

The Police Station

by Sue Hitchcock

Phoebe was waiting outside the police station. At last Hedda emerged helped down the steps by a police woman.

“I sat in a room the colour of egg yolk for two hours, while the officer got my story down.”

“We’ve been waiting, but they only detained me briefly after examining the powder burns on my shoulder. Loki came out ten minutes ago and he’s waiting for us.”

“What about Vilna?”

“You’d better ask.”

Hedda disappeared back into the station.

“They’re holding her for a bit. With her record I’m not surprised.”

“But she wasn’t anywhere near it!”

“Most of their questions were about Ernst, so I told them how it was before I found out he wasn’t who he claimed to be, as if nothing had changed.”

“Do you feel alright?”

“That yellow colour was giving me a migraine. At first I felt sick, but a medic came and checked me out, checked my missing arm, as well. At least that got you out of trouble.”

“Do they know if Ernst is dead?”

“Of course he isn’t. Who ever heard of anyone being killed with a shotgun. No, he’s just peppered. They’re digging the pellets out in A&E.”

“Let’s find out what Loki told them.”

Hedda gave him a shake as his eyes were shut, dozing.

“Gran, you frightened me! I wasn’t asleep. They let me go, because I said he was my friend, but then I got confused with all the questions about how I met him. They kept asking me if I knew different people, one called Janos, mostly. I think they gave up in the end because I was mystified.”

As Loki negotiated the car park a shout came from the building, “Wait, wait!” Vilna was out, at last. She scrambled into the front seat next to her son.

“What did you tell them?”

“I’ve only met the man three or four times. All I could say was that he had persuaded you to let us have the cottage and the barn.”

“And I could always change my mind.” threatened Hedda.

Vilna started to mumble curses under her breath, but Loki hid nothing, “You wouldn’t, would you Gran?”

“Just be good, that’s all.”

It was days before they found out what the outcome was. Phoebe and Hedda should have been charged with something. You can’t go shooting someone, even by accident. Both women were elderly and would have been let off with a warning, or at worst with a suspended sentence. Given that Ernst Wolf was not who he claimed to be, and was being investigated by Interpol. It seemed simpler to hand him over and avoid the paperwork.

At Hedda’s hotel cum nursing home Ernst was missed, not only by Hedda, but also the guests, who were threatening to stop paying. The family and Phoebe pulled together and provided the promised services as best they could. Phoebe seemed to think washing dishes was her role. She didn’t mind, though Vilna hated it, Loki dropped things and Hedda – well she only had the one hand. So Loki lugged boxes of vegetables about, Vilna chopped and prepped, leaving Hedda to stir. The waitresses kept up appearances, serving dishes and clearing tables. All was well until Hedda tried to open the door to the laundry.

“Who’s doing the fucking laundry. I can’t get in, though it pong, so I’m not going to try!”

“I suppose you think I should do it.” Vilna complained, “Am I even getting paid?”

“You’ll do whatever you want, won’t you. You always do.”

“You ungrateful cow. Get some skivvies and pay them!”

“Go, and take Loki with you. I can smell cannabis all over the house.”

There was a general upheaval as daughter and grandson collected their things and made a hasty departure. Hedda had forgotten Phoebe, who was shaking her head in despair, still up to her elbows in greasy water.

“Come on, you. I’ve called a proper taxi. We’re going into town to hire some regular staff, then we’re going to get drunk.”

‘God, we’re back to square one!’ Phoebe thought drying her hands on a tea cloth.