

# Revolutionary act

By Katy Mahood

I answer yes to everything, like Angelo taught me.

'Gate number seven,' the woman says with a smile that's mostly lipstick.

The departures lounge is empty except for a businessman in the corner, staring with determination at the small screen in his hand. Anna isn't here. In the toilet, I sit with my head between my knees until the black dots in my vision have faded.

The burger bar doesn't sell burgers.

'It's an historic name,' says the server.

I eat the rehydrated patty and try to recall the taste of meat.

Angelo used to make steaks, in the flat in Hillingdon. Shallow fried, bloody in the middle, black peppercorn sauce. We'd eat them on the patio and watch the planes flying low overhead. It's food for the brain, he'd say. That's how the idea arrived: over rib-eye in the garden as a 747 rumbled by.

'It's simple,' I told him. 'It's the one place that guards would never think to look.'

Angelo chewed his steak. He was a revolutionary of few words.

One morning six months later, the preparation was done.

'It's ready,' I told him when I came out of the bathroom.

'You're sure?'

'Just like you planned,' I said. 'The mother of all revolutionary acts.'

In the days that followed, Angelo began to talk and didn't stop. Sometimes the fire in his belly spilled over to his fists and that was just a thing I had to accept. Once he cried afterwards, tracing the blue-black line along my cheek.

'It's so beautiful what you're doing. Can't you see how it makes me wild?'

I bit his finger gently. 'My wild, wild one,' I said.

Inside of me, momentum gathered.

He gave me the ticket on a Tuesday afternoon. Paper, so I couldn't be traced.

I blinked, one-two. 'It says Wednesday?'

He nodded. 'Your time has come.'

The note I slid that evening into the gap between crooked bark of Anna's tree had one word. *Tomorrow*.

Twelve hours later, at the airport, Angelo kissed me for the last time.

'Your name will live forever,' he said. The faded bruise on my cheek throbbed under his thumb. He opened the glove compartment, where the detonator lay on a half-eaten protein ration.

'Such genius,' he said. 'To use yourself as a casing.'

It had taken dedication to persuade him. Eventually, he'd believed he could implant explosives deep inside me; though his lust perhaps had overcast his judgement.

'I go to him with honour,' I said as I stepped out of the car.

He blessed me in the old and formal way. 'Until his order is restored.'

In the burgerless burger bar I put the patty aside. Like everything I've eaten for the past six weeks it offers no joy. The sickness has been bad. An abreaction, I told Angelo, and he never questioned me. Too aglow with anticipated glory. He didn't notice my rhythm was disrupted, nor the gradual straining of my clothes. Five years since that offer of a lift, the blow to the head, the blindfolded journey. After so many lessons in correction, he'd completed his mission to make me a martyr. His pride had made him sloppy.

I hear someone call my name. Anna is walking towards me, pulling a trundle case. She holds out a phone and presses the screen. My mother's voice is in my ear.

'Mum?'

A ragged intake of breath.

'I'm coming home.'

Through the window of the plane, I look at England one last time. Small green patches are swallowed by cloud as we rise. At cruising altitude, I unclip my belt.

I rest my hand against the small ledge of my belly. I think of the wisp of new life unfurling inside me and how freedom is nearer with each minute that passes. I think of Angelo 36,000 feet below, and the phoney detonator in his hand, and its useless buttons.

---

**Revolutionary act by Katy Mahood © 2022**

*Katy Mahood teaches creative writing at the University of the West of England. Her debut novel, *Entanglement*, was published in 2018 by the Borough Press.*