

Laugh to keep from crying

A short story

by

Stella Jansen

“Anna, dear, you look good,” Sarah said flopping on a chair, “Look who’s here...hey, Arthur, you old fart. Hahaha! No, I don’t need your insults, stay away from me, get away! Oh Anna, before I forget, let me show you the picture.”

Sarah rummages in her bag. “Here they are! How about that!?” she yells triumphantly, “Haha! Yes, it’s me. Eighty-two and going strong! Do you like my bikini? Don’t I look great? A guy offered money for this picture.”

“Sarah, how could you?” A mocking sneer from one of the gang.

Shoulders stooped but slim, tottering on high-heeled shoes, ornaments and ball-point pens sticking through her thick, blazing blond hair, grey-green eyes, wide apart, in a high cheekboned face, in perpetual amazement with the world.

“I can do it,” she says emphatically, hands on hips, eye blazing furious Gypsy fire. “How do I look? No...no, I won’t show this picture to a bum like you. Get away from me, shit-face! I know I look great! Haha!”

Getting up, she dances to the music of a street organ. Round and round she waltzed, the photograph clutched in her hand.

“I was in a concentration camp. They killed my family – my father, my mother, my grandparents, my brothers...everybody.”

Without prelude, quietly sipping coffee, listening to her low, monotonous voice while rain sluiced in heavy sheets from menacing clouds.

“That creep,” she says, “I told him to lay low, but the horny bastard couldn’t keep off that young slut. We were hiding. It was dangerous to be seen. You couldn’t trust anybody. Our baby was with us. To endanger our child! Our flesh and blood! Because he couldn’t control his lust, that bastard!” A short silence and then, vehemently, “One good thing, he left me his business! I want for nothing material. The creep!”

She shakes her head, drawing on her cigarette-pipe while staring out the window.

Shooting a quick, penetrating glance she makes a gesture as if to say “don’t think any more about it.”

Outside the rain modulates a steady drizzle.



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