

## A FATEFUL DAY.

From her vantage point next to the tea urn, Ethel had an unrestricted view over the whole field. She missed nothing – watching with interest the little boy being pulled screaming by his red-faced mother from the corner where he had just been enjoying a fight with his best friend, until he had accidentally punched Kev too hard in the face and his tooth had come out. Kev hadn't minded too much – it was already loose, but his mum had gone bananas, and screeched at them both, using very bad words. Ethel smiled, remembering Kev's grandfather doing similar damage to her brother many years ago. Her eyes wandered over to the little girl whose normally plain face had been transformed into that of a magnificent tiger. Her friend had a beautiful blue and black butterfly on her face, and they were smiling at each other, entranced by what they saw. Ethel could imagine the scene at bath time that evening – 'no no Mummy, please don't wash my face tonight!'

A few customers came and Ethel gave them cups of tea. The music had started up again, and she sat, enjoying some well-remembered Beatles songs. She hummed along, tapping her foot, enjoying the dancing exhibition by a few agile members of the audience. The field was filling up – she and her colleagues encouraged passers-by to sample some of the cakes, and trade was brisk. Men were wandering around eating delicious smelling burgers, and several people were eating ice cream or strawberries. Groups were forming and reforming, and there was a happy and relaxed feel to the proceedings. The sun was shining, and all was well. Ethel wriggled her toes, and decided it was time for a wander. Pauline replaced her at the urns, and Ethel sallied forth. There was now a different music group, and the easy-going style of the previous music changed – this was louder and more aggressive to her ears, and so she turned away from the stage area and walked towards the face painting tent. As she turned, she bumped into someone – she just caught a glimpse of the young man's face as they both apologised, and then he looked down and moved away. Despite this very brief encounter, she was struck by his thin pale face and the scared look in his eyes. She turned to see where he had gone, but he had already disappeared.

'Ethel, there you are!' said her friend Joan, catching her elbow, 'come and have an ice cream!'

The two friends wandered off, content in each other's company, and after some time Ethel returned to her tea urns. There were fewer people about now, and it was agreed that the tea tent should be closed. As she wrapped up some unused cake, she suddenly remembered her encounter with the 'Sad Man' as she had described him to Joan. She looked up, and saw him sitting quietly on a bench in the opposite corner of the field. He had looked so thin that she thought she would take him some cake before she went home, so she made up a small parcel, and walked over to him.

He didn't look up as she approached, so she thought he was asleep.

'Hello again' she said. 'I've brought you some cake to take home.'

He didn't respond, so she moved closer and put the parcel on the bench next to him. She must have caught his arm, as he slowly slipped over onto the bench away from her, and lay still. Her heart gave a sudden jolt, and she gently reached out to touch his cheek. It was cold, and then to her horror she saw a steadily growing pool of blood coming from under his body, dripping off the bench onto the ground, and she realised the young man was dead.

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Ladislau was having a bad day. He had been out with friends the night before, returning to his room in the early hours. His phone woke him at 7 a.m., and his boss asked him to do an extra shift as Joe was off. Despite his hangover, he agreed, as he knew that to refuse could have unpleasant repercussions. When he turned up to work, he was told he would be on the mobile burger bar, doing kebabs. He hated kebabs – he loathed them, they were an insult to his culinary skills, and he avoided doing them as much as possible. At least he wasn't driving – Mike was at the wheel, and the two giggly girls Trish and Sandy made up the team. They drove to the village where they were to provide hot food at a fete. The field was quite large, and they were soon in position, with their tarpaulin extension set up and the barbecue lit. Sausages, burgers, and the wretched kebabs were on the menu, along with buttered baps, and lurid coloured sauces in plastic squeeze bottles.

'Come on, Ladi,' said Mike, 'For goodness sake, take that scowl off your face or you'll frighten the customers away!

He hated being called Ladi – and he scowled even more as he started putting the despised kebabs together. The wooden skewers were cheap, and splintered easily, so he had to be careful. He had perfected a way of preparing kebabs more quickly by piercing the ingredients with his own metal skewer first, and then finishing the job with a wooden one. Ladislau comforted himself with the thought that he only had to accept six more deliveries, and then he would have made enough for him to carry out the next part of his plan, and he would be throwing in this job. The next delivery was expected in three days, and he still had one more detail to confirm. So as he worked with his hands, he concentrated on the task ahead.

Before long, he had prepared enough kebabs to take a break. He wandered round the field, marvelling at the traditions of the English. It was a fine day, but nothing would have been different even if the rain had been pouring down. The ubiquitous tea tent, ice cream and strawberries, live music, face painting, stalls selling all kinds of crafts, and even a steam engine giving rides to children, but no dog show. Ladislau's mood lightened as he strolled towards the pub, where he planned to have a beer before the fete opened.

Two hours later, after cooking and serving more burgers and kebabs than he thought possible, demand slackened, and he took another break. He stood at a corner of the field, eating an ice cream, and watching the proceedings. Suddenly he saw a face he recognised, and he swore out loud. He moved quickly out of sight, and followed the progress of a pale young man who was making his way across the field towards a bench. When he was sitting down, Ladislau joined him.

"Hello Mirca" he said softly.

Mirca turned to look at him. "Where is my sister?" he whispered.

Ladislau shrugged. "She came, she found work, I have not seen her since. What happens to people after they have arrived is not my concern"

"My mother has not heard from her since she left home – and we were told she had died. Is that true?"

Ladislau forced himself to forget the sickening scene before his eyes as he had opened the secret compartment in the back of the lorry, and seen the bodies of the women and young

girls who had been overcome by the heat on that dreadful day when the lorry had broken down.

“I tell you again – when they are here, I ---“

Mirca interrupted him – “You are lying! I shall tell the police about her, and all the other missing girls ---“

“You can prove nothing – nothing!”

“I have proof! Photographs of the lorry, the driver, the ferry boat – I followed, you see!

Ladislau didn't even think. His hand automatically pushed the sharp skewer through Mirca's thin shirt deep into his chest, and he twisted it to make sure it was a fatal blow. Mirca's face contorted into a horrible grimace, Ladislau clamped his other hand over Mirca's mouth to stop any noise, and Mirca's hand lifted slightly as if to ward off his assailant. His face and body slackened, and he was still. Ladislau withdrew the skewer, made sure Mirca was still in a sitting position, and looked around. Nobody was paying attention to the bench or the two young men seated on it. So, he calmly walked back to the burger bar, and prepared some more kebabs.

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Ethel soon recovered after her horrific discovery – she retold the story many times, and if it got embellished over the years, nobody pointed it out to her.

Ladislau was never found – but he left his skewer behind, and it continued to be used for years.

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