

## The Shift

The odd conglomeration of people stood forlornly at the edge of an enormous, empty field. Early that morning it had been covered in lush, thick clumps of Rhubarb, proudly standing, their huge, shiny leaves waving in the breeze, like a gigantic, floating green carpet. Now it had been stripped, the workforce had fulfilled it's quota. They had pulled, trimmed, bundled, carried and loaded from 6 am - 6 pm, when normally, a lorry would take them to the nearest railway-station 15 miles away. They had been told the lorry had broken down <sup>now</sup> and they were left standing. Their guard, a brutal peasant in his brown Nazi uniform, had proudly ridden off on his motor-bike. Why ~~to~~ should he care, they were all what the 'Third Reich' called (Untermenschen (subhumans), a motley crowd of about 50 people of all ages, consisting of prostitutes, homosexuals, gipsies and jews of course. They were doing Zwangsarbeit (forced labour) for various reasons, they had offended against The Third Reich, some because they had refused to work in munition-factories. It was ironic, as now they were aiding that industry, or so the rumour went, by working on Rhubarb fields, the acid was used for processing some kind of munition. Their black stained hands certainly proved that Rhubarb was full of acid. They all looked dishevelled, tired and very dirty, it had been raining all morning and their clothes felt clammy, there was

no shelter or facilities of any kind on the field. Amongst them were two young girls, they stood apart from the arguing crowd and now decided to make a quick get-away to the nearest main road in the hope of hitching a lift. Now they were waiting by the side of the empty road wondering what their chances were, especially the way they were looking, dirty, tanned, their black hair ~~a~~ uncombed, not at all distinguishable from gypsies that had travelled for weeks. They were tired enough to sleep standing up, but in spite of that, they were having a good giggle about the day's big triumph at having foiled the guard at his favourite, depraved spot. As usual, they had asked him to be excused, they always went together into the bushes, when the call of nature demanded it. The guard had decided, that they in particular, had to be watched and there he always stood, making obscene remarks in his lowgerman dialect they hardly understood, whilst the girls relieved themselves. Distressed at this daily humiliation, one of them had confided in her father, he was conversant with the patois and knew the ~~p~~ men who spoke it well. His advice was to approach the guard in his own obscene language, it would cure his pleasure in watching ~~at~~ them. He taught them a few choice words, that ~~the~~ day they had used them when asking the guard to be excused. It had worked, he was so shocked and disgusted, he had left them alone. The girls had been friends since the age of

six when they had started school, both had left ~~the same~~ school together and had been accepted to train ~~at~~ the same famous fashion-house, Margot as a designer in Millinery, Ingrid had gone into dress-designing. Since the dismissal of all Jews, they had been unemployed but had refused to be reemployed to work in a factory that, although not officially, manufactured ammunitions, ~~+~~ that is how they now found themselves in this hopeless predicament. Their parents would worry if they weren't home at the usual time by 8 pm. So far no vehicle had passed them. Suddenly they saw it in the distance, a lorry, they started waving frantically, to their amazement it stopped. The driver and his mate appraised them critically: "What do you want?". They laughed when told about the breakdown of the transport. "Please anywhere near a station, or Hamburg, if you are going 'back way'." "Hop in, up there". They indicated to a shelf above their seats. Gratefully the girls climbed up, to their astonishment they found themselves in what looked like a bed. Wonderful, just what they needed, they let their tired limbs luxuriate amongst the cushions and soon dozed off. They woke with a jerk, surely they could not have reached Hamburg yet, glancing out of the window they found that they had stopped in the middle of Nowhere. Before they could gather their wits the two men were on top of them, clanking and pulling at their clothes, the girls screamed in terror and shouted,

"Please don't touch us we are Jewish".  
They knew that that declaration was worse than confessing to suffering from gonorrhoea. The fellows stopped abruptly and looked at the girls puzzled and confused.

"We thought you was from gypsies what was you doing out in the country looking like that"?

They explained their plight hoping it would change the men's intent. It did, silently they drove towards Hamburg. As they stopped near the docks, they were told to wait. They were outside a Frankfurter Take Away. "Guess they are hungry, do you think we should get away whilst we can". However, before they had a chance, the fellows appeared presenting them with delicious Sausages in crusty rolls. "Here you are, you girls must be starving as well as <sup>tired</sup> hungry". The girls were amazed at the sudden kindness and gentle talk of the men.

"This is where we have to leave you, the underground is just over there, hope you get home alright, here take this" To their astonishment money was pressed into their hands for their fare. They accepted gratefully, they had been worried whether they had enough money between them.

As they trundled homeward, relieved + tired, they reflected that sometimes being Jewish is ~~an~~ <sup>can be an</sup> advantage.