attention from the Polizei. Then we proceed to..." Alice shook her head so Lewis added, "crawl before you walk"

Alice hid the disappointment from her face as she followed the movement of the idiosyncratic stick, but Lewis knew she was. He wished not to be despotic.

"Who was your favorite band that played the festival?"

Lewis drifted off. He thought about the drugs hidden in the motor. Alice new about the weed and the lsd but there was more. Some really hard drugs; stuff that had given him a headache on a really big come down. He'd needed more just to get himself out of bed days after taking the first batch. He had a stash point in the car but still, there were bits of weed lying around, spliff butts in the ashtray; it caused him anxiety to think of what might happen should they be pulled over. He did not want nor need a high speed chase!

Lewis wondered, 'are the German cops the same as in England?'

The talking stick moved before him but he wasn't listening to what the holder said.

The cold of the night contrasted the sound before them as the quartet felt their anticipation, playing in front of a hyped up crowd. Lewis strummed guitar while Alice sang and danced up and down. The crowd all were loving it and showed their appreciation.

After dawn had risen, they began to load up their van ready to depart.

"Have you got the keys?" Lewis asked Alice

"Have I..? I never had them,,,"

"I haven't got time for this... They were in that blue bag... We're going to have to hotwire it"

As it happened, there was no trouble and Lewis needn't have worried about his drugs. They exited the carnival boundary without torment from the filth.

We brought the tent, we might as well use it

"We'll meet you at Oktoberfest" said the other band member, which was poignant because they met at the VooV.

Returning from Stemweder to a village North of Bielefeld, Lewis and Alice rode alone. The convoy split as others travelled in the camper van and a car. They were to rendezvous at Oktoberfest.

"Let's stop at Aldi. Get something to cook"

Radio plays ... then a segment of Satisfactoin and then another – one of those annoying show intros that includes a segment of a song you really like. Then when Noah and the Whale comes on, Alice says, 'I love this song"

"You say that about every song"

"I like to listen while I'm studying. It inspires me"

"To weigh up scientific equations!"

"It helps me to concentrate"

"Do the lyrics not put you off, the words coming in to your head? L.I.F.E.G.O.E.S"

"Sometimes; in which case I switch to classical."

Lewis puffed then asked Alice, "Does your Uncle speak good English?"

"Not really, in fact he's very poor; he's old"

"I may fail to understand him. Teach me some stuff, numbers, P's and Q's. I want to create a good impression"

Another car filled with revelers passes from the opposite direction

"I spy, with my little eye, something, beginning with B"

Pause. Animals meander in the rain.

"How much further?" Lewis asked.

"Not far, maybe 20 kilometre" Alice estimated from memory.

"20. We're not going to make it. We need to refuel"

"There's a station up ahead"

"Do you have any money?"

"Do I have money? I'm a girl, how dare you?"

"Listen darling, right now you most definitely have more money than what I've got"

"And if I do, does that mean I have to pay for everything?"

“Not everything, dear, just a few litres of petrol; let’s not overdo it, don’t make me out to be a cheapskate, please!”

“Why don’t you fill up the tank and I’ll get the groceries?”

Ahead is the gas station, it all looks kosher. Lewis pulls in and fills up but he doesn’t pay for his petrol.

Back on the road, the engine purrs, propelling the car up and around the winding road. The lake passes to the left of the car. Someone drowned in it. Lewis slowed the revs, dipping the clutch - then pulled around the corner, the camber sloped adversely. Bumps and potholes in the ground jittered the vehicle, jiggling and jostling the couple out of their seats. As the track narrowed, either side verged, each built up with vegetation and barbwire, forming natural balustrades.

“Straight ahead;”

“No, left”

Lewis tutted, “you have to keep me right” he looked in the rear view mirror, “we don’t want the chase from an angered gas attendant!”

“I hope they don’t follow us up here!” Alice moaned, “that was rather stupid just driving off”

Lewis was frustrated. She didn’t have any money to pay the petrol and nor had he.

A dove flies under the bonnet and gets squished.

“You just hit something an animal”

“It was a pot-hole”

“It was an animal, Lewis”

“If it was its dead; but we need get the car out of site,”

“You can hide it behind the hay in the barn..”

“What about Uncle Pop, won’t he be suspicious?”

“Of you maybe” Ali teased.

“No shit! Is he overprotective of his niece?”

“Was, but I’m not a little girl anymore”

“Yeah, I know that but does he?” Lewis muttered under his breath as she dug her fingers into his thigh.

The car crossed the cattle grid. Lewis knew the motor engine would draw the attention of anyone within the house; unless they were deaf, or had headphones on. The car pulled up on the forecourt. Alice’s Great Uncle did hear them coming and came out to greet them.

“Guten Tag” said the old man.

“Guten Tag” the youngsters replied in harmony.

“If i’d of known you were coming today i’d of killed a cow”

“I did say we’d be here sometime”

“No matter. Let’s have some tea”

“Later, you can help me shift some bales” the Uncle insisted. L nodded or just looked down at his food, Alice couldn’t be sure After eating he got to work and hoisted the hay bales up onto the second storey, his deltoid muscles showed his sinew.

"These animals are artificially assimilated" he joked as he covered the bails in polythene.

"This is Fletch."

"A dog!" Lewis looked bemused, "I thought Fletch was your cousin"

"He is;-)" Alice added and touched his furry tail.

"What about the chickens?"

"Mrs Peabody will take care of it,"

"And the Chips?"

"Farmhands. When they come back next month"

"Those cowboys" Lewis said, expressed dissatisfaction

Dinner.

"I believe you are from tyrannous England, Lewis"

"No US" he answered, "I live in London"

"what do you work? How do you earn a living?" asked unc.

"We play music. Don't we..."

"You think that will make money!" he laughed

"Keeps us going. Just trying to learn how to talk like an Austrian while we're here. Picking up some culture"

He then asked Alice where they had gotten all the tins of beans and cigarettes from. "We traded them at Steme Wede" Alice replied, she knew he'd never been.

Alice asked "Will you help me wash up?" Lewis jumped up to leave the table. He didn't like the old man. Though it was Alice's Uncle and he felt a connection, he disliked what he saw as biased interrogation.

Alice washes and Lewis dries. "Want to watch a movie later?"

"Does your Uncle have satellite?"

Alice answered, "No. We have a VCR"

Lewis says, "I bet they're all in Dutch"

Alice, "They're dubbed. English films with German voices"

"Great. Best watch something I've seen before. Where do the saucepans go?"

Lewis relaxes after dinner.

"What are you watching?"

"A comic horror"

"It looks tacky"

"This movie was banned;"

"So! Fast forward to the action-packed ending, its boring.

Slow!"

"Shut-up and let me watch it"

"I just asked what it was" said Alice

"A clockwork orange"

"I bought one of those for your Mother at Christmas,"

"No, that was a chocolate orange" Alice joked making Lewis turn his head from the direction of the screen.

"Sorry, that was in bad taste."

"I thought you meant the German film that was banned, do you know it?"

"What was it called?" he asked, his inquisitiveness as much a -getting to know you- as anything else.

"Wolves" Alice replied, "You haven't seen it," she shrugged and then went on to synopt, "It was about a little sister, born to the Preacher in an ancient, mythological town. Many of the children, especially girls had been lost so they were forced to abandon her,"

"Some species eat their young in times of a hardship," Lewis pointed out.

"Urgh! Not when I'm masticating... Anyway, they left her in the woods, by the lake. The helpless baby was suckled by a Wolf who had recently had a litter and was reared"

Weird"

"Its really pleasant actually, great cinematography, a bit like the 'Man called Horse'" continued Alice, "but then.. it turns nasty"

"What happens?" Lewis asked.

"They bring her back to the village, when she's 3 or 4 but the tribes are superstitious and they think that she is of the devil! They tie her up and keep her captive, shewing the bad spirits from inside her. The wolves try to intervene but only make the situation worse."

"Then what happens?"

Alice said, "You have to watch it and find out. I don't want to spoil the end for you"

Lewis twisted his torso, disgruntled.

"You want to hear a ghost story; a true life one?" Alice asked. The wind outside begins to howl and a drizzle of rain pitter patters on the window.

Filed fingers strum Lewis's acoustic guitar. He performs an unplugged rendition of their band's latest track.

Then he strums Mark Knopfler's Brothers in Arms while Alice runs a bath. She seems distracted and Lewis worries that when they return to civilization and play Oktoberfest, he will find himself alone, again.

"You want to drop the rest of that acid?" asked Lewis

"You fellows are smoking that marijuana; i know"

Alice confirmed that they were, "we just brought a little bit back with us from the fest" she said. Uncle P nodded, then turned his head as though scanning the carpet for dust bits. "Be better if you smoked it outside; on the porch"

"Okay, we will"

"Sheriff sometimes stops by here;" he completed and left the room.

"On first name terms with the law;" Lewis said sarcastically.

"We better do what he says,"

"Look what I found in my pocket; some of that mescaline stuff"

Lewis whispered, Alice seemed petulant.

The fallen amber and crimson leaves illustrate the change of season, autumn descends like dusk.

In the morning Alice is concerned that her Uncle isn't up. He is aging but is always out of bed at dawn, the habit of a lifetime, tending sheep and farming, away from the corruptive influences of towns and cities. When Alice goes to his room, an imminent aura forebodes her. Her Uncle has passed away in his sleep. She is very upset and Lewis does his best to comfort her. The next two days go past in a blur as the service is held and he is buried on his farm under the authority of the local parish. After such a somber affair, Lewis is enthralled with the old man's car, a vintage, red Mercedes-Benz. They decide, with Alice's endorsement to trade their car in for his, "He's no use for it now has he. And he probably left it to you in his will, if he had one..."

"Yes bit its going to cost a fortune in gasoline"

"It shouldn't be that much"

"How much did we put in on the way back from Wonderland? We could siphon it out and put it in this baby "

The waxed red bodywork gleams brilliant as the Die Autobahn theme tune kicks in on the radio.

"Okay, honey. Lets do it!" they locked hands together. A wagon honked its horn at them as they overtook it.

THE END