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**Fred Viebahn**

**I CAN’T GET NO / ROLLS ROYCE ACTION...**

*(from a memoir in progress)*

I didn’t exactly grow up on them -- not like the way my teenage years were permeated with the music of Josh White, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Bob Dylan and the Beatles.  The Stones grew on me later, late in the sixties when I was in my early twenties and my subconscious was searching for some kind of ersatz for the real thing, psycho-intoxicants to replace the poorly defined revolution we had toyed with, the ’68 turmoil we tossed flowers into before turning our coats and renouncing sit-ins for a more “sensible” strategy: the long march through the institutions.  In 1969, in the wake of my first novel’s modest success (a pacifist rock’n roll band screaming their teen lungs out as they rode the story line on roaring motorcycles), I began to pen articles about the “beat” business, as rock was called in Germany then.  I also began to review vinyls ... but never the Stones.  Then, in the early seventies, I dropped out of the pop and rock scene, keeping not much more than a dust-garnering record collection and my long hair as souvenirs while turning to more serious matters:  I entered the holy grail of high brow culture, making a living by covering the theatre scene for papers and radio.

In the spring of 1973, in an airport lounge, I ran into an old friend: A few years earlier the two of us had published a controversial attack on the corrupt ties between the record industry and public broadcasting, which had provoked some minor scandals and investigations.  She had a reputation as a man-eater that she bolstered herself with boasts about all the guys she’d slept with -- some casually, some to extract information, and occasionally on both accounts at once.  I barely recognized her now; a cosmetic surgeon had downsized her considerable nose, a gift she gave herself for her thirtieth birthday.  I’d read in a trade magazine that she’d recently sold her soul by accepting the position of German media manager at a major record company where she was in charge of publicity for, among others, the Rolling Stones.

 “Sympathy for the Devil indeed,” I teased.

 “Hot stuff, those guys,” she asserted.

 “Hopped in the sack with one of them yet?” I asked.

 “Gimme a break!”  She smiled, then nonchalantly dropped the names of a couple of celebrity clients she’d laid to prove she was still in business.  “Who knows,” she mused.  “After all, the Stones are going on a Deutschland tour this fall...”  Her eyes sparkled.  “Hey -- I'll get you a press ticket wherever you wanna see them, and I can set you up with Mick for an interview if you tell me in time.”

 “I'm no longer into that kind of stuff, you know,” I said.

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A few months later, in the dead of a clear September night, I was rushing home from a cultural reporting assignment.  The autobahn was nearly empty, and I wooshed past the occasional truck at well over a hundred miles an hour; then, north of Frankfurt, my bladder forced me to slow down and pull into the next rest area.

 Just two cars were parked at the lavatory cabin, both late model Rolls Royces with British licence plates.  I pulled alongside and got out, my silver-metallic Ford coupe -- a  rather large automobile by German standards -- dwarfed by their sleek excessiveness.  The interior lights flickered dimly through tinted glass; there was some commotion inside.  I didn't know what to think -- drug lords perhaps?

 As I stepped up to a urinal, two gaunt guys with long hair (although not as long as mine) were shaking off the last drops while chatting in English faster than I could comprehend.  I glanced sideways and the one closest to me grinned back:  Hey man...  Oh shit, that’s Bill Wyman, and there’s Keith Richards zipping his fly -- a journalist’s dream come true!  But they were no longer in my line of work ... or were they?  I feigned coolness while trying to control my palpitations -- hey, nothing to it, most ordinary thing in the world, who cares about the spurious personality worship of the day, cranked-up celebrity cults, it’s art that counts, the great masters nobody would recognize in the streets...  Frowning as if deeply committed to my business at hand, I pretended not to recognize my temporary piss pals while part of my brain frantically sent marching orders to my muscles in a desperate attempt to loosen my vocal cords.

 I left the loo and hit the night air to find Charlie Watts leaning against an open car door, smoking who-knows-what.  A couple of sturdy fellows dressed in black were milling about.  As I stopped to unlock my car, those unmistakable lips pouted from the half-drawn curtains in a rear window.  I nodded to no one in particular and clambered behind the steering wheel, revved the engine and pulled out of the rest area, cursing myself for my timidity.  I don’t remember if my tires actually screeched, but it certainly would have fit the sound in my head.

 The next day I checked up on the Stones concert tour.  I called my friend with the slimmed-down nose, ordered a press ticket and told her about the autobahn encounter.  “How about that interview with Mick?” I asked.

 “Sorry,” she replied. “I can’t believe you fucked up such a golden opportunity.”

“The roadies might have made minced meat out of me.”

“Well, what are you, a reporter or a toad?  No matter -- it’s too late, honey, not a chance in hell; every last minute of the tour has been mapped out.”

“Can you throw in a backstage pass?”  I fantasized crossing my pee companions’ path on the way back to the dressing rooms; they would recognize me and grant me an exclusive interview about ... well, what?  Night driving on the autobahn in an illegal substance haze?

“Backstage pass, no problem,” said my friend, “but I bet the gorillas will keep you out of their faces.”

 “And how are you doing?" I was curious; she hadn’t mentioned a single lay.  “Any chances with one of the guys?”

 “It’s sad,” she sighed.  “Damn groupies, half my age.  I think I'll turn celibate in my twilight years.”

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 A few years later, in 1976, my play *Blood Sisters* was produced by a theatre in southern Germany.  Maria Schell, the Austrian actress of Hollywood fame who happened to be married to my play’s director at the time, sent word that she intended to take the script to California and show it around to the right people -- Richard Brooks or Billy Wilder, I hoped.  From press reports I learned that my little drama’s opening night was planned as a gala extravaganza, to be attended only by folks who arrived via Rolls Royce.  In my left-leaning serious-mindedness I refused to attend and decried this publicity ploy to the magazine *Der Spiegel* as a decadent stunt.  So I missed the premiere of my own play, but I was pretty sure the Rolling Stones wouldn't be there, either, Rolls Royce or not.

 I never heard a word from Hollywood, and I didn’t bring it up with Billy Wilder two decades later when we chatted, in English, about the persistence of our German accents while waiting for the President of the United States to make his entrance into the Blue Room of the White House.  If I had actually heard from Tinseltown back in the seventies, I might have gone out and bought a Rolls myself.  A used one, of course, painted in psychedelic colors like John Lennon’s in the sixties -- that would’ve been something.  I can’t remember the color of the Stones’ automobiles that night at the rest area -- only that they weren't psychedelic.  In all likelihood (at least that’s how I prefer to remember it) they were Silver Shadows, their gorgeous hoods glittering darkly in the dim light spilling from the lavatory.