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Esther J. Ending

Ibiza's Child

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To Anasha Krüner

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*I have little left in myself – I
must have you.*

Charlotte Brönte

March 1987

The afternoon she was stopped by the Guardia Civil, she had just had lunch at Es Pins. It had been a lonely lunch. The friends she was supposed to meet had spotted the patrol car from a distance and skeddaddled off in various directions, for different reasons. Carrying something illegal, hash, weed or coke. For not having a motorbike licence, or a licence with spelling mistakes which, according to a microscopic caption, had been issued in Thailand. For not having an MOT certificate. Nor did anybody have insurance, since a spike in accidents had tripled the premiums.

The almond trees were in blossom, uncommonly late this spring, effervescently white. The sky was deep blue and in spite of strong gusts of wind the day was pleasantly warm. It was this wind she would remember clearly; similar squalls would instantly bring back that afternoon: the smell of burning pinewood, sage, *chumbo* cactus and carob beans.

By the time she saw him – in uniform, of course, the familiar pale-green shirt and dark-green trousers, his hair either dark blond or light brown, of this she was retrospectively uncertain – there was no escaping the situation. Without driving licence, bike papers or insurance she steered her father's screeching Bultaco into his cool and quiet shadow.

That evening, with a bottle of whisky on her father's patio, in the faint light of a rattan lamp, she couldn't get him out of her mind. Mister Guardia Civil, all in green as though he never wore anything else; the buckle on his weapon-heavy belt embellished with symbols of crown, ax and sword. In spite of these vivid details she sometimes lost his face, she wasn't even sure whether she'd recognize him when dressed in civvies, but she did know his name because she'd heard his partner calling out to him: Ramiro.

Ramiro. It bore the word "sea", *mar*, just like her own name, Marianne. His in reverse, and rightly so: their seas as different as night and day. Her *mar* representing water unbridled, sloshing in all directions only to seep away into porous ground. His sea – she'd seen it, his steady gaze, his self-possession – seemed to her more like *un mar como un plato*, a sea completely controlled.

As the evening blended into night and the whisky sank beneath the label she had made a close friend of Ramiro with whom she hung out in late-night bars. She imagined him sharing the particulars of his day's work, such as the body parts he'd had to scrape from Ibiza's deadly roads; she in turn would tell him she couldn't think of a single person on this island who didn't detest the Guardia Civil.

"We hate you, Ramiro. Don't worry, I won't go on about the civil war – we'll let those by-gones rest. We hate you for ruining our nights, like when we're on our way to a full moon party and you trap us along deserted dirt roads with a dozen shiny Nissan patrol cars, a dark-green platoon of men in the icy moonlight, surrounded by scents of pine and rosemary, flare-ups of dust and the persistent shrieking of crickets. Standing amidst you – this we see in our headlights – a doctor in a white coat and latex gloves, eyes unblinking like all the rest of you, as though we were driving into some horror movie, a movie about Nazis or aliens.

Even the German shepherds at your feet with eyes inanimate like dogs possessed, muscles taut and ears cocked as they wait for an order, some kind of signal telling them to rip out our hearts; our hearts pounding in our throats like mad, cars in front of us waved to the side as we swallow and sniff the weed and the ecstasy and the coke, the entire stash in our pockets, so that instead of a prison cell we sometimes end up in hospital. These are the reasons we hate you. We hate you because in your battle against the ETA in the Basque Country you've been trained to stare at us so hard and unflinchingly that even the calmest mind-set goes to pieces. Even though my dad taught me your trick (never stare your adversary in the eyes but just above the nose), it doesn't lessen the fear, which has nestled in our blood. I can't remember a single year without confrontations, like when you kicked in our door and kept on shouting: *donde esta la coca! Donde esta el polvo!*, and I tried to save Freddy the Teddy from your knives because you were convinced he was stuffed with drugs. Well, there you have it: my dad. My dad hates you with a passion. If he knew I had you on my mind, a Guardia Civil, at any given time of day, be it for only a minute, he'd want you dead. Not that there's much he could do, since he's behind bars in Liverpool. He's doing time for the same reason so many Ibiza immigrants go to prison sometime or other, which should hardly be news to you lot, Interpol agents enjoying their coffee and croissants here at regular intervals... It goes without saying, of course, that I'm not referring to the kind of lanky drug dealers with eye tics and other neuroses who supply Ibiza with party drugs, but the *capi di tutti capi*, the discreet gentlemen handling the lion's share of their business elsewhere while living up to the motto: *you don't shit where you eat...*"

Of course he'd never hear any of this, at least not from her, if only because there was no way she'd ever see him again. And still

she kept reliving the afternoon, even later in bed when behind the curtains the sky turned pink and she still hadn't slept.

She pictured herself in his shadow, on the 125CC Bultaco which her father hadn't given her permission to borrow. She thought how remarkable it was that Ramiro had let her off, even though she couldn't present him with a driving licence and insurance and had worn her helmet on her wrist instead of her head. He insisted she put it on, a small price to pay after his liberating gesture, especially as he must have suspected she might be too young to even *have* a motorbike licence, what with her jittery spiel about the insurance (at home, in a jam pot on the kitchen counter). He may have wanted to hurry up with her because his partner, busy with the passengers of a red Volkswagen, had needed him. But he had smiled, and that was something she just couldn't get her head around. Guardia Civil policemen never smile. Now, when she tried to sleep, she kept seeing that smile, and his shoe, or his boot, rather, that too she saw; the boot beneath the green uniform trousers as he casually poked his toe around the gravel as if expecting to find some treasure. Casual, that was the word, his manner of speech, his smile, but of course he was an uncompromising Guardia like all the rest of them. Had he known she carried in the back pocket of her jeans an envelope with ecstasy pills, enough to put her away for a year at least, he wouldn't have gone on smiling. He'd have handcuffed her straight off, called his partner and informed headquarters via the tetra radio that he was on his way with a drug trafficker.

Or imagine if he'd known what she was doing last month. What she'd had stashed in her bra when she arrived at Ibiza's airport after a weekend in London. A quarter of a million Deutsch marks – she who had no boobs to speak of had looked like Brigitte Bardot, the Customs guys hadn't known which way to look. She had deliberately bought a low cut top, reckoning that

in this respect even these men were predictable: comes a girl with big tits and they'll look anxiously away, for fear of being taken for a pervert or paedophile.

The problem was, the more she thought about how dangerous he was, the more she kept thinking of him.

April 1987

1

She heard a car drive up the dirt road. She hadn't expected Mr. S. this early, but it had to be him — she could tell by the sound of his diesel engine — the Land Rover itself still screened by almond trees.

The rickety garden table was laden with empty beer bottles and a bottle half full of Jameson for which she couldn't find a good hiding place other than the cleaning bucket. She flung a rag over the bucket and took out the letter she had written that morning.

Dear Dad,

First up, thanks for letting me use the villa. I've started with all sorts of jobs around the house, rest assured I'll leave the place better than I found it. Just for the record: it's total bull that I've been living an 'endless bacchanal on an alphabet of drugs', I don't know why what's-his-S-face came up with such hogwash. Bit rich, these people without kids thinking they're pedagogic experts.

I promise I'll leave the Bultaco locked up from now on. I was a bit surprised that you heard about me being pulled over, can't remember telling anyone about it. Guess someone saw me in passing? Anyhow, they let me off, so there's no problem. I don't need the Bultaco anymore anyway. As you've been told, I spent the last of my cash on a Yamaha XT. I'd like to put this straight: it isn't a 750

but a 250CC (clearly Mr. S. knows shit about bikes too). I wouldn't lose any sleep over it. I'm not a boy, for me a bike is just a means to get from A to B and not some gadget to wrap myself around a tree. I'm just saying, because Madresh was kicking up about it too, which is interesting considering the fact that she's driven without a licence herself for over twenty years.

My time in Barcelona was educational, if only to teach me modelling isn't for me. Imagine a world jam-packed with paedophiles seeking unblemished flesh. As for the glamour, that's only true for the supermodels and I didn't meet a single one. Most girls spend their days running from casting to casting with their *book*, this stupid book that everyone's always going on about – then at night the coke pitchers open up, dainty little pitchers with purpose-built spoons, provided by said paedophiles. So there you have it, end of Barcelona adventure for me! I haven't saved up much, though, which is why I'm proposing to dedicate myself to chores around the house. The garden for instance is going to pot (Pepe quit as the season started), and there's a leak in the upstairs bathroom. I checked the roof, last winter's rainfall has pretty much swept away the tar. The outside walls need whitewashing, which I could easily take care of seeing as I've done that as a summer job. The swimming pool is a mess, one huge nest of leaves, you can't see the bottom of it. Also I think we need some clean gravel, but I'll need some money for that.

Lastly there's the olive tree affair. You should have received my fax by now but just in case I'll give you an extra update. I came home on Saturday after a trip to Formentera and found an enormous hole in our patio. I'm absolutely shattered. *Gone*, our tree whose branches I used to climb

and even gave names to – south branch, north branch, east-west branch – the tree that was there before your great- great- great- great- great- great- great-grandfather was born. Dad, what a nightmare! I looked into that dark hole and it was like looking into the pit of hell, all the evil of mankind accumulated, the greed, destruction and indifference. How could anyone do something so gruesome?

I suspect they've been watching the house for a while and thought it empty. They won't have known I'm staying here, or let's hope not, anyway. The barefaced nerve! It must have taken them hours, and they must have had a truck, at least, to transport it.

I've been making some inquiries, and it's not just us. Eva had two (!) olive trees stolen from her property. Pepe told me how it works. It's all because of the *nouveau riche*. They want a villa and they want it now. If you're loaded you can build a villa in a matter of weeks, in *finca* style, with bread ovens and water wells which you can't tell from authentic. But you can't grow a centuries old olive tree in that time frame. For a tree of any substance you need a few hundred years, end of story. So they have this beautiful country house, but no tree, which turns their parvenu hobby horse into a pretty poor show. Enter olive tree business!

Pepe says the tree will no doubt be sold at a garden centre or put up for auction for a shitload of money – or God knows it might have been ordered in advance, some scouting scumbag having snooped around taking pictures. And you know the worst of it? The likelihood our tree will survive is slim. Pepe says a changed environment, different soil is all it takes to kill a tree.

What do you want me to do? Shall I tell the police? Perhaps the Guardia Civil will be useful for once. Take care and know you're on my mind. Marianne.

Mr. S. sauntered up the driveway, whistling. Marianne held out the sealed envelope, but he passed her with a nod and entered the kitchen, she'd have to offer him something. She pointed at a pot on the counter. "Coffee?"

He wiped his head on a towel hanging from the oven handle. It was barely April and early noon but already twenty-eight degrees. "A glass of water will do." He walked to the patio, to the arcade with the bougainvillea. "In full blossom, this time of year. Spectacular! And this one always blossoms two colours, see? Bougainvillea has always been my favourite."

As she poured him a glass of water she noticed the small mirror lying on the table. She only used it to examine her spots, but before you knew it Mr. S. would think something of it; she shoved it under a pile of papers.

"And what's this?" she heard him say. "Haven't they closed it?" He leaned over the hole in the patio.

Marianne stood still in the doorway. "What?"

"You shouldn't let them get away with this." He kicked some sand into the pit from the giant heap that lay next to it. "They get paid for it. Why would they leave a gaping crater? Unless they want someone to break a leg, for Christ's sake. Imagine coming home drunk."

"You *know* about this?"

He stood erect. "Nobody told you?"

"I was in Formentera this weekend."

"I see. Well, the tree has been sold. According to your dad it was a nuisance anyway, blocking all the light to the kitchen. Two more will be sold, further out in the field. Not as big as this one,

Ron told me, but apparently still worthwhile. They're coming to get them this Tuesday, I believe. Jesus, it's bloody hot..."

She knew exactly which trees he was talking about. The property, which was filled with carob, fig, and almond trees, pines and grapes, had only three olives, counting the one that was taken. The other two stood close together, each at least three hundred years old. She pictured them distinctly, surrounded by beds of grass and up ahead a little stone wall, possibly as old as the trees. As a child she had played there with her teddy bears and imagined the space between the trees to be a gateway to a secret realm, one with witches and dwarfs.

Mr. S. came back into the kitchen again. He took the envelope from the counter, ripped it open and started reading her letter.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed.

"I'm reading your letter."

"Why?"

She wanted to snatch it from him, but he held it out of her reach. "Everything is intercepted and thoroughly scrutinized. Your father explicitly asked me to check anything sent to him. I could've done it later, but then you wouldn't be able to make adjustments if I deem it necessary. Look here, I see the word 'drugs'. That's a definite no-go. You could have thought of that yourself."

She managed to take the letter from him, tossing it in the rubbish bin under the sink. Mr. S. watched her in silence, mopping his face with the towel. He sighed and shook his head. "What do you want me to tell your father?"

"Tell him I want to buy tar for the roof. Gravel, whitewash, plants, you name it. And then of course there's the work hours. Also one of the solar panels has come loose, I'll need to have someone fix it."

"I don't think he expects you to do all that. But anyway, you want money. How much do you need?" He pulled out a roll of

banknotes from his inside pocket, peeling off the top layer. “Here, will this do? And this here as well, that should keep you going for now. I decided not to tell your dad about your trip to London. Calm down,” he made a dismissive gesture, “I know why you were there. You had some business with Harry, who happens to be a friend of mine. I hope it was just this once. How much did you get, I hope at least five percent?”

She had got two percent, which Mr. S. could surely read from her face now.

“Shame on Harry.” He shook his head. “Do you have any idea what happens if they catch you with that amount of cash?”

“I had a convincing story,” she said, while uncertainty sank in. If stopped at Customs she had planned to tell them she had met an extremely wealthy man in some pub who had wanted to sleep with her at any price, after which he’d upped his bid until she had finally given in at the extortionate sum of a quarter million Deutsch marks. They’d gone to a hotel where both of them had stuck to their end of the deal. Who he was, how he made his money, that she didn’t know; it seemed to her that this stranger’s main thing was to prove that, at the end of the day, everyone’s corruptible. She’d thought it a fine story, even though she’d never do anything of the sort, not even for a million. Particularly if the guy was ugly, and she’d certainly have convinced the Customs officers that such had been the case; she had meticulously based him – beady eyes, receding chin, beer belly – on her former math teacher.

“You have no idea, young lady.” He poured himself a glass of water. “They know all the bullshit stories in the book. You want to play smart with them? Let me tell you, it’s the smart asses they break first. That’s what they’re trained to do, you’ve no idea how they work those interrogations. They’ll do anything to get you talking. It doesn’t take a mastermind to know that if they’ve got you crossing the border with this outrageous lump of cash, there’s

bound to be at least five others doing exactly the same thing, since no fool bets all his earnings on one single horse. So they're going to know it's a job in the millions. You'd better take my word for it, these are no nose-picking, parking-ticket bureaucrats. They'll hold you six months no problem, in isolation no less. And how do you think this would pan out for your dad? No, listen, hear me out... It takes them just *one* phone call to find out who's your daddy and where he's located. So there you are with your gobbledygook story: *I won it in a casino, some millionaire wanted to sleep with me,* and who do you think is their number one person to stick it to?"

She felt uncomfortably hot, nauseatingly so. How come only just recently the story about paid sex had sounded so clever, original even? And why did these conversations with Mr. S. always take a turn for the worse? She had to reset this exchange at once. "Why is my dad selling our trees?"

He looked at her intently without answering.

"No one told me there's a financial crisis," she added.

"Who says there's a crisis? Your father is a proficient businessman, he likes to think ahead. Sometimes money needs to be protected, especially in our line of business."

"Protected from whom?"

"Is that a serious question?"

The garlic-filled gazpacho she'd had that morning to make up for her less healthy habits pushed up against her oesophagus. She had always known: their worst enemies weren't rip dealers nor even the Guardia Civil, but that ghostly nemesis who downed its victim like a python, without as much as a sound: the public authorities. "Will they take our belongings? The house? Is he selling the trees because we're going to lose the house?"

"My guess is he's bearing in mind the worst-case scenario, just to be on the safe side. I wouldn't think more of it than that, just now."

“My father would never sacrifice our trees if there were any other way out.”

He checked his Cartier. “I’ve got to go.”

“He’s a nature-loving person. He’d never do anything of the sort.”

“I’d love to chat with you for hours but I’ve got something urgent to take care of.” He looked gravely at her. “You’re not planning a trip to London any time soon? And not to Amsterdam either?”

“It was a one-off thing.”

“And no other monkey business? Everything they find on you, they take out on him. Get that?”

She wanted to say more about the olive trees, about her father’s love for nature, but the words wouldn’t come together.

“Do you get that?” He held her gaze.

“Yes, Jesus, I get it.”

“I’ll tell your father about your housekeeping, but I think what he’d most like to hear is you’re keeping yourself together.” He pulled out his car keys. “I know what it’s like when you’re in there. It’s Darwinian. The outside world, you want to have to worry about it as little as possible.”

*

With the two percent she had earned for moving a quarter million Deutsch marks, she had bought, among other things, thirty ecstasy pills, the new love drug that was hitting it big on the clubbing scene. She wasn’t intending to make a habit of it. She’d acquired the pills for a very reasonable price from someone she knew, a Swedish guy who had to suddenly leave the island. She was helping him out, basically, since she had the cash and knew who to sell it on to in one transaction.

To Cliff, for instance. She just needed to find him, and that as always was the hard part on an island where no one had a telephone. These were the kind of things that kept her awake at night. Yesterday she had gone to Can Suldat but hadn't found Cliff. Nor was he in Las Dalias. And last week she'd spent a whole evening in Sandy's, in vain.

She also thought about the new Yamaha which was perfect, except that the exhaust needed a filter and, more urgently, the cable to the carburetor had a tear. Easily replaced, but she'd have to do that in town, and during the recent rainfall the engine had died a few times. She had got it going again by unscrewing the carburetor and drying it out. She made a mental note to take along the carburetor key tomorrow.

And there it was again, the face of the Guardia, a face that was gradually losing definition and intensity, but not so his voice, his deep, low voice, his *calm* voice primarily. In the rough sketch she'd managed to save of him she saw very specific details. She did not, for instance, remember the colour of his eyes, but she vividly recollected the way he'd looked at her; the exact moment when his gaze shifted from some empty bottles on the ground to settle calmly on her – and this, the perfect composure of that movement, she played back endlessly.

But what initially gave her a curious sense of sanctuary gradually became a torment, especially when she started to imagine future encounters that would never happen. She tried to focus on something else, concentrating on a strip of seaweed peeping through the ceiling, seaweed that had very possibly been put there centuries back by people who only spoke Ibicenco and had ridden to town on donkey carts.

This villa was not born a villa. Hundreds of years ago it had been constructed as a *finca*, a typical Spanish country house of uneven, one-meter thick walls, here and there punctuated with

small windows and deep window sills. It had all been preserved, as had been the stone-dust floor encrusted with cobbles and pebbles from the shore, and a ceiling of beams and planks, insulated with seaweed that contributed to the musty, salty smell so characteristic of houses on Ibiza.

Through her high bedroom window she saw the branches of the carob trees, and then the pale emptiness where once had stood an olive tree. For quite some months now she had spent her nights alone, and in the remote mountains of Ibiza this really did mean *alone*, with the nearest neighbours at one and a half kilometres distance. Was there any reason to be scared? It was imperative to fall asleep before this type of musing hijacked her mind.

Most villa owners were wary of strangers. Not so her father. Unlike the Belgian neighbours up ahead who had made their money in the shady world of slot machine concessions he never had an alarm system installed. He figured you'd actually attract unwanted attention. He who projects fearlessness has little to fear, he reckoned. Moreover, what thug in his right mind takes it upon himself to steal from a prominent criminal? Although it did happen. Marianne had been witness to this quite literally when, some five years back, she and her dad had visited a friend of his in Amsterdam. Marianne, her father and Fat Cor had been having breakfast – orange juice, strawberries, salami, she remembered these details well – when four men in balaclavas burst in. Dressed head to toe in black, gloves included. A variant to the so-called rip deal: they knew there was money in the house. In English with heavy Eastern European accents, they ordered Marianne, her father and Fat Cor to lie face down on the ground. They had guns on them, and though Marianne had caught a glimpse of a gun from time to time, like when a colleague of her father's had stretched out an arm and his jacket had fallen open, she had never seen one in somebody's hand. Her father and Cor, eerily quiet on

the ground, were handcuffed. The air was heavy with a sweaty scent of fear as the assailants strode through the house overturning drawers while a third man leaned over Fat Cor with a pointed gun. Like a needle stuck in a groove he kept barking: “Money! Where is the money! The money! The money!”

A fourth man handled Marianne. He ordered her to take off her tights, yellow pantyhose with pink hearts. Until then her father hadn’t said anything, now he started to shout. “Don’t you touch my daughter!” and to Cor, frantically: “Give them what they want! Give them whatever the fuck they want!”

The tights were used to tie her wrists for want of a third set of handcuffs. While this was done Marianne didn’t look at the men but at her father, an instinct from infancy: babies focus less on the calamity than on their parent’s reaction. That is what she remembered most clearly: the fear in his eyes. A fear she had never seen before, especially when she felt something pushing against the back of her head, something cold and hard which she didn’t realize until later, hours later, when the men were long gone with a holdall stuffed with money, had been the barrel of a gun; her father’s mouth shaped like Munch’s existential scream, fear beyond fear. She had never talked to anyone about it. Men robbed of dirty money had no business calling the police. And Cor kept silent in his own environment too, since spreading news that he’d been burgled might be taken as a dangerous sign of weakness. He’d hunt down those responsible with the help of his underground connections and take care of them himself. To compensate Ron and Marianne, he offered them a trip to Thailand, with a Hilton hotel stay thrown in, although this offer had never been taken up. Oddly perhaps, this potentially traumatic event had left no lasting marks, because even now, all alone in the villa, she wasn’t half as afraid of dangerous people – particularly now that the olive tree hadn’t been stolen – as she was of evil spirits. This she had Madresh to thank for.

According to Madresh, the living couldn't let go of Ibiza but neither could the dead, and just like the living the dead on Ibiza were that much crazier than elsewhere. A tricky situation, on a *finca* foundation at least two hundred years old. God only knew how many madmen had died here (rumour had it that in the nineteenth century a couple had locked up their rebellious son in the empty cistern, leaving him to starve; something Marianne could picture graphically: cries lost in the night where even the closest neighbours were way beyond earshot). Whenever she wasn't quite tired enough, the slightest sound could have her bolt upright in bed – night creatures shrieking, even the drop of a pine cone; there you had it, some roving nutcase wanting to haul her into his madness, lying in wait between the carob trees, waiting for a sign of weakness.