

THE STAG NIGHT

by

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Based on a short story by Andrea Cacciavillani

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MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN BERLIN

Gabriel, a yoga instructor in his late 20s, is leading his last class of the day, guiding his students as they sit on their mats in a deeply relaxed state of meditation.

After the lesson, Gabriel says goodbye to the receptionist and leaves the yoga studio.

Gabriel cycles home through the busy streets of Prenzlauer Berg. He weaves expertly through the throngs of hipsters, students and baby boomers that crowd the cycle path.

CUT TO

INT. GABRIEL'S APARTMENT - EVENING

A key turns in the lock and Gabriel steps inside the apartment. The phone is ringing in the kitchen but he's in no great hurry to answer it. He drops his gym bag on the floor and pours himself a glass of mineral water from the fridge. After a number of rings, the answering machine picks up.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

You're through to Gabriel. Watch out for the beep.

ANDERS

(voice on the answering machine)

Gabriel, it's Anders. Anders Hassel -- remember me? It took me forever to track you down; I hope I got the right number. Please call me back when you get this: I have a special invitation for you.

Gabriel grabs the phone excitedly.

GABRIEL

Anders? Is it really you? I can't believe it! How are you? (...) Still living in Mainzell-Forst? (...) Hmm. I barely remember what it looks like. Narrow streets... narrow minds. (...) No way! You actually found someone willing to marry you. The poor girl must be crazy!

(laughs)

Ah. Thanks, man, but you can count me out. Beer wenches and drinking songs - not my kind of party!

(CONTINUED)

(laughs)  
How different are we talking? (...)  
You mean like when we were kids?  
(laughs)  
(...) When is it? (...) Mmhh.  
Tomorrow? I'm sorry but I'm going  
to have to decline. I've got  
workshops all day... It's a really  
busy time for me, but.. but thank  
you. It's nice to know you thought  
of me, after all this time. (...)  
(smiles)  
Yeah. I wish you the very best.  
(...) Yeah, sure. We'll stay in  
touch.

CUT TO

INT. YOGA ROOM - EVENING

Sitting cross-legged on the yoga mat in his candle-light  
sanctuary, Gabriel is trying to relax. His meditation is  
disturbed by a gang of kids playing football in the  
courtyard. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

GABRIEL  
(humming a yoga mantra)  
Om.

The ball bounces loudly against his wall.

GABRIEL  
Goddammit!

Annoyed, Gabriel stands up, goes to the window and looks  
out. The kids are mocking the goalkeeper. Gabriel chuckles.  
He grabs his overnight bag and starts to pack a few things.

CUT TO

EXT. TRAIN STATION - EARLY MORNING

As the train pulls into the tiny station, Gabriel alights  
and takes in his surroundings. With a weary sigh, he slings  
his bag over his shoulder and heads along the path towards  
the village.

## EXT. VILLAGE CENTER - EARLY MORNING

The run-down houses are wrapped in an icy mist. A pack of stray dogs is patrolling the streets, looking for something to eat. The VILLAGE DRUNK (50s) with a bottle of beer in his hand stumbles barefoot towards Gabriel.

HERR GLOCKNER

Have you seen them?  
(grabs Gabriel by the arm)  
Have you seen my boots?

GABRIEL

No, I haven't seen your boots, Herr  
Glockner.

HERR GLOCKNER

I've got to go, you see. I've got  
to go hunting.

GABRIEL

(struggles to break free)  
You can go hunting tomorrow. Go  
home now. Go to sleep, have a  
little rest.

HERR GLOCKNER

(baring his teeth in anger)  
I can't go home! You go home.  
You've got no business here.

Fed up, Gabriel breaks free from the drunk man's grasp and distances himself from him.

HERR GLOCKNER

God has forsaken this place.

Rolling his eyes, Gabriel walks off.

CUT TO

## INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

The shop is deserted, with the exception of an OLD WOMAN who is busy laying out her groceries on the counter and regaling FRANK, the proprietor (late 20s) with her entire life story. Bored out of his wits, Frank scans the groceries and stares into the void as the old woman keeps droning on and counting out her pennies.

OLD WOMAN

51... 52... 53... My husband loved  
these pretzels. 54... 55... 56... I  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLD WOMAN (cont'd)  
used to bake them for him myself  
before he passed.

GABRIEL (O.S.)  
And now we know what killed him.

OLD WOMAN  
(confused)  
What?

Frank's eyes light up as he recognises Gabriel.

FRANK  
My God, it's you... half of you!  
Why didn't you tell me you were  
coming?

He makes his way out from behind the counter and gives his  
friend a cheerful hug.

GABRIEL  
I thought I'd surprise you.

FRANK  
Well, you did! You did!

He's so distracted by Gabriel's sudden appearance that he  
hands the old woman's pennies straight back to her.

FRANK  
Come on, Oma! Don't forget your  
change!

He hurriedly escorts the confused old woman to the door and  
shoves her out into the street.

FRANK  
And make sure you bring me that  
pretzel recipe next week.

He grabs an enormous box full of beer bottles, hangs a  
"Closed" sign up in the window and ushers Gabriel outside.

FRANK  
Come on, we can't leave the nurses  
waiting.

GABRIEL  
(perplexed)  
What?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Sexy nurses. From Prague. The highlight of the party.

GABRIEL

(annoyed)

Eh?!

CUT TO

INT. FRANK'S CAR - DAY

Frank drives through narrow alleyways and past half-timbered cottages. Leaving the village behind, they enter the forest.

GABRIEL

So, have you met this girl he's supposed to be marrying?

FRANK

I haven't had the pleasure. She's from out of town. I'm not sure how he met her. He just said he'll introduce us to her tomorrow. If we survive the hangover, that is.

GABRIEL

Ha! No hangover for me. My drinking days are over.

FRANK

You're kidding?

GABRIEL

No. I've embraced a totally organic lifestyle -- I no longer indulge in these barbaric bonding rites.

FRANK

Oh, come on. It's Anders' stag night. Sexy nurses and booze. And juicy steaks - straight from the fire.

GABRIEL

I'm a vegan.

FRANK

Jesus! All right. I'll make chicken salad. OK?

The mist gets thicker and icier as they drive along winding country roads, deeper and deeper into the heart of the forest.

(CONTINUED)

GABRIEL

(looking at the landscape)  
I can't believe he's having a party  
in that place. I remember when he  
told us we weren't allowed to go  
and play there anymore -- you were  
upset, I was relieved!

FRANK

Yeah, coz you were a chubby little  
sissy.

GABRIEL

Fuck you.

CUT TO

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Frank drives into a clearing in the forest, parking the car  
next to Anders' pick-up truck. Anders (late 20s), a  
dark-haired man, fit and handsome, is standing over a tree  
stump, chopping wood with a large ax. As Gabriel and Frank  
walk towards him, he rests the ax over his shoulders and  
greets them with an easy, confident smile.

FRANK

We came early, you know... in case  
you needed some help.

ANDERS

(smirking, pointing to the  
stump)  
You want to take over?

FRANK

Erhm... I can't. It's the.. you  
know. I had a rupture last week,  
and...

Anders and Gabriel exchange a look of mutual understanding.

GABRIEL

(to Anders, accusingly)  
Maybe the nurses can fix him up.

Anders cracks a loud laugh and winks at him. Gabriel's  
expression softens.

FRANK

It was a trick then! There are no  
nurses, are there?

Anders and Gabriel split their sides laughing.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK  
You bastards!

Unseen by the three men, a shadowy figure darts stealthily through the trees.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - DAY

The three friends enter the cottage, which is quite spacious but has long since fallen into disrepair. Anders offloads the chopped wood near the fireplace and starts building the fire. At the other end of the room, Gabriel and Frank glance wearily at the ubiquitous religious memorabilia around them: icons, candles, crucifixes.

FRANK  
(whispering, unheard by  
Anders)  
This place always gave me the  
creeps.

GABRIEL  
Yeah, it's a hellhole. Torquemada  
Home Furnishings. I guess the old  
grandma must be dead now. I wonder  
if Anders' sister still lives here.

FRANK  
Oh, you haven't heard?

GABRIEL  
Heard what?

ANDERS  
(appearing behind them)  
Are you two going to help me or  
what?

Gabriel and Frank both start. Embarrassed, they set about helping Anders to prepare the fire.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Anders is roasting meat on the open fire while Frank is setting up the table and Gabriel is preparing the salad. Suddenly the three friends are startled by a loud screech from the forest.

(CONTINUED)



FRANK  
What the fuck was that?

ANDERS  
Probably a fox, or a bird of prey.

GABRIEL  
(shivering)  
OK. Time for a beer.

Frank looks at Gabriel, surprised. Gabriel opens three bottles, hands two out to his friends and keeps one for himself. He gulps down half the contents in one go.

ANDERS  
(laying an enormous platter of  
meat on the table)  
Hey Frank, do you remember when his  
dog died?

FRANK  
(sitting down to dinner)  
Ha! How could I possibly forget?

GABRIEL  
(struggling nervously with a  
forkful of lettuce)  
Oh. Here we go again. Some things  
never change.

ANDERS  
Yeah, but seriously. You were so  
depressed, you stopped talking for  
an entire week. And then I took you  
up here.

GABRIEL  
The seance. I bet you organised the  
whole thing just to make fun of me.

ANDERS  
Of course I did!

FRANK  
But also to help you feel better.

ANDERS  
We didn't know what else to do!

Gabriel smiles.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

The dearly departed answered  
though.

(knocks on the table)

Woof! Woof! Woof!!

Joyous laughter at the dinner table.

GABRIEL

And your sister, when she found us  
here, with the candles, and the  
ouija board? She was so freaked  
out, she sprayed the entire house  
with holy water!

ANDERS

(turns serious)

That's not funny.

GABRIEL

(surprised)

Sorry man.

Embarrassed, Gabriel opens himself another beer. Frank comes  
to the rescue.

FRANK

I propose a toast!

The three raise their bottles.

FRANK

To all of us, together again after  
so many years of glorious  
accomplishments. And of course to  
Anders and his very last night as a  
free man!

The bottles clash quite cheerfully.

GABRIEL

Cheers!

ANDERS

Prost!

Suddenly, the fire starts to sputter and die, and the room  
is plunged into darkness. Anders gets up and turns on the  
lights. The electrics emit a strange buzz and the lights  
flicker intermittently. The three open more beers and dive  
in.

CUT TO

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

A thick fog, cold and sinister, rises from the ground and wraps the house in its icy tendrils.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Quite drunk, the three friends shiver uncomfortably.

FRANK

It's getting chilly in here. What should we do next?

GABRIEL

Why don't we take the car and head back into town? If we're quick, we can still make last orders.

ANDERS

Oh, come on Gabriel! We're shit-faced. We can't drive back in this fog: it's way too dangerous.

No sooner has he spoken than the lights go out altogether.

FRANK

And now we can't see a fucking thing. What do you suggest? We sit here and freeze our balls off in the dark?

ANDERS

(walking and groping in the dark, grabs a bunch of keys)  
Here they are... I'll run and fetch us some dry wood from the cellar.

FRANK

Alright, I'll give you a hand.  
There's a torch in my car.

Gabriel waits for them, alone in the darkened house. Hesitantly, he reaches for Frank's cigarettes on the table, sparks one up, and takes a long deep drag.

GABRIEL

(exhaling)  
Fuck!

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

From the corridor comes the sound of uneven little footsteps. Gabriel is spooked.

GABRIEL  
Is someone there?

He makes his way with the lighter, illuminating the walls of the house -- the saints and the wooden crucifixes are staring at him in silent, emotionless judgment. Then he hears an inhuman growl.

GABRIEL  
Guys, enough! Quit fucking with me!

Something mechanical makes its way through the darkness. The feeble glow from the lighter reveals a creepy-looking doll, crawling on all fours towards him. Its face is a spiderweb of cracks and someone has driven nails into its eyes.

GABRIEL  
What the hell...

Something seizes him from behind and hurls him roughly to the floor.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Gabriel looks up to see the smirking face of Anders. Beside him, Frank giggles nervously. As Gabriel lies sprawled on the floor, Anders whips out his camera and snaps off a series of flash photos. Gabriel leaps angrily to his feet.

GABRIEL  
You bastard, you almost gave me a heart attack!

ANDERS  
(laughing)  
Guess I'll have to try harder next time.

He takes yet another snapshot causing Gabriel's blood to boil.

GABRIEL  
Give me that thing!

He snatches the camera from Anders' hands.

(CONTINUED)

ANDERS

Hey! Careful with that!

FRANK

Come on, Gabriel, it was just a little scare for old time's sake. Remember the pranks we used to pull?

GABRIEL

Still taking his side, eh, Frank? Can't you see he's a psycho. He hasn't changed one bit.

(to Anders)

Don't you think it's time for you to grow up?

Gabriel places the camera on the table and waves his hand at the army of holy pictures on the wall.

GABRIEL

Why'd you bring us to this psycho convent anyway? I guess mental deficiency runs in the family.

Anders jumps forward and threatens Gabriel with his fists clenched.

ANDERS

(hissing)

One more word and I'll slaughter you like a sow.

Frank steps in cautiously to separate the two.

FRANK

Guys, relax! This is supposed to be a celebration. We're tired, we're all a bit drunk... Why don't we just cool off for five minutes.

(to Anders)

Here, have one of my cigarettes... or ten. Go outside, get your head right. We're all friends here.

Anders reluctantly obeys and walks off.

CUT TO

## INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Gabriel holds the torch while Frank tries to get the fire started, then he points the beam of light to a photograph of a beautiful but sad-looking teenage girl. Frank looks at him nervously. The fire is coming back to life.

GABRIEL

I remember their crazy Jesus freak parents, sending the poor girl out here as a punishment or something. I mean, she was so special, she probably thought it was an Immaculate Conception. Did they ever find out who did it?

FRANK

Not that I know of -- but the whole village was gossiping about it. Anders suspected a few boys from school -- even one of the teachers. But he had no proof. And then four years later, my father was called up here from the hospital. Turns out Hanna was pregnant again, but this time there was something wrong with the baby. My father had to perform an emergency abortion in front of her 4-year old daughter.

GABRIEL

Jesus.

FRANK

It was like in the Dark Ages, you know? No medical files, not a single scan in the house. Just the old grandma mumbling something from the Bible.

GABRIEL

Did Hanna... ?

FRANK

No, she survived. But maybe it would have been better if she had died.

GABRIEL

What do you mean?

The fire goes out suddenly. Drafts of icy wind. Something scurries across the room. Gabriel shines the torch after it.

(CONTINUED)

GABRIEL  
Ugh, I hate rats!

FRANK  
The fire's out again.

GABRIEL  
I'll see if I can find an old chair  
or something.

FRANK  
Hurry up. I can see my own breath  
in front of me.

Gabriel makes his way out with the torch.

CUT TO

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Gabriel climbs the creaky old staircase to the attic.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE ATTIC - NIGHT

The torch light reveals an attic full of dusty boxes and old furniture. Gabriel grabs a chair. Suddenly the attic door slams shut behind. There is the sound of a hammer and nails on the other side.

GABRIEL  
Anders, it's enough! It's not funny  
anymore!

He tries in vain to force the door. He hears a bloodcurdling scream. Gabriel puts a strong shoulder to door, but his escape is blocked and the torch falls. Bending down to pick it up, he realises he is not alone. A few yards away, an inhumanly pale and emaciated little girl is staring at him, transfixed.

GABRIEL  
Who are you? How did you get up  
here?

GHOST GIRL  
(very still)  
But I'm thirsty.

Someone is fixing new nails to the door. Gabriel is momentarily distracted. When he looks back, the child has vanished. Now he's really terrified. An invisible force

(CONTINUED)

snatches the torch from his hands. It crashes against the wall and breaks into a thousand pieces. In the total darkness, all that can be heard is the shortness of Gabriel's breath.

FRANK  
(voice from the floor below)  
Gabriel, everything okay?

The attic window suddenly flies open, revealing a weak beam of moonlight.

FRANK  
(voice from the floor below)  
Come on, I'm freezing!

Gabriel leans from the window, ready to jump, but he realises it's too high: the fall would kill him.

There is a thunderous sound of broken glass from downstairs.

GABRIEL  
(worried)  
Frank?? Frank!!

FRANK  
(yelling)  
Get out of there! Run!

Gabriel rummages among the boxes and finds a sturdy beam of wood. Using it as a battering ram, he charges the door repeatedly with all his might. He finally manages to break through the door, but injures himself in the process and passes out from the pain.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Slowly recovering his wits, Gabriel finds himself lying face down on the floor. He sees his shirt is torn at the shoulder. He sees the blood flowing copiously from the wound on his arm. He sees... the little girl greedily sucking at his blood. The creature lets out a gurgle of pleasure and her eyes roll back in her head. With a desperate tug, Gabriel manages to pull himself free and heads for the stairs.

GHOST GIRL  
(surprised)  
But I'm thirsty... I'm thirsty!

Gabriel stumbles and falls, his ankle dislocated, then gets up and runs limping into the living room.

(CONTINUED)



CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The floor is covered with glass and broken dishes. Even the holy pictures, icons and crucifixes have fallen to the ground. Frank is sitting with his back to the fireplace, where the fire is now blazing brightly.

GABRIEL  
(in a whisper, as he  
approaches his friend)  
Frank... Are you all right? Where's  
Anders?

The light of the fire reveals a huge shard of broken glass jammed into Frank's mouth. From the horrified expression on his face, it's apparent that he died while trying to scream.

GABRIEL  
(crying)  
Nooo...

Summoning the last of his strength, Gabriel searches through his dead friend's pockets for his car keys and hurries out of the infernal house.

CUT TO

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Gabriel looks around the clearing in a panic. There's no sign of Anders anywhere.

GABRIEL  
(yelling)  
Anders?

He notices that Anders' pick-up truck is missing. A set of fresh tire tracks testify to his recent departure. Struggling to control his trembling, Gabriel rushes over to Frank's car, jumps in, starts the engine and tears away.

CUT TO

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Gabriel hurtles toward salvation along the dimly lit country road. Suddenly, he senses a presence behind him and glances in the rear-view mirror. The ghost girl is reaching for him from the back seat.

(CONTINUED)

GHOST GIRL  
But I'm thirsty...

Before Gabriel can react, a pair of headlights pierce the fog ahead of him. Anders' pick-up truck is parked right in the middle of the road with its high beams on. Blinded, Gabriel instinctively jerks the steering wheel to the left to avoid a collision and the car careers off the road and smashes into a tree.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A dirty and malnourished child tries to force a tap that refuses to release any water. She approaches her GRANDMOTHER (90s), an ancient woman with blind, milky eyes, who's too busy fumbling with her rosary beads and mumbling Hail Marys under her breath to take any notice of her.

LITTLE GIRL  
Nana? I'm thirsty...

No answer.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE DINING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The little girl goes over to her mother HANNA (16), who is nestled in a rocking chair, cradling an unidentifiable bundle to her chest. A strand of prematurely grey hair falls across her eyes.

LITTLE GIRL  
But I'm thirsty...

No reaction. The little girl grabs the hem of her mother's nightgown.

LITTLE GIRL  
Mama, I'm thirsty... Mama, please!

The child's movement reveals the identity of the mysterious bundle as a doll with a blue dress. Dismayed, the little girl reaches her hand toward the doll.

LITTLE GIRL  
Mama, I beg you...

HANNA  
(jumping forward, eyes  
consumed with madness and  
rage)

(CONTINUED)

You mustn't touch!  
(gently, addressed to doll)  
Don't worry, my love. No one will hurt you.  
(singing)  
When it's time to go to sleep - do you know what the well-behaved children do? - they put down their toys and they go to their mama - who helps them to brush their teeth...

The little girl breaks into tears.

LITTLE GIRL  
Mama, please!!

She grabs the doll and tries to push it away from Hanna. The doll falls on the floor and its porcelain face smashes into pieces. Hanna lets out a piercing shriek. Enraged, she grabs the little girl by the arm and forcefully drags her up the stairs, pushing her into the attic room and slamming the door in her face.

CUT TO

INT. COTTAGE ATTIC - DAY (FLASHBACK)

There is the sound of a hammer and nails from the corridor. The little girl approaches the door and tries to open it, but finds it locked.

LITTLE GIRL  
Mama, let me out!

On the other side of the wall, her mother is nailing a wooden board across the door.

HANNA  
(singing)  
And you my child - who doesn't want to sleep - no more tantrums - or you will be in trouble.

The little girl beats her fists against the door.

LITTLE GIRL  
Mama, help! Help me, Mama, I'm begging you!

The girl runs to the window and can barely open it with her injured hands.

(CONTINUED)

LITTLE GIRL

Help!

(she cries again)

The house is isolated. Only the birds reply to her desperate appeal. Oblivious to the cries of her daughter, Hanna collapses to the ground and releases the hammer.

HANNA

(rocking back and forth,  
singing)

You already make your mom suffer so  
much - she might think you don't  
love her.

The little girl climbs the ledge and looks down, sobbing:  
her face a mask of terror and despair.

HANNA

(staring at a point in space,  
singing)

Stop the games and run to Mama -  
with a big kiss to let her know  
(there is a dull thud)  
that you love her and that you want  
to sleep... that you love her and  
that you want to sleep.

The little girl's body lies motionless in the garden.

CUT TO

EXT. NARROW COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Frank's car has crashed into a tree and is surrounded by a dense cloud of white steam. Gabriel's arm dangles helplessly from the open door. A few metres away, Anders is enjoying the show and takes photo after photo after photo.

GABRIEL

(struggling to breathe)

Why? Why Frank? Why me?

ANDERS

(surprised, big smile on his  
face)

Why not?

Gabriel is shocked. The ghost girl crawls on top of him. She lets out a joyous screech.

CUT TO

## INT. PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC - DAY

A bare and slightly sad-looking room. Anders frames his sister's face with a white bridal veil. Hanna stares into space and doesn't seem to notice the presence of her visitor.

ANDERS

(pulls out a mirror)  
Look, you're so beautiful. You'll see, we'll get you out of here and you will be my bride. We will be happy as we used to be. I will never leave you alone again. I promise! And our girl... I'll feed her -- a father provides. Those stupid little bastards... do you remember how they used to make fun of you?

(chuckling hysterically)  
Well, they're not laughing now!!

Hanna doesn't respond. Her thoughts are traveling in an inaccessible dimension. Someone knocks gently on the door and enters.

NURSE

Mr. Hassel, visiting hours are over. The patients need their rest.

Anders reluctantly leaves.

CUT TO

## INT. COTTAGE BEDROOM - EVENING

Humming Hanna's lullaby to himself, Anders opens the beside table, producing an old group photo of the school boys in sportswear. He's in the middle of the group -- Gabriel and Frank are there too. Two other faces have been crossed out with a marker. Anders crosses out Gabriel and Frank's faces and takes a good look at the updated photo. Then he picks up the phone and dials a number.

ANDERS

Hello Bruno! Long time no see!  
(...) Ahahah. Yeah. Guess what?!  
I'm getting married!

Behind him, the ghost girl emerges eerily from the darkness.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

21.

THE END