

**Junior Short Story Category – 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize 2020**

**FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BOLD**

**By Alice Bouchier**

Fortune favours the bold. At least, that's what Mum always said. Before the Nazis took her. Like they're taking me.

My face hit the mud with a splat, spraying molecules of dirt onto the people next to me. "Get up," the soldier said roughly, seizing my plait and dragging me to my feet, completely ignoring the fact that he was the one who had pushed me over in the first place. The boy next to me glared at him and opened his mouth. "Don't do it," I muttered. "It's not worth it."

We had been marching like this for I don't know how long, days or maybe weeks, just putting one foot in front of the other. The soldiers had seized me on my way to school, manhandling me into a lorry filled with people. When I asked the boy next to me why I had been taken, he replied grimly, "Because you're Jewish,"

I was shocked. The reason why my mother had been taken by the Nazis, the reason why my father had been killed by them, the reason why I had spent months in the darkest depths of

agonizing grief and despair was because of what my family believed? Where was the justice in that?

I was still mulling over the unfairness of it all when I was shoved in the back, again. I sprawled on the ground. The sharp heel of a soldier's boot ground into the back of my hand. It was *excruciating*. Then the pressure eased, and I could begin to stand up.

"In the field," the man ordered. I had been so occupied in my own thoughts I hadn't noticed that the sky was turning dim. This field must be where we would spend the night. Mindlessly, I trudged into the field, the guards following. As I sank down onto the soft grass, every pain, every sorrow, every struggle from the past six months welled up inside me and I cried.

I cried and cried and cried and cried and cried. I cried until the tears wouldn't run any more. I cried until my eyes were red and puffy. "Ursula?" a voice said softly. "Ursula, I know you say no every night, but we're running out of time. If we're going to escape, it needs to be tonight.

Those words from so long ago came back to me now. "Remember, Ursula, fortune favours the bold." My mother's soft voice, speaking those words, filling them with love, came back to me. "Tonight," I said, barely believing myself. "We'll do it tonight."

The moon had risen, a pale, thin crescent of cream, like a someone had carved a slice of wax and placed it in the sky. Peter nudged me, but there was no need. I had been awake for hours. As quietly as we could, we rose and crawled towards the tall hedge that marked the boundary of the field. Silence was imperative: the only cover in the field was a solitary, ancient oak tree that was about fifty metres away. Slowly, slowly, painfully slowly, we crawled towards the oak tree.

We were only about ten metres away from it when the guard on watch stood, turning in our direction and flicking on his torch. The beam played on the grass near me, and all I could do was press my face into the cool earth and hope against hope that I wouldn't be spotted.

I was petrified. Fear sent its icy fingers in cold rushes down my spine. But finally, finally, the guard turned the torch off. We waited for what seemed like an age, but was really only about two minutes, before working up the courage to crawl towards the hedge.

We walked for a long time that night. We trudged through fields, some with fine, sandy soil, and others which were like walking through a pit of clay, dim, foreboding woods, beside

roads where we would hide in ditches if anyone drove past and through boggy marshes. The exhaustion crept up on me until my mind was blank of anything except the thought of food, water and rest.

When dawn came, we stopped in a clearing, beside a small stream. Peter tilted his head back, so that the rosy light shone on his face. “Freedom,” he said. “We’re free at last!” I knelt to drink from the brook. But then I heard a faint rustling in the bushes, like a person was forcing their way through them. “Peter,” I said urgently, my eyes wide with fear. “Peter, there’s someone here.”

The sound grew louder and louder until an elderly woman with a gingham apron wrapped around her matronly figure blustered into the clearing. “Oh, you poor, poor children!” she cried. We looked a fright, covered in mud, clay and blood (some ours, some not). “Come, I will give you food and beds. My family and I will hide you.” And she did, until the war was over. She was my second mother, who almost replaced the one I had lost.