

## **A Flash of Blue Light**

By Michel Faber

“I was abducted by aliens,” the woman with the foreign accent told the policeman at the desk.

“Raped?” he suggested hopefully, not because he was a prurient man but because he was keen to offload her onto a female colleague if possible.

“No,” the woman said, narrowing her eyes. “They didn’t have... the equipment.”

Suppressing a yawn, the officer checked the time on his computer screen. It was 3.22. In the morning. There was only one WPC at the station and she was having a kip in the strip search room.

“OK,” he said. “What’s your full name, age, and address, please?”

“My name is Jutta Mollo,” the woman replied calmly. “I am 37. I live at Jahnstrasse 19/A, 3015 Wennigsen 5, near Hanover, Germany.”

The policeman had to get Mrs Mollo to spell out much of this information, since he was Huddersfield-born and his office was in Wombwell, South Yorkshire, where Germans were not abundant.

“What are you doing so far from home?” he enquired.

Ms Mollo ran a dainty – if somewhat grubby – hand through her stylish hairdo. Small fragments of leaf and dandelion fluttered down. “It’s not so far,” she said.

“Compared to last week, when I was a thousand light-years from Earth, I’m very close to Hanover.”

“Still...” said the policeman wearily, waving his hand toward the remaining few

hundred miles.

“If you think about it,” the woman persisted, “the aliens’ navigational technology is highly efficient. Out of all the planets in this galaxy, they returned me not just to Earth, but even to Europe.”

“England is not Europe,” said the policeman.

“Yes, we know you don’t think so, but, as a matter of fact…”

“Madam,” the policeman sighed. “What’s your problem, *really?*”

A flinty glint appeared in Ms Mollo’s blue-grey eyes. “I was abducted by aliens. Abduction is a crime,” she reminded the officer.

“We’ve a limited jurisdiction here,” he explained, deadpan. “We can’t go chasing criminals far afield. Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester maybe. Not other solar systems.”

The woman treated his note of flippancy with the severity it deserved.

“My children,” she said, “are still on the aliens’ planet. They returned *me*, but kept them.”

“Now why do you think they did that?”

“They said the children were fresher and more compact. Little Rosi is particularly small.”

The officer examined Mrs Mollo’s expression for authenticating signs of emotion. There were none.

“Aside from your word,” he said, “do you have any proof of any of this?”

She sighed. “I can see I was foolish not to tear off a large hunk of the aliens’ spacecraft and conceal it in my underwear. However, this –” (she handed him a slip of paper) “– is the telephone number of my husband in Wennigsen. He will confirm that I disappeared in a flash of blue light at 11.45pm last Wednesday.”

The policeman dialled the number, reasoning that at half past three in the morning it wouldn’t cost too much. The phone was picked up instantly at the other end. A strained,

breathless male voice said, "Ja? Mit Dieter Mollo."

"It's PC Broadbent here, at the constabulary in Wombwell, Yorkshire. It's in connection with your wife and children."

"I vill pay anysing what you ask," volunteered Mr Mollo. "Please do mein femmily no harm."

Broadbent covered the mouthpiece with his hand and looked over to Mrs Mollo.

"Your husband's English is nowhere near as good as yours," he observed.

"Yes," she agreed. "I do a lot of travelling. He is a homemaker."

PC Broadbent asked Mr Mollo a few questions, then thanked him for his assistance and put the phone down.

"A flash of blue light," he recapped. "Or, as your husband put it, a big blue flesh. Any problems in the marriage?"

"At this moment, yes," said Mrs Mollo. "Our children are in the custody of aliens."

"Can you describe them?"

"Rosi is four years old and beautiful, with blonde hair like the fleece of a sheep. Irmin is two and a half years old and not so beautiful, quite average I would say, with a round face and short hair like a mouse. A sort of greyish-brown. Brownish-grey."

"I meant the aliens, actually."

"Very short and...stocky. Like Italians. Italians from the south, not the north. Peasant Italians."

"I've never been to Italy," said Broadbent. "The wife is always at me to go."

"It's worth the trouble, overall," said Mrs Mollo. "Now, are you going to help me?"

It was midsummer, so dawn was underway by the time Frau Mollo and the female police officer arrived at Wombwell Woods. The car park at the Woodhead Lane entrance

was deserted. The two women – both approximately the same height, age and build – got out of the police vehicle and continued on foot. WPC Duffy did not advance with a gun held steady in her upraised hand, or with her shoulders hunched in readiness for combat. She walked in a leisurely fashion, keeping her eyes on the path ahead, alert not for clues but for dog turds. The sunrise was elegant and the scenery well-designed. There were thickets of attractively speckled trees, stretches of pure blue water, discreet signs imploring people not to litter, and colourful strews of garbage. All the usual features of a semi-natural municipal green space, except for the nature-loving citizens and their dogs, who were still asleep in the town.

“Where now?” said WPC Duffy.

“It was a picnic area, I think.”

As they walked, Constable Duffy brought her counselling skills into play.

“The pressures of daily life can sometimes push us to make impulsive decisions,” she remarked. “It all gets too much.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Mrs Mollo. “I hope I will not keep you too long on this search. But it was pitch-dark when I arrived and everything looks different now.”

“Yes, things can look very different in the clear light of day,” said WPC Duffy, doing her best to inject each word with extra philosophical nuance.

“Like those trees,” said Mrs Mollo. “I thought there were thousands of them, with no space in between. They’re really quite sparse.”

They pressed on. A large bird flew overhead, which made the German woman flinch. WPC Duffy decided that a less allusive, more direct approach might work best.

“Have you ever thought of running away from your husband?”

Mrs Mollo ignored the question. “I think it was a little further over there.”

“Just taking the children and... disappearing?”

“Wennigsen has a very good school. Rosi is happy there and I’m sure that when

the time comes, Irmin will be treated with the patience he needs.” Mrs Mollo swallowed hard and her eyes glimmered.

“It’s quite common for a woman to be persuaded to join her lover in another country,” suggested Constable Duffy gently, “only to find out when she gets there that he’s married. And perhaps even a criminal. You’d be surprised how often that happens.”

“We turn left here, I think.”

“Sex is a powerful motivation for all of us.”

“I recognise those wooden tables.”

They walked into the clearing designated for picnics. The benches and tables, constructed of simple planks bolted together, glowed like Stonehenge in the dawn light. The ground, an expanse of grass – almost lawn – was dotted with dandelions. It was also freshly scorched with a huge, circular brand where the green grass had turned black.

Mrs Mollo stepped inside the ring and positioned herself in the centre. She looked up at the empty sky.

“You must help me,” she said. “You cannot help me.”

Constable Duffy produced her police notebook, checked the exact time, and wrote a few lines. She was ready to ask some more questions now; different questions. She squinted into the brilliance of the rising sun as the silhouette of a woman swayed from side to side.

“We can arrange to get you back home. To Germany. Probably,” she said.

But Mrs Mollo was lost in her own world.

**Copyright © 2010, Michel Faber. All rights reserved.**

*Supported through the Scottish Government’s Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund.*