

Theater of War

Act Four

"Evil is Human"

A
Hogan's Heroes
Story

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Theater of War

Act Four

by *EM Seifert*

**is set in the universe of *Hogan's Heroes*.
This story is the fourth in a series of
"Acts".**

**"Evil is unspectacular and always human
And shares our bed and eats at our own
table. "**

– W. H. Auden

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Act Four

Scene One

Scene One

Chapter 1

The war continued. The once seemingly invincible Third Reich was shrinking away. Hungary, Rumania, the Baltic States were no longer under German control. Soviet troops had made their merciless way into eastern Prussia, on their way to Berlin. In the West, the Allies were approaching the western bank of the Rhine. To keep the Allies from crossing that ancient barrier, bridge after bridge was destroyed or mined to be destroyed by the retreating Germans. The Allies held nearly a million German prisoners and cities inside Germany itself were awaiting invasion. Some of Hitler's staunchest supporters could see the coming doom, even if the Führer remained blind; Himmler and others were already planning to sue for peace on their own. And at Yalta, the Allies had decided on the Allied occupation and division of Germany — a decision that would have enormous, and unforeseen, consequences for Germany and Europe for decades to come.

Unimaginable numbers of people moved across the landscape — vast armies numbering millions of men, even greater numbers of refugees fleeing ahead of invading armies. Thousands of others were herded like cattle onto trucks and trains — slave laborers, men, women, children — sent away from the advancing armies, not for their safety, but rather for their destruction. Despite their losses, despite the advancing armies, the Nazi death machine kept moving, killing thousands. In spite of the certain death that awaited them if they were caught, or perhaps because of the probable death that awaited them at the end of the line, some managed to escape. Some like the gaunt, worn man with grizzled gray-black hair who had seized a momentary opportunity and fled.

He had staggered blindly through the dark woods, not knowing where he was going, only knowing that he had to keep moving. He had stopped thinking long ago; he was driven only by the need to survive. But even that need could carry him only so far. In the end, his malnourished, exhausted body could go no further. And he fell to the unforgiving ground, pale as death and as still, beside a road, as luck would have it, that led to a bridge, that led to another road, that led to a prisoner of war camp called Stalag Luft 13.

For a man who hated meetings, Colonel Robert Hogan was spending far too much time in them lately. Hell, he'd called this one, as he had most of the others he'd been forced to attend. And been forced to call. With the camp's population now at twenty-five hundred plus, he didn't have a choice. The days when he could pawn off administrative problems to the few other officers in camp were long gone. But if he couldn't avoid these meetings, at least he could keep them short. He and the four captains in the

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camp had been at this meeting for twenty minutes and they were nearly done.

“Okay,” Hogan said, “that takes care of the work details. Martin, how’s the food situation?”

Captain Edward Martin¹, a thin blondish man in his late forties, grimaced. “About the same, Colonel. We finally got a shipment of Red Cross packages yesterday. That’s it.”

“What about the supply truck a few days ago?” Hogan asked.

Martin made a face. “It didn’t help. Half of the produce was inedible and the rest didn’t look much better. Langenscheidt² is trying to work a deal with the local farmers — trade the inedible produce that can be used for animal feed or fertilizer for foodstuffs. The problem is the farmers aren’t doing good either. It’s been a hard winter and they don’t have much in the way of stored provisions. And Hammelburg is in worse shape than we are.”

“Which means?” Hogan asked.

“Status quo, Colonel. The Red Cross packages are our primary food source, except for potatoes. Makes for boring meals, but we’re not starving.”

Hogan nodded. “Not yet. Now for my bad news. Klink said we’re not getting any more supplies or Red Cross packages.” The captains looked at each other more grimly. “So, how long will our supplies hold out?”

Martin did a quick mental calculation. “Well, thanks to the supplies we got from Baumann’s cache³, the Red Cross packages that Klink husbanded, and this last shipment — and as soon as it gets warmer, we’re going to have the fellas start food gardens; we can trade some of our coffee and sugar for seeds — I figure we can make it through the summer. Hopefully the war will be over before we get really hungry!”

Hogan smiled faintly. “Hopefully. Okay, that leaves our problem children. How are they doing? Mitchell?”

It was Captain John Mitchell’s⁴ turn to scowl. The camp’s “problem children” were primarily newcomers, primarily infantry, with a low tolerance for Germans and authority, American or German. Mitchell, a tall, eagle-faced man with black hair, had an edge in his voice. “For the most part, they’re just annoying, Colonel. Getting in front of others, walking into the middle of games, ‘accidentally’ tripping guys, stuff like that.”

¹ “The Gold Rush”

² “Hold That Tiger”

³ *Act Three*

⁴ “The Big Gamble”

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“How many are there?”

“Thirty to forty. And from what we can gather, they’re pretty much confined to Barracks 79.”

“Who’s the barracks leader?”

“Sergeant Virgil Yeager.”

“Yeager? Don’t recognize the name.”

“He’s the guy who barreled into Klink when he first arrived.⁵ After the fire.”

Hogan frowned at the memory. “How did he get to be barracks leader?”

Mitchell shrugged. “After he got out of the cooler, he started hanging around with the malcontents. Rumor has it he took on Chaykin⁶ who’d been the barracks leader. Not that Chaykin was any prize either.”

“We’ve been lucky for a long time, Colonel,” Martin said. “Your extracurricular activities used up a lot of excess energy and relieved a lot of the boredom, especially in the early years. But now with the overcrowding and a lot of the new guys not really knowing or believing what’s been going on, and the fact that most of those activities have been shut down, well, guys are getting antsy.”

“And,” Captain John Witton⁷, an American in an RAF uniform and now the senior captain in the camp, added, “the fact that conditions in this camp are much better than in other camps has helped exacerbate the problem.”

Hogan raised a brow.

Witton smiled humorlessly. “Starving, sick POWs don’t have the energy to cause trouble, Colonel. We have POWs who are in decent shape with energy to spare. They need an outlet. And for some, the classes, reading and sports don’t cut it.”

“Those are the ones that Chaykin and Yeager appeal to,” Mitchell said.

“And, Colonel,” Captain Jerry Warren⁸, the youngest of the four, looked at Hogan evenly, “not everyone is thrilled with your relationship with Klink. Especially some of the newcomers.”

Hogan could feel himself bristling, though he kept his voice even. “Even when that relationship makes things better for the camp?”

Witton nodded. “Some see it as making things better for you.”

“But,” Martin said hurriedly as Hogan’s face darkened, “they’re in the minority. A very small minority. The rest of the camp ignores them.”

⁵ *Act Three*

⁶ Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal 2: Encore*

⁷ *Act Three*

⁸ “The Flame Grows Higher”

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“Or ignores them as much as they can,” Mitchell said. “As I said, right now, they’re just annoying.”

“I think I’ll have a talk with them,” Hogan said.

The four captains looked at each other.

Hogan raised a brow. “Is there a problem?”

“Yes, sir,” Witton said. “We don’t think that’s a good idea. If you get involved, it might lend some credence to their complaints.”

Hogan thought a moment before replying. “Okay. But if they start disrupting the camp, then all bets are off.”

“They won’t,” Witton said firmly. “We’ll make sure of that.”

“Okay,” Hogan said with reluctance. “I’ll leave it to you. For now.”

Witton nodded.

“Anything else on your minds?” Hogan asked.

The captains shook their heads.

“Status quo, Colonel,” Witton said. “We’re just waiting until the end of the war.”

Hogan nodded. “Then, dismissed.”

The captains rose, picked up their notes and left.

Hogan stood, stretched and walked over to the window. Another typical late winter day, cold, damp, windy. There were few men walking about the compound, and those few were hurrying between the buildings. Would spring never arrive? Would the war never end? Would his life get simpler? A sharp laugh. Why should things get simple now? They never had before!

Of course, if he were honest with himself, Hogan had to admit that he’d made things more complicated than they needed to be. He didn’t need to do what he had done. He could have been just a plain ‘ole POW, not running an escape service or blowing things up.

And if he were a plain ‘ole POW, he’d have gone nuts. Sitting around just wasn’t his style. Never had been. So, he could thank his lucky stars, God, whomever, that Klink had decided he needed an officer to keep the POWs in line. Otherwise . . . Otherwise . . .

Hogan rubbed a crick out of his neck. Otherwise, given his propensity for not sitting still, he’d probably be dead like those fifty men who had been murdered after their mass escape from Stalag Luft III last year⁹. That was exactly the kind of thing he would have done — if he hadn’t come up with his escape and sabotage operation instead.

Would that have been his fate? Murdered by the Gestapo or the SS?

Naw, not him. Not Robert Hogan. He was too smart, too slick, too good, too . . .

Too stupid if he kept thinking that way. The men who had been killed

⁹ A fictionalized version of the event is in the movie *The Great Escape*

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were as brave, as smart, as he — and they were dead. Even the Stage¹⁰ knew it could happen to him. Hogan smiled wryly. He was finally able to admit it. For a long time, he'd thought he had been invincible. Now he knew better. He got away with his antics partly because he was smart and partly because he was lucky. But also because he was at Stalag Luft 13, the most unusual POW camp on the planet, the camp run by Colonel Wilhelm Klink — the camp run by the most notorious Resistance leader in Germany, the Stage.

Hogan smiled. It had been deflating to realize the truth. In hindsight, he had to admit that it wasn't as if there were no clues. Looking back, he could see instances where someone had to have been watching his back. God knows he didn't always do a good job of that himself. He found himself shivering. How many times had the bad guys found out about him?¹¹ And it was sheer luck, or their greed, that had kept him from being shot on sight or taken away. He knew of two instances where the Stage had directly intervened.¹² How many others were there? One day when the war was over, he and Klink could have a long talk. He really wanted to know. God forbid there would be another war; God forbid, he'd be captured again. But if it did happen again, he wanted to do things smarter. Luck would only go so far. The men at Stalag Luft III had proven that!

Enough thinking for the day, Robert. You've got work to do. Now, where was that . . . ?

A commotion at the front gate got Hogan's attention. Lt. J. B. Miller's¹³ work detail was back. But they were supposed to be gone for the rest of the day, working on the road by the rebuilt Adolf Hitler Bridge¹⁴. What were they doing back this early? Then he caught sight of the cars following the truck . . .

Hogan stiffened and shot out of his room.

"Trouble," he announced, gesturing to his men. Five men, grabbing jackets, followed him out into the cold.

"They're back early," Sergeant James Ivan Kinchloe, a tall mustached black man, observed.

¹⁰ *Act One*

¹¹ Two glaring examples were in "Two Nazis for the Price of One" and "Diamonds in the Rough".

¹² *Act One*

¹³ "The Meister Spy"

¹⁴ "German Bridge Is Falling Down"

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“Something must be up,” Hogan said as the truck stopped a few yards inside the gate. He watched the prisoners spill out of the truck in a hurry, and watched as the work detail was surrounded by SS men who’d poured out of the two cars that stopped just behind the truck.

One of the SS men fired his machine gun at the ground, effectively stopping the prisoners from leaving. Everyone turned to stare at the SS men, some with fear on their faces.

“There’s an extra man in that detail, Colonel,” Sergeant Richard Baker, a slightly shorter black man, murmured.

Hogan nodded. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Kommandant Wilhelm Klink coming out of his office, followed by his second-in-command Captain Fritz Gruber¹⁵.

Klink, his eyes sweeping the frozen tableau, walked over to the SS men. “What is going on?” he demanded loudly in German.

One of the men, an SS captain, turned to him and saluted. “Heil Hitler! I am Hauptsturmführer Schiff, Herr Oberst¹⁶,” he said in accented English. “We are after an escaped prisoner.”

“We have no escaped prisoners, Hauptsturmführer,” Klink said. “No one has ever escaped from this camp.”

“He is not your prisoner, Herr Oberst,” Schiff said. “He is ours.”

Klink looked at him evenly. “That does not explain what you are doing in my camp.”

“I believe he is hiding here.”

Klink looked disdainful. “There is no one hiding here, Hauptsturmführer.”

“Your men were in a hurry,” countered Schiff. “Why?”

Klink turned to rotund Sergeant Hans Schultz.

Schultz gulped audibly. “Lt. Miller was ill, Herr Kommandant. So we came back.”

Schiff snorted. “What does it matter if a prisoner is ill? It is immaterial. Your sergeant is lying and your prisoner is lazy.”

“That is for me to judge, Hauptsturmführer,” Klink said. “Not you. Take your men and — ”

“Our prisoner is here. There was no other place for him to go!”

“Who is this missing prisoner of yours?” Klink asked.

“A dangerous man. We were moving a truck full of prisoners to another camp.”

“You are free to check the truck, Hauptsturmführer.”

“We will! And your prisoners as well!”

¹⁵ “Don’t Forget to Write”

¹⁶ Colonel in German

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"You will not find anything," Klink said.

"We will see."

Schiff motioned to his men. The SS men walked over to the truck as Hogan strolled over to Miller. Hogan's eyes swept the detail; he easily found the extra man.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," Miller whispered. "I — "

"At ease, Miller," Hogan said.

"What do we do?"

"Stay calm and don't say anything."

After a few minutes, the SS men were finished with the truck.

"Did you find anything?" Klink asked.

"Nein." Schiff scowled. "He is among the work party."

"I know every man on that party, Hauptsturmführer," Klink said. "I allow only men I trust out of the camp."

"You can identify them?"

"Yes. Which appears to be more than you can say."

Schiff flushed. "He is a worthless Jew. His appearance is immaterial."

"Then it will be rather difficult to identify him, won't it, Hauptsturmführer?"

"He is spiritless, thin, with short black hair and dressed in rags."

"That description matches a good number of the men in this camp," Klink said.

"He is wearing a yellow star."

"Which was thrown away the moment he was out of your sight. And why would he escape from one prison into another?"

"Because he would think himself safe. He is hiding among your work detail, Kommandant!"

"That remains to be seen. Since you seem unconvinced, I will identify the men. Will that satisfy you?"

"Jawohl."

"Schultz, line up the prisoners."

"Colonel," Miller began in an alarmed whisper to Hogan.

"At ease, Miller," Hogan said. "Everyone keep it relaxed," he ordered as the men reluctantly lined up. He glanced at Klink quickly.

Klink, accompanied by Schiff who had produced a small notebook, walked down the line of prisoners. "Lt. J. B. Miller," he intoned. "Corporal Jacques Dubois, Private James Dunbar, Private Christopher Mulcahy, Private Thom Mulcahy, Private Lester Carr, Corporal . . ."

Klink continued down the line. In the middle of the line, he looked at a pale man with dark brown, watery eyes. "Private Philip Wagner," Klink said clearly. The man's eyes closed as Klink walked past him.

At the end of the line, Klink turned. "Satisfied, Hauptsturmführer?"

Schiff bowed curtly. "My apologies, Herr Kommandant. We will continue our search."

"Colonel Hogan."

"Yes, sir?" Behind Klink, Hogan could see Schiff's cynical smile as he

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put the notebook back in his pocket. Hogan forced himself not to frown as he faced Klink.

“Take the men into your barracks for a report.”

“Yes, sir.” Hogan saluted and gestured to the prisoners.

“Are you going to Hammelburg, Hauptsturmführer?” Klink asked Schiff.
“Jawohl.”

“You may not know,” Klink said. “There is no longer a garrison at Hammelburg; a fire destroyed most of the town a few weeks ago.”

Slowly, the men began moving into Barracks 2. Hogan looked back at Klink; the Kommandant was still talking with Schiff. Hogan felt himself relax. Klink’s manner was nonchalant; he even had that old smile that used to drive Hogan crazy. No problems there. Hogan turned away and walked into his barracks.

Into a noisy chaotic mess. Most of the regular occupants of the barracks were on their bunks or in the far corners. The twenty men from the work detail had taken over the common area gesturing wildly or talking loudly. In the middle of it, looking confused, was “Philip Wagner”. Wagner was painfully thin, his face haggard, his gray-tinged black hair cropped short, his age indeterminate. No, Hogan amended, Wagner didn’t look confused; instead, overwhelmed. And even that word wasn’t good enough. Wagner was managing, just, to sit straight on the bench, oblivious to the chaos swirling around him.

“How ‘bout some tea, mate?” RAF Corporal Peter Newkirk pressed a tin cup into Wagner’s hand.

Wagner managed what could only charitably be described as a smile. His shaking hands cupped the cup; Hogan wondered if he had the strength to raise it to his lips.

The noise was giving Hogan a headache. “Quiet!” His voice was lost in the bedlam. “That’s enough!” his voice rose to no avail. His lips pursed and a shrill, ear-piercing whistle cut through the noise.

Silence finally fell, and the men turned to look at him.

“Thank you,” Hogan said. “Okay, Miller. Give me the short and sweet version. The really short and sweet version.”

“Yes, sir.” Miller took a deep breath. “We were on the road just past the Adolf Hitler Bridge when we stumbled across,” he gestured at Wagner. “He was asleep in a ditch beside the road. After we shook him awake, we got him rigged up in some of our clothes and into the truck. Then I told Schultz I wasn’t feeling well and we needed to get back here right away. Schultz was going to argue until he spotted Wagner. Then he was shooing us into the truck and we lit outta there.”

“Where did you pick up the SS?”

“About a mile from here. We just beat ‘em to the camp.”

“Okay. What about Wagner’s clothes?”

“Threw ‘em out when we crossed the bridge.”

Hogan nodded and started to turn away.

“Colonel,” Miller said, “Klink *lied*.”

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“Yeah, he did.”

“But . . . why?”

Hogan smiled. “You’re a bright boy, Miller. I’m sure you can come up with a couple of reasons.”

Miller’s mouth opened and then snapped shut.

Hogan grinned and turned to the others. “As for the rest of you, the story is that Wagner came in with the last batch of prisoners; that’s why he looks so ragged. He was with the First Army, captured last year. That’s all you need to know. Got it?”

The men nodded.

“Okay. Now get out of — ”

The door opened and Klink came in. His eyes swept the assembled men and settled on Miller. “Are you feeling better, Lt. Miller?”

Miller smiled weakly. “Much better, sir.”

“You will be able to go back to work this afternoon?”

Miller sighed audibly. “Yes, sir.”

“Good.” Klink turned to the others. “The rest of you as well?”

The men of the work detail nodded.

“Good.” Klink turned back to Miller and froze. “Lt. Miller.” Klink’s voice was unusually soft. “The next time,” his hand reached toward Miller’s jacket pocket, “you decide to hide something,” Klink pulled a yellow cloth from Miller’s pocket, “please do a better job.”

Miller gulped noisily as he stared at the yellow star in Klink’s hand. “Yes, sir,” he finally managed to whisper.

Klink nodded and crumpled the star in his fist.

Hogan stared at Klink’s fist and shook himself mentally. That had been too close. If Schiff had seen that, they would all have been in trouble. “Good thing Schiff was blind,” Hogan muttered and turned back to Wagner. The poor guy was barely holding it together; he sure didn’t look well. “Sorry about that,” Hogan said. “We’re normally more careful.”

Wagner managed a shaky smile. “I was not worried,” he said in a soft accented voice.

Hogan blinked. That was an oddly confident comment, a thought he could see reflected on the faces of the other men. “O-kay.” Hogan turned to order the other men out.

“Everything will be all right now, mon ami,” French Corporal Louis LeBeau said as some of the members of the work detail began leaving.

“Ja,” Wagner continued in that same soft voice. “I knew when we reached camp.”

“Weren’t you scared?” young American Sergeant Andrew Carter asked.

“Nein. God would not let me die now.” Wagner’s eyes were on Hogan.

No, not me, Hogan realized. He turned to see Klink looking at Wagner with a puzzled expression.

Newkirk snorted. “I’m not sure God cares, mate.”

Half of the men from the detail were still there, including Miller and the Mulcahy twins.

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"Anything we can do for you, Kommandant?" Hogan asked.

"Yes." Klink cleared his voice. "It seems the paperwork on Private Wagner is incomplete. We are missing items such as birth date, serial number and the like. If you would . . .?"

Hogan smiled. "No problem, Kommandant. So, Private Wagner," he quipped, "when were you born?"

"July 15, 1910," Wagner said.

Hogan felt Klink move closer. He glanced back; Klink had the oddest look on his face. Then Hogan looked at Wagner. Wagner was now standing, his trembling fingers braced on the table, and he was staring intently at Klink. The air was suddenly thick with a tension Hogan didn't understand, a tension felt by everyone in the room.

Wagner took a step toward Klink. Hogan backed away from the two men, keeping his eyes on Klink.

The silence dragged on. Klink had a look on his face that Hogan had never seen — part confusion and part . . . what?

Wagner took another step toward Klink, away from the table. "I once said it would take better men than they to kill me. God saw fit not to strike me for my arrogance."

Shock distorted Klink's face. "Binyamin?"

Wagner smiled wanly, took a step forward, and collapsed. Klink caught him before he hit the floor and cradled him in his arms.

Hogan knelt beside them. "Get a stretcher!" The look on Klink's face . . .

"I saw them shoot . . . I thought he was dead . . ." Klink mumbled.

Two men appeared with a stretcher; Wagner was laid on it. Hogan and Klink stood. Klink stepped and turned away while Wagner was carried out in total silence.

Hogan looked at Klink. Klink was standing alongside the right wall, his eyes on Hogan's door.

Who was Binyamin? Hogan wondered. What was his connection to Klink? Klink was too still . . . What's he thinking?

"Kommandant?"

Klink stirred. His eyes dropped to his clenched fist. His fingers opened slowly, revealing the yellow star.

Hogan looked at the star; he knew the star identified Jews. He remembered reading about it years ago when he was more interested in paying his dues and getting into flight training. Jews were banned from Germany, that he remembered. Put into refugee camps or something. Didn't he see something about Jews being relocated to another country? Madagascar or someplace? Hogan opened his mouth . . .

And nearly jumped out of his skin. Klink's fingers had closed around the star and tightened into a fist that lashed out, striking the mirror above the sink. The mirror shattered.

My God, he's going to lose it! Hogan took a step toward Klink and stopped. Klink's body was a quivering line, his eyes blazed with naked fury. *He can't! If he does, he won't be able to go back. Kommandant Klink would*

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be gone forever. Leaving who? The Stage? Wilhelm Klink?

Hogan was very afraid that only the Stage would be left. He wanted desperately to say something. But he couldn't find the words.

The seconds passed agonizingly, seconds where nobody in the crowded barracks seemed to breathe.

Finally, Klink, his fist still against the broken mirror, stirred. He took a deep breath; the quivering stopped. Slowly his fist lowered.

Klink opened his fingers and looked at the star again. The anger was gone, replaced by a deep sadness. Holding the star loosely in his hand, Klink walked over to the stove. He opened the door and tossed the star into the fire. He turned to the barracks door and paused. Then he spoke in a voice most of them had never heard before. "Please get the paperwork on Private Wagner to Fraulein Hilda as soon as you can, Colonel Hogan."

"Yes, sir."

Klink nodded and left.

The silence continued.

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Chapter 2

After dark, Colonel Robert Hogan and Kommandant Wilhelm Klink walked across the compound to the infirmary. Twenty-two men were still housed in the infirmary, weak from lingering cases of pneumonia and dysentery. In the back, screened from the others, was "Private Philip Wagner", real name Binyamin Weiner.

Hogan had seen Binyamin earlier to fill in the details on the fake personnel folder they were creating on him. Afterwards, Hogan had delivered the file to the Kommandant's office. Klink wasn't in, but Hilda had told Hogan what had happened after Klink returned to his office. Klink had made two calls, one to Berlin and the other to Dusseldorf. Hilda wasn't sure what the calls were about, but she had been surprised and impressed. As far as she could tell, Klink hadn't been servile or pushy. And Klink had won his point on both calls, leaving both Hogan and Hilda curious about them.

Binyamin looked at them as they walked over. Klink pulled up a stool and sat. Hogan leaned against the shuttered window, his arms folded.

Binyamin smiled faintly. "Wilhelm, you are looking well," he said in German.

Klink's smile was less steady. "I wish I could say the same about you."

"The past ten years . . ." A brief smile. "Perhaps a penance for my pampered youth." Then he looked at Hogan. "Colonel," he said in English, "forgive me."

"It's okay; I understand German."

"Danke. Nein . . . No," Binyamin said softly. "If I am Philip Wagner, I must practice English."

Hogan nodded curtly.

After an awkward silence, Klink glanced down at his hands, clasped them and looked at Binyamin. "I saw them shoot you in the head. What happened?"

Binyamin closed his eyes for a moment. "That day . . . Do you remember?"

Klink nodded.

Binyamin glanced at Hogan. "You may not know, Colonel, but Jews were not the first people taken by the Nazis. Gypsies were. There was a place outside the city with hundreds. The Nazis were taking them to concentration camps. Wilhelm and others were taking some away. I was there as a . . . I do not know the word . . . Vermittler . . ."

"Go-between," Klink translated; Hogan nodded.

"That day, a group of women and children had been taken out; Wilhelm left a few minutes later. I started to go the other way when I saw the SS. I could have hidden, but they would have found Wilhelm. It had not been

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enough time for him to leave. I,” he shrugged, “let them see me.”

Klink winced, but stayed silent.

“I struggled and they were not happy. I was put with six others who were trouble. On the road outside the camp, an SS officer shot each in the head.

“I was riding by on a bicycle when it happened,” Klink said quietly. “The SS had stopped traffic so others could see what happened to troublemakers.”

“I know,” Binyamin said softly. “I saw you. I did not want you to see, but someone would know what happened to me. Your face was the last I saw when the bullet entered my head. I . . . died.” A faint smile. “Or so they thought.

“I wake in bodies to be buried. I felt no pain. I heard soldiers talking. I must have moved because I was seen. The officer in charge came over. As he looked at me, my eyes opened and looked into his. A sergeant came over and gave him a paper. He looked at it and shouted. He received the promotion and the place he wanted. I knew he was ready to shoot me. But the new Hauptsturmführer Danziger was very superstitious; many SS are. He was convinced I was, how do I say, good luck?”

Klink nodded.

“Danziger took me to a doctor. The bullet entered my head and left the other side and did no damage to my brain. God kept me alive. Why, I do not know. Danziger has kept me as a servant. Since that time, we have gone to many places. Each was better than the last, and his career was good. But the past months, his sins caught him. I was no longer good luck. I was only a Jew lucky to be alive. Danziger is in charge of moving slave labor from subcamps in Dusseldorf. We were to go to a train station in the east to join others on the way to concentration camps. Or killed. God was with me. I escaped and I ran until I could run no more. Your men found me. And,” he smiled, “here I am.”

Klink was silent, staring at his hands. Then his head rose. “Why didn’t you get a message to me? I could have . . . ”

Binyamin was shaking his head. “Nein. You were a new lieutenant colonel. Why should you care about untermenschen¹⁷, a worthless rabbinical student? You would be under suspicion or you would be imprisoned. I would not take the risk.”

“There were ways . . . ”

“Perhaps now. Then . . . ” He shook his head. “You were too important to risk.”

¹⁷ Untermenschen — subhuman. Nazis considered Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, Poles and others subhuman, fit only for slave labor, otherwise expendable.

Scene One

Klink winced.

Binyamin smiled. "Even in the camps, there were whispers. You succeeded more than we ever hoped."

"Not enough."

"No one can do everything. You did more than most. At a cost."

"Others paid more."

Binyamin nodded. "And others paid nothing. There is nothing to blame yourself."

Klink shook his head sadly. "You are tired; rest now."

A hesitation. "Wilhelm, I must ask . . ."

"Anything."

"The men with me —"

"I will see what I can do."

Binyamin shook his head. "Nein, their fates are decided. But tomorrow, there will be two trucks with women and children. They also go to concentration camps. Sixty lives are not many, but . . ."

"I will take care of them."

Binyamin smiled. "Danke, Wilhelm."

"Rest, Binyamin." Klink's hand lay lightly on Binyamin's.

Binyamin nodded. "Now, I think I can. Gute Nacht, Wilhelm." With a sigh, his eyes closed.

Klink stood. He and Hogan stepped away from the cot, back near the partially opened supply room door.

"Two trucks," Klink said. "With SS escort."

"A problem," Hogan said "In daylight . . ."

"It will not be daylight. After this morning, I complained. As you Americans put it, I laid it on a bit thick — the effect on the prisoners, the lack of guards, the overcrowded conditions . . ."

Hogan smiled. "Made it sound like there's gonna be a riot."

Klink nodded. "The officer I talked to was most helpful. He assured me there would be no more daylight trips." A pause. "Pity the underground didn't get around to the Adolf Hitler Bridge again. With the bridge gone, there would be no reason for anyone to come this way."

Hogan grinned. "Yeah, a pity."

Klink smiled faintly. "I'll leave it in your capable hands."

"You're all heart, Kommandant."

"I'll try to get you some information later."

Hogan nodded.

"Then, good night, Colonel Hogan."

"Good night, Kommandant."

Klink nodded and left.

Hogan leaned back against the wall, cap pushed down over his eyes, arms folded.

Two trucks. Sixty passengers — and what the hell do we do with them? A problem for later. Right now . . .

Two men in the cabs, maybe a motorcycle escort. Maybe a couple of

Scene One

guards in the backs of the trucks. Ten? But taking them out needed to be bloodless. We'll need more than five men. Twenty would be a good number — men who spoke German or at least understood it. Miller — he could use the field experience. The Mulcahy¹⁸ twins — big, strapping boys, they were pretty good in silent hand- to-hand. Maybe —

Hogan's eyes snapped open; the door beside him was squeaking open. Two men poked their heads around the door and found themselves staring at Hogan.

"How long have you guys been in there?" Hogan demanded.

Morrison gulped. "An hour or so, Colonel."

"An hour? So you heard every word . . ."

Morrison and Bellini nodded.

"Fine," Hogan snapped. "You two just volunteered for the mission."

He jammed the cap on his head and left.

* * * * *

The next twenty-four hours were among the busiest and most hectic of Hogan's stay at Stalag 13. He'd spent a sleepless night deciding who to take and what to do. Klink's only input into his planning was a note delivered by Schultz. Klink had learned that the trucks and their SS escort, possibly a dozen men, including motorcycles, should be reaching the Adolf Hitler Bridge about midnight.

Finally, Hogan knew what he was going to do.

There were twenty-seven men in the tunnels, listening. Hogan, his team, their "outside" man, Sergeant Glenn Olsen¹⁹, and their underground contact, Max Fleischer²⁰, were gathered around the map; the others were scattered around.

"Okay," Hogan said, "we've got two objectives — the bridge and the convoy. The bridge will be the least of our worries. Kinch, Max, you'll take care of the bridge. Max, you'll need about five or six men to plant the charges."

"Not a problem, Colonel."

"Good. Now, it gets tricky. You're gonna blow the bridge either after we

¹⁸ Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal*

¹⁹ "The Informer"

²⁰ The grocer in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?"

Scene One

all get back across it after stopping the convoy, or one hour after we engage the convoy. We'll get word to you when the convoy is spotted. Kinch," his eyes met the other man's, "I mean exactly one hour. No delays for any reason. If it takes longer than an hour, we're probably in trouble."

Kinch nodded soberly.

"Baker," Hogan continued, "you and a couple of men will be our lookouts. You'll be stationed, here," his finger jabbed the map, "about a mile from our location. Your job is to let us know when the convoy passes you and how many men they've got. After they pass, you'll block the road to prevent any surprises. And to stop anyone who might get by the rest of us. We can't have anyone getting away until we want them to."

"Right, Colonel."

"That leaves the rest of us. Now, here's the delicate part. We don't want any violence — no shooting unless there's no other choice. And we can't have them shooting either. We don't want the women and kids, or us, getting hit. Right?"

The listening men nodded.

"But," asked LeBeau, "how do we get them not to shoot?"

"We ask them?" Carter suggested, attracting a number of disbelieving looks.

Hogan smiled. "Not quite. We give them a stake in not shooting. By making them think that if they do they'll wind up dead. Carter, I want you and your gang of happy saboteurs to put together a couple of dozen mines."

"I don't have enough explosives, Colonel," Carter said. "Not if we have to blow the bridge."

"Not a problem." A wide smile now. "All you need is a couple of real mines that make a lot of noise. The rest can be dummies."

"I get it," Newkirk said with a grin. "We'll blow one up and make 'em think the others will blow as well."

"Right. Well, Carter?"

"That I can do, boy! Uh, sir," Carter agreed. "Make a couple really loud and messy . . . Yessir, no problem."

"Olsen, you're going to be a Wehrmacht lieutenant. Those men not on the bridge or lookout will be part of a work party, Wehrmacht men. Newkirk, that means you need to scrounge up about twenty uniforms, including a lieutenant and a captain."

Newkirk rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "The officers, we have. But twenty others . . ."

"They just have to look the part. In the dark."

"I guess we can take bits and pieces from some of the others, like the Luftwaffe ones. I'll get some of the boys to 'elp out. Not a problem, Colonel."

"Okay. Olsen, you're the lieutenant in charge. You'll be there with a nice, conspicuous 'Halt' sign. You're supervising a Wehrmacht detail that's mining the roads."

"Won't that raise suspicion, Colonel?" Olsen asked.

Hogan shook his head. "Roads are being mined by the retreating German

Scene One

armies.”

“But there’s no war around here,” LeBeau said.

“It’s a precaution. Ordered by Abwehr. They may not like it, but it’s a real enough explanation. The rest of you men,” Hogan looked at the others listening in, “will be digging holes along the road with some of the fake mines beside you. Then, Carter, you ‘accidentally’ set off one of the mines. That should convince them that shooting might be a bit dangerous.”

“Are we all going to be armed, Colonel?” Miller asked.

Hogan nodded. “Just in case, yes.”

Kinch frowned. “All of us?”

Hogan nodded.

“We don’t have enough weapons, Colonel,” Kinch said.

“I know.”

“I suppose we could take them from Klink’s armory,” Baker said.

Hogan shook his head. “Nope, there’s a better source. Remember those supplies that Hochstetter hid around here last year?”²¹

Most of the men nodded.

“We never did dig them all up. I checked the map we stole from Hochstetter; one of those cases is a cache of weapons, small arms. Olsen, you and Max pick them up on your way back tonight. I’ll give you the coordinates before you leave.”

“Yes, sir.”

“If everything goes as planned, we won’t need the guns, other than for show. Remember, we don’t want any shooting.

“Kinch, the truck in operating order? Except for the parts we took out.”

Kinch grinned. “Yes, sir.”

Hogan smiled as well. Their transport — a truck they had liberated months ago from the camp’s motor pool — was waiting in a shed in the woods. Of course, it had a few parts missing so it couldn’t be driven if someone else stumbled across it.

Hogan looked at the men gathered around him. The Mulcahy twins, Morrison, Bellini, Miller, Wainwright, Martinez, Spinoza, MacKay, Keegan, and the rest. Yeah, they could all handle themselves in a fight if they had to. Hopefully, it wouldn’t come to that, but he wasn’t going to bet on it.

“Okay,” Hogan said, tossing his pencil on the table. “That’s it for now. Everyone back here right after evening roll call. And, fellas, keep a low profile up top. We don’t want any unexpected problems. Dismissed.”

Hogan drew Olsen and Max apart as the other men started to leave. He gave them the directions to the cache. They nodded and left.

Soon the room was nearly empty. Carter and his explosives team were off in a sheltered room making the mines. Newkirk and LeBeau were going

²¹ “It’s Dynamite”

Scene One

over their supply of German uniforms.

Hogan settled back in his chair, and tipped his hat over his forehead. Now came the hard part — waiting.

Scene One

Chapter 3

They were a few hundred yards from the Adolf Hitler Bridge. Kinch and his group were at the bridge, placing the charges. Once, Hogan had planned to put explosives in the bridge as it was being rebuilt.²² Great idea in conception, lousy idea upon execution — too easy to blow up the builders, along with the prisoners they'd conscript. So, he'd abandoned the idea. Well, they'd destroyed it once; they could do it again. Baker and his group were up the road, just past the bend, ready to call, ready to block the road after the trucks passed by. The remaining men were waiting anxiously with picks, shovels and mines.

Hogan, dressed as a Wehrmacht captain, was giving the last set of instructions when Miller coughed nervously.

"Uh, Colonel," Miller said, and gestured toward the woods on the side of the road.

Hogan, impatient, turned and was surprised to see a masked man in black along with half a dozen others. "Stage."

Eyes turned to the masked man as he walked over. Hogan could hear the murmurs of surprise, even awe, from the waiting men, and grinned inwardly.

"Glad you could make it, Stage," Hogan said.

"I brought some friends," the Stage said, gesturing at the other men. "They'll take the passengers off your hands."

Hogan sighed with relief. "Thanks." He never did figure out what to do with them. Then he said in a low voice, "You could have warned me."

A fleeting smile. "Wasn't sure I could put it together." Then in a louder voice, "Fill me in, bitte."

Hogan did so rapidly.

The Stage nodded. "Where do you want us?"

Hogan was surprised. He'd half expected the Stage to take over. Then again, he'd never worked with the Stage before. Was this the way the Stage handled his operations? Letting others take the lead? An unexpected pang of latent guilt hit Hogan. He was in charge on nearly every mission, whether he needed to be or not — the mark of a good commander.

Or an insecure one? His ego had demanded that he be there. To show his men what to do? To mother them? Or did the good commanders, the great ones, also allow others to take the lead? Let his men do their jobs without always looking over their shoulders. Hell, he'd hated it when his superiors

²² "German Bridge Is Falling Down"

Scene One

babysat him.

Yeah, but the few times he'd let them go alone, they fouled up. Or did they foul up because he never left them alone?

The Stage was eyeing him curiously.

Woolgathering. Right before a mission, and he was woolgathering. "Okay, everyone take your positions. Stage, you and your men can take out the guards in the cabs."

The Stage nodded and gestured to the men with him. Without a word, the men melted into the darkness.

They must have worked together for some time. Hogan said the thought aloud. And started when the Stage informed him that he'd never worked with the unit before.

"You're kidding," Hogan said.

"Units are trained to operate almost soundlessly, relying on visual cues."

Another twinge of guilt. Many of Hogan's missions had been anything but quiet. Or as anonymous as those men. Sometimes, his men had worn their uniforms, even calling each other by name. No wonder their cover had been nearly blown before. He'd stopped that after the fiasco with Crittendon last year²³, but it still gave him a pang whenever he remembered some of those past missions.

The Stage was looking at him, waiting patiently. Hogan cleared his throat. "Okay, everyone take your places. And remember, no talking except in German. And stay in the shadows; we don't want anyone getting a look at you."

The men dispersed to their assigned positions. Olsen, in a lieutenant's uniform, was up the road, near the bend. Olsen had been living with Max Fleischer, posing as a disabled nephew. As a result, his German accent was perfect. And he was more anonymous than the men from the camp. Olsen would confront the convoy first. Hogan would step in only if it looked like there would be a problem.

One last look around. The Stage and his men had disappeared into the trees. Most of Hogan's men were on the road, digging holes, planting the phony mines. Dim lanterns, turned away from the men, were placed every ten feet or so. Olsen was walking up and down between them. Hogan nodded and stepped off the road to wait.

His walkie-talkie sounded a few minutes later.

"They're here, Colonel," Baker said softly. "Two trucks. Four motorcycles in pairs, front and back. Looks like there are two men in the cabs, and two more in the backs of each truck."

Hogan nodded in the darkness. Unless there were more guards in the

²³ Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal*

Scene One

trucks that Baker couldn't see, that made twelve men. Hopefully, they were tired and bored. And none too eager to risk their lives for slave laborers.

A rumbling cut into his thoughts; Hogan felt himself tensing.

Olsen let the trucks get between the men on the sides of the road and then stepped in front of the lead truck, holding a "Halt!" sign. The headlights of the first truck spotlighted his figure as it lumbered to a stop. Olsen walked over to the opening right-side door. An SS lieutenant, his uniform impeccable, stepped out.

Uh, oh, Hogan thought. Just the type we don't want — young, arrogant, fresh out of the Hitler Youth. Exactly the type to do something stupid.

The SS officer looked at Olsen's slightly shorter form. "I am Obersturmführer Gruner. What is the meaning of this?"

"My apologies, Herr Obersturmführer," Olsen said smoothly. "We are planting mines along the road in case of invasion."

"I was not informed of any mines. Where did the order come from?"

"Abwehr, Herr Obersturmführer."

"Abwehr. A nest of incompetents or worse," Gruner sneered. "Let us pass."

"I am sorry, Herr Obersturmführer. You will need to wait a few more minutes."

"Wait? My orders are to get these prisoners to Münster by dawn. Since we are forced to use these back roads instead of the autobahn, we do not have time to —"

A loud explosion ten feet from the lead truck cut into his complaint, startling them.

Hogan, advancing with a relish, rounded on Carter. "Dummkopf! Are you trying to kill us?"

"Entschuldigung, Herr Hauptmann," Carter whined. "It was an accident."

"Accident?" A visibly pale Gruner came over. "Negligence!"

Hogan raised a brow and turned to him. "Accidents will happen, Obersturmführer."

Behind the young officer, Hogan could see men creeping soundlessly behind the motorcycle escorts and, just as soundlessly, taking them out. At the same time, the Stage's men were at the trucks' cabs, jerking open the doors. For Hogan, time seemed to speed up.

One of the bikes started to slip as the man on it tried to fight the arm around his neck. Gruner turned around to see his men going down.

"Don't move," Carter said, pulling a gun from his pocket.

Astonishment on his face, Gruner turned back to Hogan. "Was geht hier vor?"

Hogan smiled grimly. "We're taking possession of your prisoners, Gruner."

Hogan had to admire his self-possession; Gruner laughed. "These are only worthless Jewesses and children."

"If they're worthless," Hogan said in a cold voice, "then you don't mind

Scene One

if we take them. Do you?"

Gruner's face tightened, but he kept silent.

Hogan walked over to the others. "All secure?"

Olsen grinned. "All secure, sir."

"Good. Get them in the ditch. Tie them up, blindfold and gag them."

"Right, sir."

Hogan turned back to Gruner, just in time to hear Carter cry out as the lieutenant attacked him. That provoked some of the braver guards. And Hogan's up until now easy mission became more complicated as a free-for-all broke out. Hogan could only glance at the struggling men before Gruner took all of his attention. Carter was on his knees, holding his groin, and Gruner was heading for the woods.

With a stifled curse, Hogan took off after him. The fleeing SS man was a dark blur under the pale moonlight. Hogan ran faster; he couldn't lose Gruner.

There was a small clearing ahead. Hogan cursed, sped up, and lunged for Gruner. He landed heavily on the frozen ground, his arms around Gruner's legs. Trying unsuccessfully to avoid the kicking boots, Hogan scrambled, trying to pin Gruner down. Breathing heavily, Hogan was shocked to see a gun in Gruner's hand. *Damn! Where did that come from?*

Everything blurred for Hogan as his fingers reached for the gun. Hogan grunted as Gruner swung at him. And grunted again as they thrashed on the ground, a stray rock squishing against his neck.

Where the hell was the gun? He glimpsed the weapon between Gruner's and his body. *Damn!* Hogan's gloved fingers finally closed on the gun. *Now, point it somewhere else!*

And where the hell was everyone?

He had to get Gruner's fingers off the gun. He had to get that gun away from Gruner.

A muffled plop rang in his ears; something slammed his left forearm.

What was . . . ?

Damnit, where's that . . .

His fingers squeezed around Gruner's, trying to pry Gruner's fingers off the gun.

A much louder plop sounded. Gruner gasped; his fingers separated. Hogan heaved a sigh of relief, and pushed away from Gruner. And grunted as Gruner didn't budge. *Sheesh. How much did he weigh?*

Gruner suddenly shifted, and Hogan found himself staring up at the Stage. He turned his head; Gruner was lying next to him, unmoving.

"Are you all right?" the Stage asked.

"Yeah, fine," Hogan managed to gasp. He was out of breath, tired. *Getting old.*

Hogan turned over onto his left side, and pushed up. But his left hand didn't want to work. Didn't hurt, just refused to work.

The Stage knelt beside him, and pushed Hogan onto his back.

"What are you doing?" Hogan asked.

Scene One

The Stage was looking at Hogan's left arm. "You've been shot."

"Shot? Me? You're crazy!"

Firm but gentle hands kept him still. "You don't feel anything?"

"No."

"You will."

"Thanks!"

The Stage got his hand under Hogan's right elbow. "Come on."

Hogan, leaning more on the Stage than he liked, got to his feet. He swayed tiredly. His left arm still didn't hurt, but it was numb. And he couldn't raise it.

Hogan accidentally kicked into Gruner; he looked down. "Is he dead?"

The Stage knelt beside Gruner and felt his neck. "He's dead." The Stage checked Gruner's pockets and pulled out a set of credentials. He stood. "Let's get back to the others."

Hogan took a step and unexpectedly sank to his knees. "What the — ?"

The Stage was at his side, his hand under Hogan's right elbow, helping him stand. "Come on."

Hogan took a step forward and grimaced. Not the steadiest of his life, but he managed another step and another.

More tired than he'd thought possible, Hogan reached the road. A quick look around. The guards had been tied together in the ditch beside the road, blindfolded and gagged. The other men were standing on the road waiting for Hogan and the Stage.

One of the Stage's men came over. "We are ready," he said with a soft French accent.

The Stage nodded.

A woman, emaciated, prematurely gray, balding and dressed in a formless shift, came over from one of the trucks.

"We had given up hope that people of conscience still lived," she said in a throaty voice. "God has proved us wrong." Her cold hand touched Hogan's face and she murmured something in a language he didn't know. She repeated the gesture, touching the Stage's mask. "God bless you both," she whispered, and walked back to the truck.

"Go," the Stage said.

His men nodded and climbed into the cabs of the trucks.

The Stage and Hogan walked over to the side of the road. The trucks backed away from them and then made a U-turn, heading back in the direction they'd come from.

"Where are they going?" Hogan asked softly.

"Don't know."

Hogan stared at him. "You don't know?"

"Don't need to."

Hogan's jaw clamped shut. *Don't need to . . . He's the one in charge and he doesn't need . . .*

A sharp unexpected pain sliced through his left arm and he hissed.

Scene One

The Stage gestured to Baker. "Get him back to your truck now," he said softly.

"I'm fine," Hogan protested.

"He's not," the Stage said. "Go."

Baker nodded, and took Hogan's right arm gently.

Hogan glanced back to see the Stage step down into the ditch, and tuck Gruner's credentials into one of the Germans' pockets. Hogan grimaced and let Baker lead him to their truck.

The Stage joined them while the rest of the men picked up the tools and mines. Hogan was helped into the cab as the men got into the back of the truck. The Stage climbed in beside Hogan.

Hogan looked at him in surprise. "Coming with us?"

"Faster than walking."

Hogan managed a smile and then groaned softly. That pain in his arm was beginning to throb annoyingly, kind of like a toothache. Worse, his head was feeling funny, fuzzy. And his eyes insisted on closing.

Baker started the truck.

After a couple of hundred yards, the road forked. Baker took the right fork to the Adolf Hitler Bridge. A few minutes later, the truck rumbled across the bridge. Baker stopped the truck a few hundred feet beyond the bridge.

"Why'd we stop?" Hogan asked in a drowsy voice, his eyes opening.

A massive explosion shook the truck and the ground, and the Adolf Hitler Bridge, the last link to Dusseldorf and points west, was gone.

"That's good," Hogan said in a slurred voice and closed his eyes.

"Colonel?" Baker asked worriedly.

"He'll be fine," the Stage said, hoping it was true. He turned his gaze back to the road.

Scene One

Chapter 4

Hogan opened his eyes before they reached the truck's hiding place. The fatigue had passed. So had the numbness. Now, his arm throbbed with each beat of his heart. Painfully, like a bad toothache that refused to go away. But not as bad as that abscessed tooth he'd had the summer before he was shot down. That was pain. And the root canal that followed was almost as bad. As long as he didn't move, it was bearable. Trouble was, he had to move.

The truck stopped. The door opened and the Stage climbed out. "Coming?"

Hogan sighed and scooted over to the door. He winced. Moving made the arm a bit more like that abscessed tooth. But it couldn't be helped. And they still had a walk of half a mile, a hilly half a mile, to the tree stump.

Well, as long as he didn't do anything stupid, the pain wasn't too bad. He'd been hurt worse before.

When?

The motorcycle accident when he broke his ankle.²⁴ He'd had done a real number on his foot thanks to some black ice. But he'd spent the worst of it doped up at the hospital.

Then the time he broke his leg in junior high playing football. He'd tried to prove he could play with the big boys who'd had a whole head on him and a lot more pounds. Not one of his better ideas; he'd spent the summer in a cast. But they had come away with a grudging respect for Robert E. Hogan. And they stopped calling him Bobby, which he'd hated with a passion. In retrospect, it had been worth the broken leg.

Hogan cradled his left arm. Guess this was worth it too. "Stage? That woman — do you know what she said?"

The Stage nodded. "A Hebrew blessing. Binyamin's father used to say it once in a while."

His tone had become withdrawn. Was Hogan prying too much? There was still so much Hogan didn't know about the man.

And this wasn't the time to go into it, not with twenty strangers around. Besides, his head hurt as well as his arm. And he was slowing down.

To let the others get there first. Can't have twenty-five men trying to get into the tree stump at the same time. Cause quite a traffic jam. Make it a sure-fire cinch that we'd be seen.

Still, he lagged behind far more than he'd intended.

²⁴ Ibid.

Scene One

Finally, they were at the stump. They could see the camp's lights, watchtowers and barbed wire. Home, sweet home.

Or not.

Most of the men had already gone down into the tunnel by the time Hogan reached the stump. Only the Stage, Kinch and Hogan were left on top.

He hated to admit it to himself, but Hogan had to be helped down the ladder to the tunnel. His left hand and fingers refused to cooperate. Kinch, *bless him*, was steadying Hogan down the ladder. At the bottom, Hogan stepped away, swaying as he did so. His right hand lifted to cradle his left elbow. His left forearm was throbbing painfully with each heartbeat. *Damn, it hurt*. His teeth clamped together tightly; his muscles tensed up.

"Don't," the Stage murmured in his ear. "Relax your muscles; it'll hurt more if you're tense."

Hogan nodded curtly and took a deep breath. That relaxed the tightest muscles. Then he tried to relax the rest of them. And he shuddered as pain shot down his arm. A groan slipped out, attracting glances from his men. He realized with a pang that LeBeau and Newkirk, among others, hadn't known he'd been shot. LeBeau turned white as a sheet, even looked faint, and Newkirk — well, he didn't look faint, but he looked shaken just the same.

Hogan tried a smile, one that gave his face a ghastly appearance.

"I'll take him to the radio room," Kinch said in a calm voice. "Less traffic there."

Hogan would have agreed. But he hurt too much to say a word. He was dimly aware of passing branches of the tunnel system. And passing startled men.

In the radio room, Sergeant Walter Red Hand²⁵, a full-blooded Lakota who'd been manning the radio, stood as they entered.

"Any messages?" Kinch asked as he led Hogan to a stool beside the radio table.

"None," Red Hand said quietly as Hogan sat tiredly. Then he noticed the black-clad man who also entered.

"Bandages, water, sulfa," the Stage was saying as he eased Hogan's coat off. He ripped the shirtsleeve, exposing the still bleeding wound. After removing his gloves, he examined the wound with gentle fingers.

Hogan tried not to wince. And failed. Then he noticed the worried looks on the faces of his men. Not only his crew, but also the half dozen or so men who were getting rid of the German uniforms. Hogan cleared his throat. "Newkirk."

Newkirk visibly started. "Sir?"

²⁵ Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal 2: Encore*

Scene One

“All the uniforms accounted for?” Hogan was pleased that his voice wasn’t shaking — unlike his insides.

The Stage glanced at his pale face.

“I’ll check, Colonel,” Newkirk said and went down an auxiliary tunnel.

“Is there any coffee?” the Stage asked. “And sugar?”

LeBeau found his voice. “Oui, Monsieur.”

“Black with a lot of sugar for Colonel Hogan,” the Stage said.

“That’s not the way I drink it,” Hogan protested.

“You need it,” was the quiet answer. “Add a handful of aspirin to it.”

“Oui, Monsieur.”

A man entered the room. He nodded to Miller, the Mulcahy twins, Olsen and the others. “Colonel Hogan,” he began in a crisp British voice. “Captain Witton . . .” He stopped, shocked speechless.

Hogan glanced at the newcomer. Mr. Geoffrey Samuelson, once so very long ago the senior man in the camp.²⁶ Until a cocky, too cocky Hogan now admitted, American colonel arrived in the camp. Samuelson was smart, competent, and had been ever so timid. The timidity had disappeared for the most part. But if the look on Samuelson’s face was any indication, it still lingered beneath the surface.

Hogan cleared his throat, trying to ignore the Stage’s still probing fingers. “Quiet upstairs?” he asked with a wince.

Samuelson looked at Hogan and the Stage. He’d never seen the Stage, of course. But he, like most of the camp, had heard of him. It was a little unnerving to find him in the tunnels. But it was even more unnerving to see that wound in Hogan’s arm.

“Yes, sir,” Samuelson said slowly. “All quiet.” Then he smiled faintly. “Though there was a godawful explosion a bit ago.”

“Anyone interested in it?”

“No, sir.”

“Good. Olsen, fill him in.” Hogan shifted uneasily as the Stage cleansed his arm with the water. He winced as sulfa was sprinkled liberally on the wound. A quick glance at the wound. It didn’t look like much — a small neat red spot on his arm. “Will I live?” And clamped his teeth shut as dizziness swept over him.

“You’re lucky,” the Stage said. “The bullet went through cleanly. No major tears or bleeding.”

“Yeah, lucky.” Why did he feel so shaky? “Guess you won’t have to return January’s favor,” he added, alluding to the time he had to remove a bullet from the Stage’s shoulder.²⁷

²⁶ Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal*

²⁷ *Act One*

Scene One

The Stage stayed quiet as he bandaged Hogan's arm.

Hogan sipped the coffee LeBeau had handed him and made a face. Far too sweet. Moreover, he was less than pleased to discover that his hand was shaking. And his insides. And his head was swimming. And he was —

The loud jangling of the telephone startled them, and froze the men starting to leave.

Baker moved over to the telephone station. "They're ringing Klink's line," he said.

Hogan and the Stage exchanged looks.

"Put it on the speaker," Hogan said, pushing the wooziness away with an effort.

After several loud rings, they heard, "Kommandant Klink's office. Hauptmann Gruber here."

"Get me Klink," demanded a rough hard voice.

Gruber cleared his throat. "The Kommandant is not available. If I —"

"This is Standartenführer²⁸ Danziger of the SS. I demand to speak to Klink."

"My apologies, Herr Standartenführer," Gruber said in a shaky voice. "But the Kommandant is not in."

"He's not?" Danziger's voice turned dangerous. "Staff officers were to be at their posts by dark. And he is not there?"

"Nein, Herr Standartenführer. I mean, jawohl, Herr Standartenführer. He is here," Gruber babbled. "But he left strict orders . . ."

"Why the bloody hell doesn't he get Klink," Samuelson whispered loudly.

Olsen was watching the Stage and Hogan. Both men had the oddest expressions on their faces. Olsen grabbed Samuelson's arm painfully. "I don't think he can," he managed to croak.

"What?"

Olsen didn't reply; he just nodded at Hogan and the Stage.

Hogan could hear the Stage's sigh as Danziger got louder and Gruber got shakier. "Get Newkirk," he told Carter; Newkirk did a decent Klink imitation.

The Stage shook his head and reached for the telephone. Out of the corner of his eye, Hogan could see the shock on the faces of the watching men as the Stage took the phone in one hand and pulled off the mask with the other, revealing . . .

"This is Kommandant Klink," said the loud exasperated voice. "Do you realize what time —?"

"This is Standartenführer Danziger."

"Standartenführer Danziger," said the now fawning voice. "It is always a pleasure to . . ." But there was no pleasure on Klink's face or in his eyes.

²⁸ The SS equivalent of a colonel.

Scene One

“Silence!” Danziger roared.

Klink shut up, waiting expressionlessly.

“I sent a convoy to your area, Klink. They were to stop at your camp and report on their progress.” Klink raised a brow. “They should have reported in an hour ago.”

“I assure you, sir, that no one stopped here.”

“I guessed as much, you fool! I want you to go look for them. Personally.”

Hogan could see the frown grow in Klink’s eyes. “But, Herr Standartenführer, I cannot leave — ”

“You will leave, Klink,” Danziger said smoothly. “Or I will have you shot.”

Klink blinked in surprise and his eyes met Hogan’s; Danziger was far too upset over the loss of the slave laborers.

“Well, if you put it that way, sir,” Klink said, and scribbled a note that he passed to Red Hand. Red Hand glanced at it and cranked up the radio. “I will be happy to — ”

The telephone clicked.

Klink was silent for a moment. Then, “Gruber?”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant?”

“You heard the order. Get a truck and a dozen guards. I will join you shortly.”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.” Then, “Herr Kommandant, where are you?”

A faint smile touched Klink’s lips. “You will find out in a few minutes.” He hung up the telephone, and took the headset from Red Hand. He held it to his ear.

Hogan had to suppress a smile at the expression on LeBeau’s face as Klink launched into what sounded like flawless French.

“LeBeau?” Hogan asked.

LeBeau shook his head to clear it. “It sounds like a code, Colonel.” Then a pause as he listened. “He’s asking about the guests we liberated.” Then, as Klink scribbled another note and handed it to Baker, “Let me know what you find.”

Baker dialed an outside line. Klink removed the headset, and picked up the telephone again, speaking in German this time.

But it might as well have been French or some other language Hogan didn’t know. As far as he could follow the rapid conversation, Klink was talking about a book? Obviously a code of some sort. After a few minutes, Klink hung up.

“Well?” Hogan asked.

“The passengers are safe and already dispersed,” Klink said. “The trucks are being stripped. Danziger will never find anything.”

“And the other call?”

“To Hamlet. I need your help.”

“Anything.”

Scene One

“Someone will need to man the radio at all times. No absences for any reason.”

“Done.”

Klink nodded. “A message will come in on your normal channel.” Behind him, Red Hand, Kinch and Baker took notes. “They will ask for Papa Bear in German and say they have a message from William; they will use the English name, not the German one. Immediately after the word ‘William’, they will say in English, ‘Avoid what is to come’. They will then give a list in German, words or numbers. When they are finished, they will end with a single word in English. It can be any word, even goodbye.”

He turned to the three men taking notes. “Be extremely careful with the beginning code. If they do not say ‘William’ or use other than those five specific words in this order, ‘avoid what is to come’, cut the connection immediately and tell me.”

“Trouble?” Hogan said.

“Trouble.”

Klink was silent for a few moments and then stirred. “You’d better get some rest. It might get busy later on.” He glanced at the men still staring at him in wordless shock. “I’ll leave you to clean up the mess.”

Hogan nodded and cradled his arm gingerly.

Klink picked up his mask and gloves and started toward another tunnel.

Miller cleared his throat loudly. “Uh . . . Kom . . . Stage?”

Klink turned toward him, expressionless.

“The last few minutes . . . Sir, they never happened,” Miller said in a steady voice.

Klink nodded gravely and left.

And Hogan, despite the ache in his arm, the dizziness that kept blurring his vision, and the fatigue that threatened to drop him where he sat, found himself smiling.

Scene One

Chapter 5

It was late morning when Robert Hogan came out of Barracks 2. He turned his collar up against the cold with his right hand; his left, he kept cradled against his chest. A quick glance around the compound. Everything looked fine. He sat down on the bench, trying to look casual, though he felt far from it. He'd just spent what had to be the most uncomfortable night of his life.

With the help of Kinch, again, he'd managed to make his way up the ladder to the barracks nearly an hour after Klink's exit. It had taken that long for the shocked men to unwind from the night's surprises. Then, again with Kinch's help, he'd gotten out of the German uniform and into his pajamas. He wished he could have resented the attention he'd gotten, but the truth was, he needed the help. Every movement, no matter how simple, started fires up and down his arm. He couldn't hide the pain from his men, and their worried looks hadn't eased his mind one bit.

Finally, they left him alone to get what rest he could. Which was very little. Not that he was awake either. His head, his mind, kept swimming. Every time he opened his eyes, even if he didn't move, he had to close them again quickly as dizziness threatened to overwhelm him. And that was the good part. The bad was the nausea. Thank God, he didn't get sick to his stomach. He didn't think he could take that! Not when even breathing made the pain worse.

Then the dreaming — or was his mind playing games with him? His fight with Gruner, the trucks, the Stage — all floated around in his skull. Even Binyamin. Then he'd felt the bullet go through his skull, not his arm. And there were bodies there. Not anonymous faces, but those of his men. That had shaken him awake. And he had lain there, shivering and bathed in sweat. He'd forgotten about his arm for a moment and tried to get out of bed. And groaned loudly as his head fell back on the pillow. He had to bite his lip as the pain continued to grow. And grow. That abscessed tooth was nothing more than a pleasant memory now. He'd never hurt so much before in his life

Dawn came slowly. He heard the truck returning — the truck with Klink and those guards. Why had it taken Klink so long to come back? The bridge was gone. Or did it just seem long?

Thinking made his head fuzzier, so he stopped. And had just lain there, half dozing. Eventually, he heard sounds from the common room, and, later on, Schultz calling for roll call. But no one came to get him. He must

Scene One

have drifted off because he didn't hear anyone come back in.

When he woke, his mind was much clearer, and the pain was a dull ache. And he was being watched. He blinked in surprise. The medic, Sergeant Frank Wilson²⁹, was sitting across from him. Wilson had grinned and said, "Good morning, Colonel."

Then Wilson started with the bandages and the probing. Hogan didn't like to admit it, but he'd actually cried out once. The door had started to open then, but Wilson kept whoever was on the other side of it out of the room. Hogan had sworn he'd keep from crying out again. And he hadn't, but it had taken every bit of will he had not to.

Wilson had been apologetic — and frowning. "A slight infection," he'd said in response to Hogan's question.

"Bad?" he'd asked.

"Well, not good," Wilson had answered.

Finally, the probing and the bandaging ended. Wilson gave him a handful of aspirin and told him to stay in bed. But Hogan didn't listen. Not when he'd remembered the Stage, or rather Klink. If HE could do it, then so could Hogan. Even if it killed him. Hogan had to laugh at that, attracting odd looks from his men as they opened the door.

He'd needed help getting dressed, getting shaved, and getting a bite to eat. But he'd be damned if he needed help walking out the front door.

And he didn't. He'd managed to walk a whole ten feet before sinking down on the bench outside the barracks.

So, here he sat, harboring his strength. And praying his arm would stop aching.

"Hey, Yeager!"

Big, brawny, and decidedly sullen, Sergeant Virgil Yeager turned toward the voice.

"What is it, Stinky?"

"Have you heard the good news?" Stinky, also known as Private Alphonse Stickney, asked.

"Our tanks here?"

"Naw, not yet."

"Then it ain't good."

Stinky grinned. "You'll still like it. Who's your least favorite person here? Well, your second least favorite person here?"

"Right now, you. You're exasperatin' me, Stinky."

"Hogan, right?"

Yeager spat loudly and looked at him.

"Rumor has it he's hurt."

²⁹ "Operation Briefcase"

Scene One

"Couldn't happen to a nicer guy, unless it was Klink. What happened?"

"He got shot."

"Yeah, right."

"I heard that too," Corporal Lenny Liebowitz said, stepping up to the two men.

"How'd it supposedly happen?" Yeager asked.

"He got shot blowin' a bridge," Stinky said.

Yeager snorted loudly. "Yeah, right."

"No, I heard it too," Liebowitz said. "That noise last night — a bridge blew up. That part's right. Heard a couple of goons talking."

"Fine, the bridge went boom. What's that got to do with Hogan?"

"He blew it."

A loud laugh. "You two still buyin' that crud?"

"We didn't say we believed it," Stinky said. "But — "

"But, nothin'! Look, I told you before. Hogan's nothin' but a big con artist. Got everyone convinced he's some kind of hero. He ain't."

"But the guys who've been here awhile — "

"The guys who've been here awhile are protectin' their asses. They were told not to escape, and it was easier not to."

"But Hogan," Liebowitz started.

"Hogan's got himself a real sweet deal here. Extra privileges, extra food, even a girl. And he's nice and safe. He scratches Klink's back, makes nice, and gets away with anything. And he's got the rest of these losers believin' it."

"I don't know, Yeager," Liebowitz said.

"Lemme tell you one more time," Yeager said patiently. "You ever seen one of these tunnels? Didn't we crawl all over the barracks lookin' for one?"

"Yeah. But we're in one of the new buildings. Maybe they — "

"Maybe nothin'. You tell him, Stinky."

"They showed me one once. It was all caved in. Didn't go nowhere."

"See," Yeager said. "All talk."

"But they do know stuff," Liebowitz countered.

A loud snort. "Who don't? Hell, the guys from other camps said they had radios too. And people talk — goons, everyone. Look," he said patiently, "for half the stuff to go on like they said, Klink would have to be a real idiot. You seen him, you said, during that fire. Was he an idiot?"

"No."

"And Schultz pokes his fat ass into everything. He's no dummy either. So, unless you think they're in with Hogan . . . "

"Naw, they're krauts."

"You just remember that. As for Hogan, he probably tripped over his big feet, and is playin' it for all it's worth. Just somethin' else to tell the brass when they get here."

"You bucking for a promotion, Yeager?" Stinky asked.

"I'm buckin' for a meal ticket. Once the Allies get here, I figure they'll need someone who knows the lay of the land. Good pickings here. Women,

Scene One

gold, some real fancy digs. I want in. And that means Hogan's out. Got it?"

"Sure, Yeager," Stinky said. "We want in too."

"So, go pretend to make nice. We'll nail Hogan's butt good when the real brass gets here."

Stinky and Liebowitz strolled away as Yeager leaned against one of the barracks, his eyes on Hogan sitting on the bench.

"Admirin' the view, Virgil," said a slow, lazy drawl.

Yeager snorted loudly. "You buckin' for another whoopin', Clarence?"

"If it's someone else getting whooped."

Yeager grinned. "I got a few candidates in mind."

Sergeant Clarence Chaykin shook his head. "Not as long as Hogan's around. Or Klink."

"They won' be around forever. One of these days, our tanks are gonna push over these fences. And Hogan'll get what's coming to him. So will Klink."

Chaykin grinned and walked away.

Scene One

Chapter 6

Berlin:

Major Hans Teppel³⁰ sighed as he looked at his office. Or rather the remains of his office. Last night's bombing raid had hit the building adjacent to his office and crumpled in the wall on the right side. At least there was still a wall of sorts, and the telephone worked, and the lights. Which was more than most places could claim.

His telephone rang loudly. He had to step over some debris to get to his desk. "Teppel here. Heil Hitler!"

"Guten Morgen, Herr Major."

Teppel froze; it was a voice from his past, one he'd thought never to hear again. "Morgen," he managed to say.

"I know it has been some time since we last spoke. How is your family? Your Aunt Viktoria? No improvement in her hearing?"

"Nein. She is still as deaf as ever."

"Thank God! I need your help. I'm in trouble, not at my best, and I need to get out of Berlin. Out of Germany."

"I don't know . . ."

"Hans, I'm desperate." There was an undercurrent of rare panic in the man's voice.

"All right. Meet me at the zoo, near the lion's den at twenty-three hundred."

There was a sharp laugh at the other end. "The lion's den. Appropriate. I'll be there."

The telephone went dead, and Teppel slowly replaced the receiver. He straightened his chair and sat down, suddenly sweating. A voice from his past, one he'd thought had died — Mike Anders.³¹ Not his real name, of course. Just as Hans Teppel wasn't really his. He'd been born Robert Jared Morrison in Milwaukee. But since 1937, he'd been here as Hans Teppel, now a major in Abwehr. And for most of that time, he'd been on his own, passing information to the Allies. Anders, an OSS agent, had been one of the men he'd passed information to. But Anders had disappeared during the campaigns in the east early last year. And that had left Teppel with one contact in Germany, Papa Bear.

³⁰ "Bad Day in Berlin"

³¹ L. Cash: *New Beginnings*, used with her permission.

Scene One

Now Anders had come back from the dead and needed help to get out of Germany. The trouble was that Papa Bear, or rather Colonel Robert Hogan of Stalag Luft 13, couldn't help. Papa Bear's primary contacts were in Hammelburg, which had been nearly destroyed by fire a few weeks ago, and Dusseldorf, which had been nearly smashed to rubble by bombings. Hardly of use to someone trying to get out of Berlin. And Teppel's resources were even scarcer.

But there was someone whose resources seemed to be limitless. And as luck would have it, Hogan did know him. Which was good, as Teppel had no direct way of contacting him.

Teppel rose abruptly. He needed to get to a radio and fast. He walked to the door and opened it. And shut it. His boss, General Walter Schellenberg was at the end of the hall. Unlike his former boss, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris³², Schellenberg was SS and loyal to Hitler. But Canaris was in prison or dead, and Schellenberg was here. And Schellenberg hated Teppel's guts. Teppel waited until Schellenberg returned to his office and left quietly.

Teppel walked slowly through the bombed-out streets, picking his way over rubble, avoiding the few people he saw. He was heading toward one of his boltholes, Hell # 6 he called it; literally a hole created by several collapsed walls. He might as well call it # 2 now; he was down to just two of them. The rest had disappeared in the bombing raids, like much of the city. Now, save for the outskirts of the city, there were streets filled with shells of buildings, barely functioning services and people who were desperately longing for the end of the war. Except for the megalomaniac still in charge and those who still followed him.

Teppel was breaking his rule by going to # 6. He had made it a point to use his radio only at night, only when he could be assured of being relatively undetected. But now, with Anders back, he had to talk to Papa Bear. Or rather, he had to talk to someone that Papa Bear could reach and he couldn't — the Stage.

As he walked, he recalled his last, his only, meeting with the Stage. It had been completely unexpected, even nerve-wracking. It had been a long morning in late January, and he was tired, physically and mentally — the Allies had bombed again the night, and the day, before.

Major Hans Teppel picked up the telephone. "Abwehr 587, Heil Hitler."

³² Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the head of Abwehr and a member of the Resistance, was arrested in 1944 after the attempted assassination on Hitler and sent to Flossenberg concentration camp. Schellenberg replaced him.

Scene One

The fact that he hadn't heard it in nearly two years mattered not a whit; he'd have recognized that voice anywhere. "Major Teppel! Perhaps you do not remember me; this is Wilhelm Klink from Stalag Luft 13. We met — "

"Two years ago when I came to question some of your prisoners," Teppel replied, his voice hard and cold in attempt to mask the admiration, and terror, he suddenly felt. "What can I do for you, Kommandant? Is there someone you wish me to interrogate?"

"Oh, no, Herr Major. I am in Berlin on business, but I'm mixing in some pleasure. I have been looking up some old acquaintances. So far, I have had the pleasure of speaking to at least five Luftwaffe and Abwehr officers, but, unfortunately, none of them are able to meet me for lunch. I thought perhaps you might oblige me. We could discuss . . . oh, any number of interesting things."

"I am very busy, Kommandant — "

"Surely, Herr Major, one of my old acquaintances would oblige me . . . "

"All right, Kommandant. When and where?"

"I have my staff car. I can pick you up in an hour? While you wait, perhaps you can think of a restaurant that still has real butter?"

An hour later, an hour filled with useless foreboding, Teppel descended the stairs, noting the waiting Kommandant's good-natured smile and the fist clenched over the ever-present riding crop.

"It is good to see you, Herr Major. It has been almost two years, has it not, since you came to question my prisoners? I remember thinking that I wished everyone who interrogated my prisoners conducted himself as you did. You knew how to strike fear into their . . . "

The pompous speech died as Klink held the car door open. Checking the back seat first, Teppel got into the car. Klink slammed the door and went round to the driver's side.

"Colonel," Teppel began as Klink got into the car.

"Silence," Klink hissed, starting the car. The change in tone was not lost on Teppel. And he was amazed that not only had Klink's voice changed, but his whole bearing had also changed, right in front of Teppel.

A few silent minutes of driving slowly through the bombed-out, debris-filled streets passed. Teppel swallowed uneasily, but said nothing.

Finally, Klink spoke in a tone soft, and dangerous, "We have an awkward situation, Robert Jared Morrison."

Surprised by the statement and that Klink knew his real name, Teppel made no reply. He looked at the hawk-like profile. What am I thinking? Of course, he knows my name. He's the Stage.

"I have a dilemma, Major — you. Thanks to you and a certain list, I am alive.³³ For that, you have my gratitude."

³³ Act Two

Scene One

Teppel opened his mouth to say, "You're welcome," or to protest that it was nothing; he didn't know which — but it didn't matter.

"But I also have a problem. You know something you shouldn't. The one other time someone knew something they shouldn't, it ended everything I and those who followed me have worked for. And it cost me," his hands unconsciously gripped the steering wheel harder, "more than you can know.

"Fortunately," Klink went on, his grip relaxing, "most of the recently informed are close enough to me that I can monitor them, and control them if need be."

Teppel almost laughed. "Control Hogan? After what I saw . . ." His voice faded as Klink looked at him.

Klink continued as if he hadn't interrupted. "But you, Herr Morrison, are a very different situation. As you know, my organization has, like I, come back from the grave. And I am extremely loath to leave its survival, and mine, in the hands of someone I cannot control."

"Yes, but you know about me," Teppel said with a raised brow. "We're even."

"Not quite. If you are lost, the Allies lose one man. If I am lost, there is a network of men and women whose lives are, at best, disrupted, at worst, at risk — a network whose size and scope you would not believe."

"I see." Well, no one in Berlin trusted him either. Why be surprised? He looked out the window. "So what happens next? You shoot me in the head and throw me in the Wannsee with a bag full of lye?"

"Killing one of the men who saved my life would not be very generous of me," Klink said with open amusement.

"Then what did you have in mind?"

"My solution is much simpler — you disappear."

"Disappear? Just like that?"

"Just like that," came the echo.

Teppel shook his head, baffled. "Leave Germany? I don't think my boss would like that."

"If you mean Mr. Donovan³⁴, I believe I can convince him."

Teppel found himself breathing harder. He forced himself to calm down. "I don't think I want him convinced."

"Major, you act as if the matter is open for discussion." He looked at Teppel for a long moment. "You surprise me. After all these years, many of them on your own, I would think you would welcome the chance to leave."

"You didn't leave when you had the chance," Teppel retorted. "You stayed."

"This is my home, not yours."

³⁴ William Donovan, the head of the OSS, the precursor to the CIA.

Scene One

"You don't know me, St — Kommandant," Teppel replied acidly. "I have no home. There's nothing in America that's home to me; everyone I loved is either dead or they don't care about me any more. I wasn't born here, I'll grant — but all the same, I've been fighting as long as you have, maybe longer. This is my fight as much as yours. You know who I am; then you should know I can help you."

"With Canaris out of the way," Klink said, "you are no longer assured of an ally in Abwehr. Schellenberg hates and distrusts you. You are a liability to yourself and more importantly to me. To put it bluntly, you are of no use to me."

"Fine. Throw me out with the fish bones," Teppel said coldly.

"Were you expecting a reward?" was the soft question.

"No. Hell, no." His laugh had an edge that surprised him. "I'll be lucky if I'm not tried for war crimes. A reward is the last thing on my Christmas list. I guess I just expected you to understand."

"What, exactly, should I understand about the man who talked Hitler into bombing London? Is that your character reference?"

Teppel deflated. He looked out the window again. When he finally spoke, his voice was hollow. "Do what you want; you will anyway. If you want me out, fine. But I want confirmation from Donovan before I leave; I don't leave messes for others to clean up."

Klink looked at him. "Why did you have London bombed?" was the surprising question.

"You're the genius; you figure it out. Just drop me here. My appetite's gone."

"Jared, look at me." Klink spoke in English, and the tensile strength in his voice dared Teppel to do otherwise . . . and made Teppel wonder how he could ever been so foolish as to think of this man as the idiotic Kommandant. "I don't spoon-feed my agents, I won't spoon-feed you. Answer my question."

Teppel sighed heavily. "The Luftwaffe was decimating the British airfields. Another month or two bombing the southern areas — where all the airfields were — and the RAF would've been out of business. Canaris was desperate to take the pressure off the airfields. I . . . I told him if he could convince Hitler and Göring to bomb London, the RAF would have time to recoup its losses. And there was little significance to London militarily."

"Little significance?" Klink replied so gently that it took a minute for the venom to sting. "Tell that to the dead. On both sides. Bombing London provided the excuse for the bombing of Berlin, Hamburg and all the other countless cities."

"I know. I see the dead in my dreams," Teppel whispered. "They're waiting for me every time I close my eyes. It was the right thing to do to save England. If I didn't believe that with everything in me, I wouldn't have done it. But it makes it no easier to live with."

"No," Klink agreed. He pulled into an open parking space near the Adlon Hotel. There were quite a few empty parking spaces. Fuel was reserved for

Scene One

military vehicles and buses, and soon even the buses would stop running. "St. Paul said that no one is given more than he can bear."³⁵

"I can bear it," Teppel said, his eyes empty.

"Hmmm. I hear the cheese here is real, and not half bad," Klink said in a Kommandant-like voice. Then, "If you have any messages for me, send them to Papa Bear. Do not contact me directly."

The sudden change caught Teppel off guard. "You're . . . you're letting me stay?"

A nod. "You have been on your own a long time. I wanted to be certain that you hadn't, as a friend of mine would put it, become a loose cannon. And, I wanted to understand you."

"Kommandant, with all due respect, if I were a loose cannon I would've left years ago. I'm on my own, but I've been following orders for years. As to me, I could have turned you in the moment you returned to Stalag 13, and gotten a medal. I don't want your gratitude. All I want is for you to understand . . ."

"I understand more than you think," was the soft reply. "I have sins of my own to dream about. However, some advice — be careful, and watch your back. One day you will have to go. Just make certain you do not leave it too late."

"Thanks."

Klink shook his head. "No thanks are necessary. I hope this is a decision that neither of us will regret."

"You won't; I promise."

Klink looked at him a long time before saying softly, "But you may." Then he looked at the street. "And once again the curtain rises . . ."

Kommandant Wilhelm Klink got out of the car. "Of course, Herr Major, we do not dine well at Stalag 13. I don't believe we've seen real cheese in weeks. But each of us must make sacrifices for our glorious Third Reich!"

And Teppel had, regretted it, that is. Sometimes, he wondered why he was still here. However, if he hadn't been here, then Anders would have no one.

Now, inside his bolthole, he made the call to Papa Bear.

Kommandant Wilhelm Klink was eating lunch in his quarters. Or what passed for his lunch — potatoes, again, in a watery stew with some meager vegetables. At least the wine made it slightly more palatable. He took another bite when a slight scraping to his right got his attention. As he watched, the trapdoor under his potbelly stove moved and LeBeau's head poked out.

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:13

Scene One

“Bonjour, Kommandant. There is a message for you on the radio.”

Klink lifted a brow. “For me?”

“Oui, Kommandant. From Snowman — uh, Major Teppel.” LeBeau got out of the tunnel. “If you would, sir. The tunnel complex is empty except for us.”

Klink got up and tossed his napkin on the table. “Danke, Corporal.”

LeBeau moved out of the way as Klink walked over to the trapdoor. He glanced at the Kommandant’s lunch and made a face at it. Was that all Klink had to eat? Maybe he could do something to improve it. LeBeau took the plate and went into the kitchen.

Klink reached the radio room; Kinch looked up at him.

“Good morning, Kommandant,” he said with a smile. “Teppel will be calling back any minute now.”

“Did he say what he wanted?”

Kinch shook his head. “No, sir. But it has to be important. He never calls during the day. Well, almost never.”

Klink nodded. “How’s Colonel Hogan?”

“Resting.”

“Good.”

The radio squawked loudly. Kinch held the headset to his ear. “It’s him, sir.” He gave the headset to Klink who slipped it over his ears.

“Go on,” he said curtly.

“I need your help,” Teppel said quickly. “An OSS agent named Anders is in trouble and needs to get out of Germany fast. Might be hurt too.”

Klink frowned. “I am not in the habit of . . .” Then again he had that other little problem to resolve. “All right,” he said to Teppel’s relief. “Listen carefully. You will be contacted sometime today — do not leave your office for any reason, regardless of the time. Understood?”

“Yes.”

“All right. The recognition code will be, ‘I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb.’³⁶ Your response will be, ‘I have shot my arrow o’er the house and hurt my brother.’³⁷ The final response will be, ‘My soul is full of discord and dismay.’³⁸ Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Teppel said.

“Good. Return to your office.”

“Danke.”

³⁶ William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, Act 4, Scene 6

³⁷ *Ibid*, Act 5, Scene 2

³⁸ *Ibid*, Act 4, Scene 1

Scene One

Klink took the headset off. "I need an outside telephone line."

Kinch connected the wires to their duplicate of the camp's telephone system. He watched as Klink dialed the number himself. And shook his head as Klink launched into an incomprehensible exchange. Well, not really incomprehensible. He just couldn't believe that the conversation he was hearing was the one that was really going on. He found himself wondering how many other calls they'd overheard the Kommandant make where the surface conversation was just a cover for something else.

Klink ended the call and Kinch took the telephone from him.

"Anything we should know about, Kommandant?" Kinch asked.

Klink shook his head. "No, not yet. By the way, I am expecting another call within a couple of hours."

"Yes, sir."

"Danke." Klink nodded and left the radio room.

Kinch found himself shaking his head again. He didn't notice it last night — well, it was a mite hectic — but Klink seemed to have no trouble navigating the tunnels alone. Which left Kinch wondering how often the Kommandant had used them when they weren't looking.

Scene One

Chapter 7

Kommandant Wilhelm Klink hung up the telephone with a sigh. This was what he'd been afraid of — Danziger was on his way here. A couple of hours, possibly three. He wasn't surprised, not after he'd learned what his people had found in the torn-apart trucks. Which left him with two options, neither one of which he liked. The question was, which did he dislike less?

The first option depended solely on him — he could leave. Permanently this time. The second depended on the cooperation of others.

He swiveled around in his chair. The first would also leave the camp at the mercy of Danziger and his SS goons. God knew what Danziger would do if he discovered that Klink, and Binyamin, had left.

That wasn't true. He had a good idea what Danziger would do, and it wouldn't be pleasant for anyone in the camp. And he couldn't take Hogan and the others with him. There wasn't enough time. And that was assuming Hogan was in any condition to travel. As far as he knew, it was the first time Hogan had been shot. The wound wasn't serious, but it was painful. And he knew better than anyone how hard it was to pretend that nothing was the matter when all he wanted to do was crawl into bed and stay there. Which may leave only the second option. He could always leave later — if he were still alive that is.

However, the second option depended on whether others would be willing to lie for him. Worse, it involved doing something that revolted his very soul. He'd done it before. And he'd sworn he would never do it again. Ironic. He had a reputation for keeping his promises. Except for the ones he made to himself. Those . . .

Enough thinking. There were too many risks to others by leaving. Danziger, from what he'd learned, had grown more brutal with the years and wouldn't stop until he slaughtered half the camp's population. And the death of the innocents here revolted Klink's soul even more than the second option.

He stood and walked to the door. "Fraulein Hilda, I need Colonel Hogan, Sergeant Schultz, Sergeant Langenscheidt, Captain Gruber and you in here now."

Hilda looked at him with surprise. "Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

Klink closed the door. He needed to gather his thoughts before the others arrived.

Newkirk burst through Hogan's door, startling him as he lay on the bunk.

"Colonel, Klink wants to see you now!" Newkirk managed to gasp.

"Okay. Help me up, will you?"

Newkirk with unexpected gentleness helped Hogan sit up. As the rest of

Scene One

the men came in, he helped Hogan into his jacket.

“Any idea what gives?” Hogan asked.

They shook their heads.

“Schultz is getting Langenscheidt and Gruber as well,” Kinch said.

“Okay. Listen in,” Hogan ordered as he left the room.

Hogan found a gathering in Klink’s office when he got there. Hilda, Sergeant Karl Langenscheidt, Captain Fritz Gruber and Sergeant Hans Schultz stood or sat in front of Klink’s desk.

“Glad you could join us, Colonel Hogan,” Klink greeted.

“What’s up, Kommandant?” he asked as he sat down next to Hilda.

Klink was silent for a moment, and then looked soberly at them. “Schultz, I know that Sergeant Langenscheidt had . . . forgotten a few things about his trip to Paris³⁹ with you and Colonel Hogan.” Langenscheidt visibly started. “But I need more than that this time. Do you trust him?”

Schultz looked intensely at Langenscheidt, who gulped nervously, but kept still under the scrutiny. “Jawohl, Herr Kommandant. I trust him.”

Klink nodded. “Colonel Hogan, Fraulein Hilda has also conveniently forgotten to tell me a few things about you and your men. And once in awhile, she has done more than forget. Do you trust her?”

Hogan looked at the startled young woman. “Yeah, I do.”

Hilda managed a faint smile, which Hogan returned encouragingly.

Klink nodded, his eyes on the nervous pair before him. “I need you both to do more than forget some unimportant details, Fraulein Hilda, Sergeant Langenscheidt. I need you to lie convincingly to the SS colonel who will be here shortly. To be blunt, my life depends on it. Probably the lives of others. Do you think you can?”

Langenscheidt and Hilda looked at each other, then at Klink. There was indecision on both of their faces.

“If you cannot, please tell me now,” Klink said quietly.

“Herr Kommandant,” Langenscheidt began. “We, I, do not . . . I do not know you. Now. You are . . .” He shrugged.

“I know,” Klink said gently. “And right now, I have no explanations to give you. If you agree, you may learn more. As for Fraulein Hilda . . .”

“I can lie.” A hard look at Langenscheidt. “So can Karl.”

Langenscheidt looked at Hilda with surprise, then at the others waiting for his answer. They trusted him to do what they thought was right. Klink trusted him. Klink had requested that Langenscheidt not be transferred away from the camp, as had happened with the other Luftwaffe personnel. If it hadn’t been for Klink, he might be dead. “Jawohl, Herr Kommandant. I can lie.”

³⁹ “Art for Hogan’s Sake”

Scene One

Klink nodded. "Then we proceed. Schultz, the men on the back gate and the front, do you trust them?"

"Kaufmann⁴⁰ and Reinwald are on the main gate. The back gate has Krieger and Hirschfeld. Ja, Herr Kommandant, I can trust them."

"Good. You are going to get a truck from the motor pool. Then I want you to tell the men at the gates that we are going on a work detail by the destroyed bridge. Make certain they understand that if anyone asks, I have been planning this trip since this morning. Understood?"

Schultz nodded.

"Go. I will fill you in later."

Schultz left as Klink turned to Hogan. "Colonel Hogan, I need you to organize a work detail. I want your team and half the men who had been on Miller's detail a couple of days ago. I also want another two or three men dressed as guards. Have them wait in the motor pool. It might be a good idea if you take men who were at the unmasking; I believe some of the men on the work detail were there as well. And take Private Wagner with you."

Hogan lifted a brow.

"I will explain later. Please, go.

Hogan nodded and slowly exited the room.

"Now," Klink turned to the others and switched to German, "here is where it becomes more difficult. There is an SS colonel named Danziger coming, along with Hauptsturmführer Schiff. I am hoping that it will only be those two, but I do not know. Danziger doubts me, but he does not know anything. Not yet. He will ask to see all the men on the work detail, along with their files. Fraulein Hilda, you will supply the files and answer any questions. Except for the Wagner file, everything will be in order. He may not question it, but if he does, play along with him. Tell him you had nothing to do with it. That it was put there without your knowledge. He must trust you, even if he does not trust me.

"Hauptmann Gruber, make certain that Langenscheidt is the one who brings the prisoners on the detail to see Danziger. After he fails to find what he wants here, he will demand to go the bridge. If he does bring men in addition to Schiff, you must convince him that if there is something wrong, I will be suspicious if he shows up with extra guards. You must convince him to go in my staff car and with only yourself and Langenscheidt as the escort. Schiff can also go, but no more. If the only way you can get him to agree is to cast doubt on my loyalty, do so. Again, Danziger must trust you.

"Fraulein Hilda," he turned to her, "after they leave, call me immediately on the walkie-talkie and tell me who is going to the site. Understood?" His eyes took them all in.

⁴⁰ *Act Three*

Scene One

They nodded.

“Herr Kommandant,” Gruber asked, “if there are others with him, if I cannot convince him to keep them here, then what?”

A sad smile. “Then, Hauptmann, I’m afraid you will not see me again. I will leave if he insists on bringing more men with him. The risk is too great to stay.”

Though Hilda and Langenscheidt were startled, Gruber nodded soberly.

“You can change your minds,” Klink said gently.

Hilda shook her head firmly. After a moment, Langenscheidt did as well.

“Good. Now,” he stood, “begins our little play.”

Hogan was waiting with some nervousness beside the remains of the Adolf Hitler Bridge. Hilda had called. Danziger and Schiff had left camp in Klink’s staff car. Gruber was with them and Langenscheidt was driving. Hilda had said that Danziger was convinced that Klink was a traitor, and he would prove it. Danziger had wanted to bring more men with him, but Schiff had weighed in on Gruber’s side, agreeing that more men would make Klink suspicious. So far, so good. But Hogan still didn’t like it.

“Please relax, Robert,” Klink said softly.

“Relax. Right.”

A faint smile. “You used to be more adventurous.”

“That was before I got shot! Besides, you’re the one who keeps telling me to stop being so cocky.” His hand lifted to his elbow; that arm of his was getting sore again.

“True. But to use an expression of yours, all bases are filled.”

Hogan smiled. “All bases are covered. And I hope so.” He looked around again. Most of the Adolf Hitler Bridge had disappeared, leaving jagged edges butting out about twenty feet over the deep ravine. A few hundred feet below, the debris from the bridge was barely visible in the tangle of rocks, shrubs and snow. Conceivably, the bridge could be rebuilt, but who’d do it?

“That should keep people away,” Hogan murmured.

“That was the idea,” Klink said.

Hogan grunted and turned back to the men. Four of his men were there; he’d left Kinch behind to man the radio — just in case. Half of the men from the original work detail, including some from last night, and Binyamin Weiner, were spread out, filling holes and leveling the road running by the bridge. Guarding the prisoners were Schultz, Samuelson dressed as a Wehrmacht corporal, and the Mulcahy twins dressed as Wehrmacht privates. Samuelson and the twins had volunteered for the assignment. Well, the twins were always ready for a mission, more so since they learned who Klink was. Samuelson, he was the surprise. He’d never gone on any of their missions before. Hogan nearly turned him down, but then Hogan thought about it a bit more. Maybe it would do Samuelson good to see some action. Though, if the truth were told, Hogan didn’t have a clue what that action would be. Olsen was a mile up the road, ready to warn them

Scene One

when Danziger was near.

Klink looked around when the walkie-talkie sounded; he answered it.

"They're coming," Olsen's voice said softly.

Klink tossed the walkie-talkie back into the truck. "Bring the men in for a break."

Hogan gestured and the prisoners came over to the still standing guardhouse. "Showtime, fellas," he murmured. "Everyone stay cool. Take your cues from Klink." He almost smiled at the startled expressions on the faces of the six men who didn't know what was going on. Well, there was no time to explain things now. Not to mention, he wasn't sure what to explain.

Hogan looked down the road; he could just make out the staff car coming toward them.

But Klink was walking out onto the remains of the bridge. Hogan followed him. "Don't get too close to the edge. It's not as stable as it looks."

"I won't."

Hogan watched as Klink stooped down, looking at the damage. "What are you doing?"

Klink stood. "Think it can be rebuilt?"

"What?"

"Think it can be — ?"

"Who the hell cares?"

Klink raised a brow. "I do."

"Oh, for . . . It was your idea to blow the damn thing. Now you want to rebuild it?"

"Well, not immediately. Later."

"When later?" Hogan started. And stopped. The staff car, driven by Langenscheidt, had stopped in front of the bridge.

Gruber got out, followed by Schiff, who looked around with a cynical smile. Then another man who, if he had been a few years younger, could have been a poster boy for the Aryans. Tall, blond, handsome. Or he would have been if he didn't have that deep scar on his right cheek. His eyes flickered over Hogan and Klink almost dismissively. Then they turned to the work detail. His eyes began to glow, and Danziger smiled. Hogan found himself shuddering at that smile.

That smile turned on Klink. "Is this he, Schiff?" Danziger asked in German.

"Jawohl, Herr Standartenführer," Schiff answered. "Kommandant Klink."

Danziger walked closer. "The man who can personally identify every man on his work details. Such a memory, Kommandant." He smiled again. "Don't you agree, Schiff?"

"Jawohl, Herr Standartenführer."

"A man with such a memory is wasted here, Schiff. Surely, he belongs somewhere else. Another post, perhaps? Would you like another post, Kommandant?"

"I am content here, Herr Standartenführer," Klink said.

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"Of course, Kommandant. Here, you can play your games, hide from battle, protect worthless prisoners. And Jews. Is that correct, Kommandant?"

Klink stayed silent, his eyes fastened on Danziger.

Danziger turned around suddenly. His arm jerked out, his finger pointing at Binyamin. "There, Schiff! There! Do you see that worthless thing? If you look on his arm, you will see the numbers 300303 tattooed there. My birth date. A gypsy woman told me those numbers were special. And they were. For years, those numbers brought me luck. They protected me. They protected him. But no more."

Just as suddenly, Danziger turned again. "You lied, Kommandant. A Jew-lover," he spat. "Or is it simpler than that? What did he promise you? Gold? Gems? I'm afraid he cannot deliver them, Kommandant. His friends have taken them. But I will find out where they have gone."

Hogan's eyes narrowed. Danziger was as loony as a tune. Or was he? Gold? Gems? He shouldn't be surprised that Danziger had those things. Other SS men had also looted their way through Europe. But now they were gone, and Danziger thought that . . .

Wait a minute. The convoy. Danziger had been apoplectic when the convoy didn't report to him. Of course! He'd hidden that stuff in the convoy. And he thought that Binyamin had . . .

Hogan stopped thinking as Danziger turned to Klink again.

"Or perhaps you already know, Kommandant. He told you about the trucks. Perhaps you had something to do with the trucks disappearing. It does not matter. I will get the truth out of both of you. First you. Then," he turned back to Binyamin, "you."

Hogan didn't see Klink's hand move. One moment, Klink's right hand was empty; the next, there was a gun in it, pointing at Danziger's head.

"Danziger," Klink said softly.

Danziger turned.

There was time for a split second of fear to cross Danziger's face before Hogan saw the blood spurting from the hole in Danziger's forehead. As Danziger fell, Klink's hand lowered and he turned toward Schiff.

Not particularly surprised, Schiff looked down at Danziger's body. "That is one less for the Allies to take care of."

"Shall I make it two?" Klink said softly.

"Nein!" Binyamin interrupted hurriedly. "He . . . he saw me escape. He let me go."

"Do not concern yourself, Herr Wagner," Schiff said with a faint smile. "If the Kommandant had wanted me dead, I would already be dead." He looked at Klink with mild surprise. "How did you know?"

"Your vague description of the escaped prisoner was the first suspicion. When you did not demand to examine the prisoners for tattoos, that was another. I made inquiries; you have friends, Schiff."

"So do you, Herr Kommandant. To my surprise, given your reputation."

Klink bowed slightly.

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Schiff looked down at the body. "The wound. It looks like it came from a rifle. Interesting. I have heard of such weapons. Something to do with the barrel?" He glanced at the other side of the ravine. "A sniper firing from there?" He pointed. "An assassination?"

Klink nodded. "Danziger had many enemies."

Schiff nodded. "And, of course, there is no way to find the sniper, given the destruction of the bridge."

"None. Though Sergeant Schultz heroically sprayed the terrain with machine gun fire."

Schiff nodded. "I agree. That is how my report shall read. If you will permit me to use your car and return to camp, Herr Kommandant, I will send my men back to recover his body. If there is a nearby cemetery, I would prefer to bury him there."

"As you wish."

"Then I will take my leave, Herr Kommandant. Auf Wiedersehn."

Klink nodded. And said through tight lips, "My condolences to Frau Danziger and the children."

Schiff looked surprised. "I will offer them, Herr Kommandant."

"Danke," Klink said softly.

Schiff clicked his heels together and bowed to Klink. Then he turned to Binyamin. "May you have a long life, Herr Wagner."

"And you, Herr Schiff."

Again the cynical smile, and Schiff returned to the staff car. Langenscheidt, as pale as a sheet, and Gruber, nearly as pale, got inside. In moments, the car was out of sight.

Klink stirred. "Schultz, if you please, the woods." Klink gestured toward the other side.

Schultz nodded, and walked out onto the remains of the bridge. The silence was shattered by his machine gun firing.

"Now what?" Hogan asked.

"We go back," Klink said in a tired voice. "Schultz can stay with the body until the SS arrives."

Hogan looked at Klink's face and frowned. Klink was far too quiet now. It was as if . . .

"You didn't have a choice," Hogan said. "You had to do it."

"Did I?" Klink said softly.

"Danziger was a monster. Schiff was right; one less for the Allies — "

"Judge, jury, and executioner," Klink said.

"He was gonna kill you. You know that. After he tortured you. He got what was coming to him."

Klink looked at him sadly. "It's still so easy for you, isn't it? Everything is still so black and white. Danziger is a monster; you eliminate the monsters. He was a man, Robert, with a wife and family who will grieve for him."

"Their tough luck."

Klink shook his head. "Be very careful, Robert. The world is not as

Scene One

simple as you think it is. Death should never be simple. When it is, when we forget that these are human beings we're killing, then we all become monsters."

Hogan shook his head. "I don't buy that. We're the good guys, and — "

"The end justifies the means?"

"Yeah, it does."

Klink shook his head and walked away.

Hogan stared after Klink. *What was with him? Why did he make things so complicated?*

Hogan shook his head and turned around to see the others looking at him, waiting for him.

"Get in the truck, fellas. We're going back to camp."

Slowly, soberly, the others walked back to the truck.

Scene One

Chapter 8

Hogan was tired, his arm was sore, and the barracks were too noisy for his aching head. After a monotonous dinner — not even LeBeau's efforts could help the food — he didn't feel like hanging around. Sergeant Wilson had told him to go to the infirmary before he went to bed; he might as well do it now.

Hogan walked across the quiet compound. The guards were walking slowly on their rounds. Some of the prisoners were heading for the recreation hall. The dusk air was cold and damp. Was it going to snow again, or worse, rain? He hoped not. He was tired of winter and the war.

How far were the Allies? The Allies hadn't reached the Rhine yet. And they still weren't anywhere near Dusseldorf, which, like the entire Ruhr valley, was under the control of Field Marshall Walter Model's Army Group B and its 300,000 men.

Hogan walked into the quiet infirmary. The lights were low, too low, for his mood. But, as far as he could tell, most of the sick men were already sleeping.

"Evening, Colonel," Wilson greeted quietly.

"Well, I'm here, Wilson," Hogan said in an irritable voice. "Where do you want me?"

Wilson smiled. "Back there; it's out of the way."

Wilson led the way to the back and behind the screen. He pointed to the cot next to Binyamin's. The younger man was reading, a small desk lamp illuminating the book he held.

Binyamin smiled at Hogan. "Good evening, Colonel."

"Evening," Hogan said.

"If you'll have a seat, Colonel," Wilson said. "I'll be right back." He ducked into the supply room just past the cots.

"Interesting book?" Hogan asked.

Binyamin shook his head. "One of your men gave it to me. I do not like the lady."

"What's the book? . . . *Gone With the Wind*? You don't like it?"

"I know little American history. This does not show a nice picture of it."

"Well, the movie was good."

"I have never seen a movie."

Hogan looked at him. "Never? You're kidding?"

"Mein Vater . . . my father was very orthodox. He thought movies were too . . . I do not know the word . . . leichtfertig."

"Frivolous," Hogan translated.

"Frivolous . . . Mein Vater, my father thought movies were too frivolous for a rabbinical student."

Scene One

"I've always liked them. Especially westerns."

Wilson came back.

For the next few minutes, Hogan suffered through his ministrations. And when he was through, Hogan felt even achier than before. He also saw Wilson's frown. "Okay, what gives?"

"You've got an infection, Colonel. No infection's good."

"It'll go away."

"I hope so. But I think I'll clean that wound with some alcohol. Be right back."

"What? Hey, wait a . . ."

However, Wilson had disappeared into the supply room again.

"Infections are serious, Colonel," Binyamin said. "I have seen strong men die from them."

Hogan managed a shrug. "I've had them before."

"Have you been shot before?"

"No," Hogan admitted.

"That is a shock to the body. It takes long to get over it."

"He didn't," Hogan murmured.

"Wilhelm?"

Hogan nodded, and kept silent as Wilson came back.

Somehow, Hogan got through it without making a fool of himself. He didn't pass out — though he prayed he would. He didn't scream — though he wanted to. He did groan loudly a couple of times, and he did cry out, though he managed to turn it into a whining complaint.

"Sorry, Colonel," Wilson murmured. "If I didn't, well, you really don't want this turning into something worse."

Worse? What could be worse? And caught himself. He knew a lot that could have been worse.

"Colonel, I'd rather you spent the night here. I'm gonna want to look at that arm again later. And probably change the bandage a couple of times. Okay?"

Hogan nodded. God, he felt shaky! "Let my barracks know. But keep it simple."

Wilson smiled. "No problem, sir." He stood. "Get some rest."

"Yeah, right," Hogan muttered under his breath. He shifted uneasily on the cot and looked over at Binyamin. He managed a faint smile. "Looks like we're bunkmates."

"I do not mind."

"Actually, you could satisfy my curiosity," Hogan said. "How do you know Klink?"

A faint smile. "You would like to hear my boring life?"

Hogan laughed faintly. "I don't think it'll be boring."

"At first, it was. Very, very dull."

"Do you mind?"

Binyamin shook his head. "No. It is odd to . . ." He shrugged. "I was

Scene One

seven when I meet Wilhelm. It was 1917 und . . . and I was visiting my sister, Amalia. She was much older — twenty-eight years. A rich widow. Her husband died before the war. My father did not like it, but Amalia's house became a place for soldiers, a very, what is the word, a very smart group. She had a large library and gave books out. Wilhelm was on leave from the war and would visit. I liked him. He told stories."

"Stories?"

"Yes. About magic and heroes. My father would not have liked the stories. But he did think family was important, so he let me visit Amalia often. I think," he said with a faint smile, "he hoped Amalia would return to her strict upbringing." A sigh. "He was disappointed. He did not approve of Amalia's friends, especially her Gentile friends. And Wilhelm was a close friend."

"How close?" Hogan blurted out.

Binyamin looked at him in surprise.

Hogan winced. "That was . . . Forget it."

"Do you wish to know if they loved each other?"

"I, uh . . ."

Binyamin smiled faintly. "When I was thirteen, I asked him."

"You did?"

"Rabbinical students are taught to be curious. And I was more than most." Binyamin smiled. "Wilhelm and I, we talked long. I did not understand why they did not marry. I did not understand when he said they did not love each other that way." His head shook. "It was confusing. I understood more when Amalia married Rudolf."

"You're kidding."

"Nein . . . No. Wilhelm was the best man." The smile turned sad. "My father did not forgive Amalia. Rudolf was Catholic, and Amalia became one when she married. My father did not allow me to see her. But I did. She was very happy with Rudolf, more when her son was born."

"And Klink?"

"When he was home, he would spend time with Amalia and Rudolf. Wilhelm knew more about music and books than anyone. It was worth my father's anger to learn. Since I was a child, I have wanted to learn."

"Sounds like a nice life."

"It was for many years. Then Amalia died in a car accident. And Hitler came, and my life, the lives of all Jews, changed. Wilhelm tried to talk father to leave Germany. Father refused, told him not to go back. Rabbi Baruch Weiner was very stubborn. He did not change his mind about Amalia. And he would not leave Germany."

"What happened to your father?"

"I do not know. Wilhelm has not said about my parents and Rudolf. I believe they are dead."

"You don't know that," Hogan protested.

"It is expected. I saw the death camps with Danziger — Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek. That is where Jews went. If my parents did not go to

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those camps, they went to other camps and died. My parents were not young.”

Hogan stared at him. “Death camps? What death . . . Majdanek. I know that name. Why? . . . Sam — that’s it! Sam . . . He was transferred to Majdanek late in 1942.”

“Sam?”

“That’s not his real name — we just called him that. His real name was Vladimir Minsk⁴¹.”

“Russian?”

“Yeah.” Hogan smiled. “And the best tailor this side of Savile Row.” Another smile. “Haven’t thought of him in months. A natural con artist. Probably has everyone eating out of his hand.”

“I am sorry, Colonel Hogan,” Binyamin said. “But your friend is dead.”

“What?”

“Majdanek was a death camp. And a prison for Soviet prisoners. The difference between the Jews and the Soviets is that Jews died quickly in the gas chambers. The Soviets died slowly of hunger and disease.”

Hogan stared at Binyamin. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Hitler believes Slavs are untermenschen, not human, like Jews. Why keep untermenschen alive? Was your friend young?”

Numb, Hogan shook his head.

“Your friend is dead, Colonel. The men at Majdanek were skeletons, much worse than any man here. With diseases that would kill strong men. No one could live there for two years.”

Hogan couldn’t say a word; he just stared at the younger man speaking so casually about death. Finally, he found his voice. “Death . . . you said death camps.”

Binyamin sighed. “You do not know. Why should you? Most Germans do not know.” He turned to look at Hogan. “The Nazis are efficient, Colonel. Those they do not use, they kill. Men, women, children, old, young . . . To Hitler, untermenschen are good only to work or die. I saw records. They killed tens of thousands at Majdanek; Auschwitz, hundreds of thousands. I have heard whispers of millions. God knows how many Soviets died in their camps. Tens, hundreds of thousands? The numbers make no sense. Can we see such a slaughter? No. But . . .”

Binyamin turned his head. Hogan was staring at him with a look of . . . He didn’t have the words to describe it. Horror was too trivial a word. Binyamin turned away.

⁴¹ “The Informer”

Scene One

Chapter 9

Berlin:

Hans Teppel looked at his watch for the tenth time in as many minutes. It was nearly 2100 and he still hadn't heard anything. Worse, his boss, General Schellenberg, was entertaining an old crony of his, Standartenführer Weiss from Leipzig. They'd gone to dinner together and were now indulging in some brandy in Schellenberg's office. And Teppel had a nasty suspicion that Schellenberg was the reason he hadn't been contacted yet.

Teppel heard murmurs outside his door and straightened. Then he heard hearty laughter and even louder goodbyes. Maybe now . . .

To his surprise, the door opened and he saw Standartenführer Weiss in full SS regalia staring at him from the door.

"Major Hans Teppel?" Weiss asked as Teppel snapped to attention.

"Jawohl, Herr Standartenführer. Heil Hitler! May I be of service?" Behind Weiss, he could see four alert SS guards. Fear twisted Teppel's insides; Weiss had a nasty reputation dating to his time in Berlin. Was this Schellenberg's way of getting rid of him?

Weiss strolled into the room, his eyes roaming curiously. "You have had some damage."

"Jawohl, Herr Standartenführer."

"The fortunes of war." Weiss sighed exaggeratedly. "A pity." He closed the door behind him.

"Jawohl, Herr Standartenführer. Would you care for some brandy?"

Weiss, to Teppel's surprise, roared with laughter. "I believe I have had enough brandy, Teppel. Nein, I am more interested in conversation." He settled himself in a chair and nonchalantly crossed his ankles. Genially, he waved Teppel back to his seat.

"Conversation, Herr Standartenführer?" Teppel sat on the edge of his chair, wondering if he could overpower the taller Weiss if he had to. But there were those guards outside . . . He began to turn the ring on his finger, the ring with the poison . . .

"Jawohl, Teppel. It is rare that I have the opportunity for some pleasant conversation." He sighed loudly. "The fortunes of war again. And the burdens of command."

Was he drunk? If he was, he hid it well. What do I say?

But Weiss didn't seem to need a reply from him. "Ja, the burdens of command. The stories I could tell. Why, I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb."

Teppel froze for a moment, and stopped playing with the ring. Then he stood and walked over to his liquor stock. He poured himself a drink,

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gathering his thoughts. "I, too, have stories, Herr Standartenführer. Of my service to the Fatherland. Once, I shot my arrow over the house and hurt my brother."

"Ja, command and the war will often cause pain," Weiss said solemnly. "Sometimes, my soul is full of discord and dismay."

Teppel slowly turned around and looked at Weiss, waiting for him to make the next move.

Weiss nodded approvingly. "Sehr gut, Teppel. Now, I understand from a theatrical friend of mine that you need a package moved. Where is it?"

"At the Tiergarten zoo; I will take you."

"Good. First, a warning. Two of the men outside are loyal SS, and they are killers. Do nothing to make them suspicious. You will not be able to warn your package; he will think you betrayed him. Do you understand?"

Teppel nodded.

"One more warning." Weiss stood and leaned closer. "Beware of Schellenberg."

"I know," Teppel began.

"Nein, you do not," Weiss said softly. "Schellenberg is not as loyal to Hitler as you think. He, Himmler and several others are trying to negotiate a separate peace with the Allies."

Teppel stared at him. "I don't believe it."

Weiss smiled grimly. "It is true. Himmler has already tried once. But Himmler is also a coward; he dares not cast suspicion on himself while Hitler is watching him. If anything goes wrong, if Hitler becomes suspicious, those men would not hesitate to bring down others, guilty or not. Do you understand?"

Teppel nodded.

Weiss smiled briefly. "Then, as my friend is fond of saying, let the play begin."

Weiss opened the door and swept through, followed by Teppel.

Mike Anders was shivering in the cold, dark night. Cloudy as it usually was, the nearly full moon was hidden from sight, and with the lack of lights anywhere, the very shadows were threatening. If he were a man to believe in ghosts, he would be extremely nervous. But he didn't, so he had nothing to be nervous about. Right? Yeah, right.

But he was nervous, and he was scared. Since he'd lost touch with the OSS last year, he didn't know whom to trust, whom to turn to. And sometimes, he'd trusted the wrong person — which was how he'd gotten hurt.

Thank God, he'd managed to get to Berlin. Thank God, Teppel was still alive and able to help. Maybe his luck was changing. Maybe . . .

A noise spun him around. There was a man approaching, a man in uniform. Anders waited until the man got closer. Then he breathed a sigh of relief. It was Teppel. He walked over with a smile . . .

Then he heard the sound of a weapon being cocked.

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"Halt!" cried a voice behind him.

Anders started to turn. But his treacherous right leg gave way under him, and he fell heavily. Several pairs of arms reached for him and soon held him fast. A tall SS colonel walked over and, with a smile, snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. Still, Anders tried to break free, and was rewarded with a rifle butt into his back. He fell with a groan to his knees.

A gloved hand reached under his chin and tilted his head up. "You have spirit," said the colonel. "I enjoy questioning men with spirit. It makes it so much more entertaining when they break." The colonel straightened. "Felsenthal, Loeffler, bring him."

Two beefy SS men grabbed his arms and dragged him to his feet. Anders still tried to fight them, but was nearly immobile in their heavy grip.

Then he saw Teppel. Bitter bile rose in his throat. *So, he finally turned. Why? What happened? Any fool can see how the war is going. Now, he betrays us . . . Betrays me?*

Teppel stared at Anders emotionlessly. Then he turned and walked away.

The colonel turned to the other two men. "Return to headquarters."

"Jawohl, Herr Standartenführer." The two saluted and disappeared into the darkness.

Anders was dragged, half carried toward a car. They threw him inside; he hit his head against the door. Dazed, he felt them secure his handcuffed hands to a rod behind the front seat. The SS colonel got in beside him. The other two men got into the front and, in moments, the car started.

"Cigarette?" the colonel asked. "No?" He lit it and took a long drag. "American, very good. As you know, Herr Anders."

"You have the wrong person," he bluffed, though his insides were turning somersaults. "My name is Baum."

"Your name is Mike Anders, though I doubt that is your real name. You and I will be spending some time together. We should get acquainted. Can you fly an airplane? A small civilian craft holding no more than five?"

Anders kept silent.

"No answer?" An elaborate sigh. "Very well. Then let us talk of 'graves, of worms, and epitaphs, make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.'⁴²"

Astonished, Anders raised his head and turned to look at Weiss.

Weiss smiled. "Teppel didn't betray you, Herr Anders. We have a mutual friend in common; he entrusted you to me." Weiss reached over and unlocked the handcuffs. "Cigarette?" He proffered his gold case as Anders rubbed his sore wrists.

Still stunned, Anders took a cigarette and let Weiss light it.

⁴² William Shakespeare: *Richard II*, Act three, Scene two

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“First, we need to get you better. Some food, a few days’ rest and a doctor.”

“Who are you?” Anders finally asked.

Weiss smiled. “That mutual friend — he calls me Hamlet. Now, rest; we have a long ride ahead of us.”

Anders sank back against the seat, a wave of relief sweeping over him. Hamlet, one of the Six who reported directly to the Stage.⁴³ Never in his wildest dreams could he have hoped for this. Then . . .

How in hell did Teppel manage to contact the Stage?

⁴³ *Act Two*

Scene One

Chapter 10

It was quiet in Barracks 2. Some of the twenty men were already sleeping. Most of the others were on their bunks, reading or talking in quiet voices. Hogan's crew — LeBeau, Carter, Newkirk and Kinch — were still sitting at the table, waiting for the door to open, waiting for Hogan to return.

LeBeau shook the coffeepot. "There is still a little left. Anyone care for a cup?"

The others shook their heads as Newkirk said, "Save it for tomorrow."

LeBeau grimaced. "It will taste like tar tomorrow."

"Yeah, but with the coffee rationed, it's still better than nothing."

"Or that ersatz stuff the Germans drink," Kinch added.

LeBeau shrugged and put the pot back on the stove.

The rattle of the bunk hiding the ladder to the tunnels sounded loudly in the quiet room. All eyes went to the tunnel entrance. Baker grinned as he saw the others staring at him.

"Trouble?" Kinch asked.

"No. Lt. Miller is spelling me for a few minutes."

"Miller?" Newkirk asked. "What for?"

"Seems he wants to go into radio after the war," Baker said. "Thought it would be good practice."

"After the war," Newkirk said in a dreamy voice. "The three loveliest words in the English language."

"Yeah." Carter sighed. Then he straightened, his eyes going wide. "Hey! I never really thought about it before."

"You never think at all, Andrew," Newkirk said as the others laughed.

"No," Carter said. "I mean it. What are you gonna do after the war, Peter?"

"Sleep for a month, take long soaks in a hot bath and eat every kipper I can find."

"No," Carter persisted. "For real. What are you going to do? Stay in the RAF?"

Newkirk opened his mouth, and then clamped it shut. Every once in awhile, the kid made him uncomfortable. Stay in the RAF? Hell, he'd only joined because his kid brother did. Mum was so proud of Hal. So, what was he going to do but join as well? Fat lot of good it did either of them. Stay in? Not bloody likely. But, do what? What was he really good for? It was a disturbing thought.

"Maybe for a bit," he found himself saying. "Until I figure it out." He looked at Carter. "What about you? Go back to Bull Frog? Do the drugstore thing?"

Carter looked unusually somber. "No," he said slowly. "With Mary Jane

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gone . . . There's nothing in Bull Frog."

"Your folks are there," Kinch said quietly. "And your kid brother and baby sister."

"Yeah, they are. And I miss them. And I can't wait to see Kenny and Betsy Sue. But . . . I don't know . . . After all this, Bull Frog . . ." His head shook. "I don't know. And being a pharmacist . . . I'll have to go to school. College and then a pharmacy school. That costs money."

"They passed a bill last year," Kinch said. "Help GIs with tuition, books and things if they want to go to school after the war. That's what I'm doing," he added.

"School?" LeBeau asked.

"Yeah, finish college."

"And do what?" Baker asked.

"Well, before the war, I read about this thing they had at the World's Fair in New York. Something called television."

"Never heard of it," Newkirk said.

"Like radio with pictures. They said there's gonna be one in every house someday."

Newkirk wasn't convinced. "Right."

Kinch grinned. "Something new, something that I think will be big. I'd like to get into it. And there's another thing that's gonna be big one day. Something to do with calculating machines. There's a company called IBM that's working with things like that."

"You invest in it, Kinch?" asked Paul Hammond from a nearby bunk.

Kinch grinned. "Yeah, I did. Last I checked it was doing pretty good."

"Oh, Kinchy's going to be rich," LeBeau kidded.

The grin grew. "You never know. What about you, LeBeau?"

A faraway look in LeBeau's eyes. "My own restaurant on the Champs Elysées," he said positively. "I've dreamed about it . . . well, forever, I think."

"That'll take some money," Newkirk said.

"I can borrow it from Kinch," he said brightly as the others laughed.

"Me, I'm going home," said Carr from a bunk.

"Your folks have a farm, Lester. In Georgia?" Walter Red Hand asked.

Carr nodded. "Yeah. Their own too. Not sharecropping like most colored⁴⁴ folks. Good land. Good people there too."

"Me," Hammond said softly, "I'm going to school."

⁴⁴ In this time, blacks would refer to themselves as "colored", as in NAACP — National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Whites would use the word "Negro", which superseded the word "colored" by all races after the war. And we all know the word that racists used back then and now.

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“Doing what?” Carter asked.

“Teaching.” He laughed. “When I was a kid, I hated school. But after being here, and taking some of the classes we’ve had . . . Never thought I’d say it, but I like school. Want to do it right too. Teach kids like me who don’t like it.”

There were nods from the others in the barracks.

“What about you, Baker?” Red Hand asked.

“Don’t really know,” he said thoughtfully. “I’ll have to think about it. But I do know one thing. After the war’s over, I’m going to ask to stay here awhile.”

“You’re what?” from LeBeau.

“You’re nuts, mate,” from Newkirk.

Baker smiled. “Yeah, sounds like it. Trouble is . . . Well, I’ve been here over two years. Boring, scary, exciting. And, well, I don’t know . . . Going from war to peace to home, that suddenly . . . I guess I need time.”

“You’ve got folks in Atlanta. And a younger brother and sister,” Kinch said.

“Yeah, and I want to see them. But I need to do this, I think. Kind of get used to peace again before going back. Especially since I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“Think they’ll let you?” Newkirk asked.

Baker shrugged. “Why not?”

“Maybe we could all stay,” Carter suggested. “For a bit anyway. Make up our minds after the war ends.”

“Maybe,” Newkirk said.

“What do you think Hogan will do?” Hammond asked.

“Heck, he’s a flyer,” Kinch said with a grin. “He’ll keep flying.” The grin grew. “You should see his face whenever he hears about those new planes, even the German ones, the jets. His eyes light up. He can’t wait to get into one of those things.”

“Hey, I just thought of something!” Carter exclaimed. “What if they want to ship him to the Pacific?”

“Why would they do that, Andrew?” Newkirk asked.

“Well, that war’s not close to being over. They need flyers. Maybe they’ll give him back his old group.”

“I think that would probably tick off the new CO,” Kinch said dryly.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“And after years in this place, I don’t think they’ll ship him off to combat,” Baker added.

“Maybe. Hey!” Carter brightened. “Maybe we can all stay together, until it gets sorted out.”

“Hell,” Newkirk said as he walked over to the sink. He got himself a cup of water. “They’ll probably just ship us out without even asking.” Odd, the thought suddenly hurt.

“But that’s not fair,” Carter complained.

“Life’s not fair, mon ami,” LeBeau said sympathetically. He also turned

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away from the others. Much as he wanted the war to end, he didn't want to lose what he'd found in this godforsaken camp. No, life really wasn't fair.

A loud, cheerful tapping on the door startled them. LeBeau walked over and opened the door.

"Evening, gents," Sergeant Wilson said with a smile.

LeBeau looked behind him. "Where's Colonel Hogan?"

"He's not coming," Wilson said. And grimaced at the uproar he caused.

"What do you mean he's not coming?" Newkirk out-shouted the rest of the men.

"If you'll give the man a chance to say a word," Kinch interrupted.

"Thank you," Wilson said exaggeratedly. "He's spending the night in the infirmary. That's all."

"Why?" Kinch asked.

"It's nothing much," Wilson said in a light voice. "He's picked up a mild infection. I can keep an eye on him, change the bandages, that sort of thing."

"We can do that," Newkirk said.

"Yeah, you could," Wilson said with a slow drawl. "If you took the time to finish any of those courses I was giving. You didn't, so you're not."

"Now, look, mate . . ."

"Sorry," Wilson said firmly. "None of you has the training. None of you knows what to look for. And he can do without you guys fussing over him."

"Who's fussing? Okay, okay," Newkirk said. "We're fussing. But . . ."

"No buts."

"Are you sure it's a mild infection?" Kinch asked.

Wilson nodded. "Yeah. He just needs the rest."

"Who doesn't?" Newkirk murmured.

"If it gets worse," Kinch started.

"Shouldn't."

"If it gets worse," Kinch said again. "Then what?"

Wilson sighed. "I do what I can."

"Doctor Bauer⁴⁵ in town?" Baker asked.

Wilson shook his head. "His supplies aren't better than ours."

"We could ask for an airdrop of penicillin," Carter suggested. "We've done it before."⁴⁶

The others nodded.

"Look, don't go borrowing trouble," Wilson said. "He's just got a mild infection. Probably be gone tomorrow."

"Yeah. Just make sure you let us know, mate," Newkirk said.

⁴⁵ *Act One*

⁴⁶ "Is There a Doctor in the House?" and "That's No Lady, That's My Spy"

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Wilson smiled tolerantly. "Will do. Goodnight."

Glum goodnights followed Wilson out.

"What do you think?" Baker asked.

"I think he's telling us what the Colonel wants us to hear," Kinch said. "But I also think he thinks it is a mild infection."

"So it's okay," Hammond said.

"My mom," Carter said hesitantly. "They didn't tell me at first . . . But she got an infection when the baby was born in January. She got really sick."

"Infections can be bad," Red Hand agreed.

"I had an uncle," Kinch said soberly. "He died when I was six. A blister that got infected." *Though it wasn't only the infection. He didn't get it treated at first; the colored hospital was too far away.*

Kinch turned to his bunk and started pulling off his clothes. *And when it got too bad, the whites-only hospital wouldn't take him. He died on the way to the colored hospital.*

The others were also preparing for bed. Outside, the guards were knocking on the doors — lights-out in ten minutes. Kinch climbed up to the upper bunk over the tunnel entrance.

Baker was going down the ladder to the tunnels. "See you later, Kinch," he said softly.

Kinch nodded; he'd spell Baker in a couple of hours. He turned over, facing the wall, and drew the thin blankets over his shoulder. But he wasn't sleepy. Tired, yes, but not sleepy. He'd almost forgotten about his Uncle Ivan — his mother's older brother and his godfather. Hence, his own middle name of Ivan.

Funny, before his uncle's death, he'd hated the name Ivan. But after the funeral, he announced to his startled family that from then on, he'd be Ivan to his family and closest friends. He also changed his mind about moving north to Michigan where his father's sister lived. His mother wanted to go, his father was neutral. It was his decision whether they went. He was only six, but he'd learned what racism was. And he knew that was the real cause of his uncle's death. He didn't want to leave his friends and the only home he'd ever known. But after his uncle's death, he'd hoped it would be better up north. And they moved that summer.

In some ways, in many ways, Michigan was better. There weren't any whites-only places nearby. None officially that he knew about. But he knew there were places where coloreds weren't accepted or allowed. The racism was subtler than in the South, but it was still there. But James Ivan Kinchloe was ambitious and smart. He was going to school, was going to be somebody. And when they moved to Detroit after his daddy got a church there, he knew he could do it. Even got to work for the telephone company. The pay was good, and he'd made friends there. A few were even white, though he wasn't always sure if the friendship was real or only, to use an expression, skin-deep.

Weird. He had to come to a German POW camp to be fully accepted as a

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human being. Here in racist Germany, he wasn't judged by the color of his skin. And not only by Hogan and his guys, but also by the Germans he was closest to. Klink and Schultz didn't care he was colored. And neither did the underground people they met. At least, he didn't think so. Like most coloreds, he had a second sense about that kind of thing.

He nearly laughed. In Nazi Germany, for the first time in his life, he felt truly equal to the whites around him. *My God! How do I go back? And do I want to?*

Corporal Peter Newkirk was also wide-awake. *Damn Andrew! Why did he have to dredge up bad memories?*

What was he gonna do? He'd had fun bumming around before the war. Tried his hand at everything — theatre, magic, road shows. A regular nomad he'd been. A lark, he'd had. He'd never told anyone, including Hogan, but a few of his larks were less than legal. He had to admit that if it weren't for the war, he might have wandered more and more into the underside of British life. His mum had been afraid of that. His sister Mavis too. Both had been so glad, and proud, when he'd joined the RAF. Of course, he had to when Hal joined. After all, Hal was his kid brother, and if the kid did that, how could he not do it? He'd look like a ruddy fool. Or a coward. Now, all things considered, he'd made the right decision. Though he'd been mad as hell when he was shot down and captured, he'd actually done better here in this POW camp than he would have in the RAF. Here, he was doing something useful. And he'd had fun, well for the most part, doing it.

But what now? Or rather, what later? After the war? What to do after he got out of here? He didn't have a bloody clue. It was a thought that kept disturbing his sleep until it was his turn to man the radio.

Sergeant Andrew Carter fell asleep fast enough, but his slumber was broken by dreams of Mary Jane⁴⁷ and his hometown. Mary Jane was his first love — his only love — from the time he'd first seen her in seventh grade. Her father, who worked for the Forest Service, had just been transferred to Bull Frog from Washington D.C. A big strapping man, he loved the outdoors and the area. But Mary Jane and her mother didn't. They were big city folks, and the tiny town was boring and intimidating. They probably would have left within a year, except that Mary Jane's mother had a stroke. The town gathered around the strangers and pitched in to help the shaken father and the stunned girl. Andrew's mother would go over once a week to help the family, and he'd go too. Finally, he worked up the nerve to talk to Mary Jane; he'd been far too shy to do so in school. After that, all thoughts of leaving the small town were forgotten.

⁴⁷ "Request Permission to Escape"

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Mary Jane adapted after the shock wore off, and she and Andrew would have long talks on the way to and from school. After a while, she allowed Andrew to carry her books as they walked home, and Andrew knew she was the only one for him. Mary Jane still dreamed of big cities and the excitement they held. But it was okay because Andrew did too. Sort of. The little town was hide-bound in many ways, and sometimes smothering. And there wasn't much to hold anyone's attention, save for farming or lumbering. Andrew already knew he didn't want either of those. His parents tolerated his dreams, thinking he'd outgrow them. Mary Jane, she understood. It was her encouragement that prompted him to go to Mr. Swenson, the town's pharmacist, for a job. Andrew had always enjoyed playing with chemicals and things, especially the ones that went bang. And Mr. Swenson didn't discourage him. Andrew knew it took money to go to college and to a pharmacy school. Money he didn't have. His grades were decent enough, but not good enough for a scholarship. So, he worked in the drugstore, and saved his money.

And there was Mary Jane. She was the practical one. Andrew wanted to get married right after high school. "No," she'd said. It took money to be married. Money he needed to go to school. There was time. They were young, in love, and they had the rest of their lives ahead of them.

Or so they thought. Well, it turned out not to be. Mary Jane's mother died, leaving her a small inheritance. She'd taken it and went back east to visit some cousins. She came back, more impatient with the town. More impatient for Andrew to go to school. And he would have. Except he was drafted.

Mary Jane was thrilled every time she saw him in uniform. And she wanted to get married right away. But this time, Andrew held back. He didn't know what was going on in Europe, but he'd seen and heard enough to worry. And he found himself too busy to have a wife. The Army kept sending him to schools and camps once they learned of his interest in things that went bang.

Then the war came, right before he was going home for Christmas. The Army let him go home, but on January 2, 1942, they sent him to England for more training.

He'd never forgotten his goodbyes. His folks were proud and scared, though they hid it. Mary Jane was just scared. She'd buried her head in his shoulder and kept crying. But Andrew wasn't sure if she was scared for him or herself. She'd talked about joining the WACS or getting a job in a defense plant. All of that stopped a few months later when her father was seriously injured in a logging accident. And shortly after that, Carter was shot down.

He'd gotten a few letters from Mary Jane. But it was his folks who told him that her father had died. And told him that the town was suddenly hopping with activity. The war effort needed lots of lumber, and lumber company executives were always around. A few weeks later, Mary Jane sent her letter, telling him she was marrying someone else. His folks sent

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him a letter as well. One of the company men was taken with Mary Jane, and his manners, money and big-city ways swept her off her feet. She'd closed the home her parents had left her and gone off with him to get married.

Andrew was wide-awake now. God, how it had hurt when he'd gotten that letter. And he'd thought that if he went home, he could find her. The guys in the barracks tried to talk some sense into him, but he wanted to leave anyway.

Until he met Mady⁴⁸. She had been sweet and sympathetic, and, he blushed in the darkness, loving. But then she left, finally getting permission from the Nazi government to go home. By then, Andrew had come to realize that leaving the camp wouldn't have done anything to his relationship with Mary Jane. The Army would just have sent him where they needed him. So, he was glad he'd stayed in the camp. Here, he felt useful. Here, he was needed. That felt good. Few people needed him, including, it seemed, Mary Jane.

Which was why he was staring at the ceiling instead of sleeping. What would he do after the war ended? He didn't know. But he did know one thing — he would never again live in Bull Frog.

Corporal Louis LeBeau found himself tossing and turning so much that he expected Newkirk in the upper bunk to complain. And he wasn't sure why. He, unlike the others, did know what he wanted — his own restaurant right on the Champs Elysées. And he even knew where he wanted it, just down the street from the Arc de Triomphe. A perfect location. Before the war, he'd talked to the owner of the property, an elderly widow, and told her of his dream. Madame Mathieu had been impressed. The price was dear, but he'd anticipated that. He'd received an inheritance from his favorite uncle — that was the down payment. He was going to borrow the rest from a bank. The capital outlay would have been the highest cost. At first, his employees would be family. His mother would be the hostess, his young brother the busboy, and his sisters would be the waitresses. His sisters' fiancés would be in the kitchen with him, both of them chefs, though not as good as he. And Rachele . . .

He turned over in his bunk.

The day he was going to the bank, war broke out, and his plans, his life, were put on hold. He'd been in French Air Force in his youth and was still in the reserves. When war came, he found himself in an airplane. He'd even been captured for a few weeks but had been freed by the armistice. And he returned to his beloved Paris to find it occupied by the Germans. That's when things really went wrong, with the restaurant, with Rachele, with his

⁴⁸ Ibid

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life. He joined the Free French and not long afterwards, found himself in Stalag 13.

Thanks to a certain cocky, self-assured American, he was more useful as a prisoner than as a soldier, though there had been a few times when he didn't think so, times when he'd nearly left.

Now, the war was nearly over, and he would eventually leave for good. But so much had changed since he'd made those plans. The Germans had killed his younger brother a few months after he'd arrived at Stalag 13. His sisters had married their fiancés not long after the war broke out. He knew that Marie had lived with their mother in their Paris apartment until the Germans forced them out. They then moved in with Marie's father-in-law, a quarrelsome old man. Louis's mother had died; he'd heard that. But he had no idea where Marie, a widow with a four-year-old son, now lived. Danielle had moved to Marseilles where her husband, missing a leg after Dunkirk, had relatives. The last time he'd heard from them, he'd learned that they'd had twin sons. But that was almost two years ago, and he had no idea if they were still in Marseilles.

Then there was Rachelle . . .

He turned to face the wall. He'd never told anyone about Rachelle, not even Peter. Rachelle — his very practical wife⁴⁹. Though they hadn't lived as man and wife since 1940. Their families had known each other forever, and he and Rachelle had grown up together. It had always been expected that they would marry. And one day, they did. Rachelle loved him, he knew that. What he didn't know was whether he loved her. Not that he was unhappy; he wasn't. They had much in common, and she was as excited about the restaurant as he had been.

Then the war came and he was gone, and she returned home to her parents. And he found himself in places he'd never been and surrounded by temptations he'd never noticed before. And he succumbed to those temptations. He always felt guilty after he did, but not guilty enough to stop. When he finally went home, Rachelle knew, but she never said anything. Perhaps that was the problem; she never fought back. And he began to think that she didn't care.

Their last goodbye had been unpleasant. That's when she told him she was moving to Lyons to her sister's home. That's when she told him that she was taking their religion more seriously. And he'd been upset with her, with their marriage. After he was captured, she had written him every couple of months or so. But after a year, the letters stopped. By that time, he didn't care. He'd found other girls to write to, and strangely enough, here in this prison camp, he'd even had other girls to love. But as the end of

⁴⁹ LeBeau mentions his marriage when he's alone in "Happy Birthday, Adolf"

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the war came closer, he found he was losing interest in the girls who were friendly to him, and his thoughts started to turn to Rachelle. Where was she? Was she alive? Was she happy? Did she think of him at all?

Maybe he was finally growing up. Maybe he was finally beginning to realize that regardless of the way their marriage started, the vows they had taken meant something. And finally, in the dark, drafty wooden building, he realized he loved his wife.

Scene One

Chapter 11

Hogan was bathed in sweat, shaking and shivering. He was so cold, so very cold. Except for his arm where he'd been shot. That was burning . . . burning . . .

"Wilcox, get out of here!" Hogan yelled at his co-pilot. "I'll try to hold her steady." Smoke was already filling the cockpit.

"Colonel, you can't control it by yourself. There's too much damage!"

"Just make sure the rest of the men are out. Go!"

Wilcox ducked out of the cockpit and moments later, as Hogan battled the controls, was back at the entrance. "They're all out, Colonel. Come on!"

"Okay." Hogan yanked the earphones from his head. "I'm right behind you."

Wilcox nodded and was gone. As Hogan got to the open door, a wall of flame appeared from the back of the plane. The plane bucked like an unbroken horse. Hogan fell against the side of the plane. The metal skin was hot, burning him through the uniform. Sweat poured down his face. Oddly, he wasn't afraid. The plane careened wildly, and time, which had slowed, now sped up. The plane was starting to dive. He had bare moments, not even seconds, left, before the plane took him down with it. The plane bucked again and spun — and God, or fate, made sure that he also spun, right out the open door. After the heat of the plane, the freezing night bit into him, stopping his breath for long seconds. His numb fingers found the cord and pulled. The opening chute jerked him up roughly as the nighttime sky burst around him. Flak. The greatest danger to an airman with a parachute. Now that he had time, now, he was afraid. Afraid that one of those deadly pieces of metal would tear through his fragile body. Afraid that the flak would find that billowing canopy above him and rip it to shreds. Afraid . . .

The ground hit with a vengeance. Human beings weren't meant to fly, Hogan thought as he fought to stay conscious. Look what happened to Icarus when he tried to fly. His wings melted — he melted. And Hogan laughed. Laughed and fell silent.

He couldn't breathe; the air was hot, thick. His skin felt like fire. And he shook; his teeth were chattering.

Then he saw them — not just his men, but also others. Men, women, even children. And he knew them — faces from his past — friends, acquaintances, schoolmates. They were lying on the ground, their features locked in horror, blood pouring out of every pore.

He backed away slowly and then turned, and ran.

The world changed. He was in a plane, a burning plane. His skin was on

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fire; he was breathing flames. The very air was burning. And so was he. Burning . . .

Stop! Hogan screamed as the SS herded his men into the truck. Stop! He tried to run to the truck, but his legs wouldn't work. The harder he ran, the further away the truck was.

The engine roared into life, and smoke from the exhaust soon obscured the truck. Hogan could hear his men screaming, gasping as the cloudy poison enveloped the entire truck. The screams, the gasps, grew fainter. Then they stopped.

Hogan, his legs now working, ran to the truck and threw back the tarp covering the back.

LeBeau's lifeless eyes stared up at him from the bed of the truck. And Carter's. And Newkirk's. And Kinch's. And Baker's. All of them stared at him, with accusations in their dead eyes. Where was he, they asked? Why wasn't he with them? Why didn't he save them?

"Why didn't you save me?" asked a voice behind him. "Why did you let them take me?"

Cold crept over Hogan as he stood there, afraid to turn around as he recognized the lifeless voice.

"You saved others. Why did you let them kill me?"

"I didn't know!" he screamed. "I didn't know!"

"But he did."

And Sam smiled. And from his mouth, issued a thick red stream. The stream flowed down Sam's body to the ground. Soon, the gray soil was saturated with red.

But the flow didn't stop. The flow thickened and stayed and grew higher. It reached Sam's shoes, his ankles. And it still didn't stop. It kept getting higher — up his calves, up his knees. It reached his waist and still, it didn't stop.

Hogan screamed as Sam's arms lifted and his hands, bloody claws, reached for Hogan. "You killed me."

"No! I didn't. I didn't know. He knew. "

"Who, Hogan? Who knew?"

"KLINK!"

Hogan jerked awake.

Sam. He's dead. And he knew . . . HE knew!

Hogan, his eyes bloodshot, wild, sat up. His body was shaking from the fever. Pulling the blanket around him, Hogan staggered to his feet. Sweat poured down his face and he reeled among the cots in the infirmary. He was at the door and stumbling out into the cold.

Sergeant Hans Schultz was making his final tour of the camp. It was quiet now. The barracks were all shut; the lights were out. There were still a few lights on in the guards' barracks, and in the Kommandant's quarters

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as well. Soon, those lights would go out and . . .

Schultz caught sight of a figure, a blanket trailing after it, weaving erratically toward the Kommandant's quarters. Schultz frowned and hurried toward the figure. It looked like Colonel Hogan. What was he doing up at this hour? And why was he walking so funny?

Schultz walked faster.

Wilhelm Klink shut off the record player. A beautiful piece of music, that *Meditation* by Massenet. It never failed to soothe his spirit. And his spirit needed soothing badly after the day's activities. Perhaps he could sleep with a little peace now; he was so very tired. He closed the top of the record player and walked over to the light switch.

The front door banged opened, startling him. Klink turned toward the door. It was Hogan, Hogan as Klink had never seen him before — hair disheveled, clothes rumped, a blanket trailing the floor behind him, face flushed, eyes wild, body shaking uncontrollably. *Fever. He's running a fever. Infection from the wound.*

And behind Hogan was a worried Schultz.

Concern clouded Klink's voice, "Robert, you're ill." He walked over to Hogan and touched his arm.

Hogan threw off Klink's hand, nearly losing his balance with the vehemence of the gesture. "You killed him," Hogan growled menacingly. "You murdered him."

Klink winced. "It had to be done."

Hogan stared at him. "Had to be done?! And what about the others? Those untermenschen Binyamin called them. What about them? They also had to be killed? Murdered?"

Shock froze Klink. "Binyamin told . . ." He visibly pulled himself together as Schultz paled.

"So, you did know. When were you gonna tell me? Never?"

A tired shrug. "The time . . ." He straightened. "I'm sorry you found out this way, Robert."

"Don't you dare call me that, you murdering bastard! I was right the first time. You are a bastard, from a whole race of bastards! You and your whole sick Reich should be exterminated."

Klink's face was a frozen mask. "We are back to that again, are we? Germans are nothings, untermenschen! Fit for slaughter. Should I give you a pistol so you can take care of it yourself? The lives of millions of human beings dead in the gas chambers aren't enough for you? The lives of innocent women and children who are killed daily by your bombings aren't enough for you? The wholesale slaughter on both sides isn't enough death?"

"That's a war. A war you people started. Killings you began! And when the world knows about the others . . . They'll kill you all."

A grotesque smile. "Some Germans kill, and the whole race pays. Well, the winners of wars always write the history. And the history of this war will be littered with accusations and condemnations. Don't worry, Colonel,

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there will be enough hatred to satisfy even you.”

“Don’t you go high and mighty on me,” Hogan growled. “You killed Sam as surely as if you’d shot him when you sent him to Majdanek.”

Now it made some awful sense. It wasn’t the millions; it’s the one. “I tried to save him; I couldn’t. I, we, managed to save some. Not enough.” For a moment, his shoulders slumped. “I couldn’t even save Binyamin.” *Or the others I loved.*

“You didn’t try hard enough!

“I didn’t . . .” Anger finally intruded. “I suppose the great Papa Bear could have done better. I’m sorry, Papa Bear, but this is war! People die, even friends!”

“And that’s it? People die? You murdered Sam by sending him there. You knew what it was like. You knew about the others. You’re a cold-blooded bastard, aren’t you? You’re all cold-blooded bastards. You murder and kill and — ”

“Isn’t that what you do, Colonel Hogan? Kill?”

“I don’t kill innocents! We don’t kill innocents. You krauts are the ones who do!”

“You don’t kill innocents? Tell that to the babies and children caught in the bombs dropped on Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden and the other cities. Oh, yes, we Germans are unique,” Klink said with angry sarcasm. “We slaughter just for fun. We kill those who aren’t like us, those we don’t like. We’re not perfect, like the Allies.” Resentment roiled inside him. “Like your esteemed ally, Stalin. At least he had the sense to hide the millions he slaughtered inside his borders where no one could see them.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You didn’t know your great country is in bed with a devil as bad as Hitler? He murdered millions of farmers, Ukrainians, among others, much more slowly than those the Nazis killed in the gas chambers. Starvation is not an easy death, nor a quick one. And now, he’s the ‘Uncle Joe’ of the Soviet peoples. But he got there over the bodies of Christians, White Russians, Cossacks, other Slavs, and anybody, including fellow Communists, who dared to think that he wasn’t God. And when this godforsaken war is over, he’ll get bigger over the lives that his good friends, the Americans, will hand over to him. Since they’ll be Germans or Hungarians or Czechs or others on the wrong side, it won’t matter how many of them die.

“Or his own people. Your friend Sam was dead regardless. Stalin’s paranoia is as irrational as Hitler’s. He believes any Soviet who had the misfortune to be captured is a traitor. The poor men in the POW camps who had prayed for liberation had quite a shock in store for them when their troops came. Some were killed outright; others were sent to the front lines where the result was the same. The rest are enjoying their freedom in gulags — the Soviet concentration camps.”

“You’re crazy!”

“I wish I were! Then there are the French. A splendid people who love

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good food and art. Despite Corporal LeBeau's fantasies, there are quite a number of Frenchmen who love having the Nazis around, and are just as eager to get rid of the Jews and others as Hitler and his ilk. Their glorious history is also littered with the lives of innocents. Hitler wasn't the first to invade Russia; that magnificent French hero Napoleon was. After killing countless others across the face of Europe, including Germans.

"Then there are the British with their vast empire. I will grant that some of them do a decent job. But talk to the Chinese about how the righteous British turned a nation into drug addicts in their quest for empire. And how do the peoples of India, Africa and the Middle East feel about them? How many countries have they drained of resources to enrich themselves? How many treaties have they ignored or rewritten when it suited them? And of course, there is still that inspired class distinction where the incompetents find themselves in power simply because they were born into the right family.

"And finally there are the Americans. Such a democratic people with high-sounding phrases like liberty and justice for all. Did you know, Colonel, that at the time your country held millions of Negroes in slavery, there was not one slave in any of German states? That Jews and Catholics were more welcome in the German states than in most American cities? That Germans provided for their old decades before your people heard of social security? Perhaps the next time you're in your country, Colonel, you might check out those schools, clubs, hotels, restaurants and neighborhoods where Catholics or Jews or Negroes are not welcome at any price.

"As to what the phrases liberty and equality really mean, you should talk to Sergeant Kinchloe or Sergeant Baker. Perhaps they can enlighten you on the liberty and equality they have as Negroes. Especially in the South, where looking at a white person the wrong way is a quick way to earn a lynching.

"Or you can ask Sergeant Red Hand about justice and property rights, or what the white man's word is worth to the Indians forced from their lands by the greed of the whites.

"Then you can ask Americans of Japanese ancestry where they spent the war. Men, women, children, herded into camps for the sole crime of being Japanese, and your Supreme Court said it was constitutional. And how many people profited when the Japanese had to leave homes, businesses, farms that they had for many years?

"And once this war is over, how will those enlightened Allies deal with the losers? The same way they dealt with them after the Great War? Condemning millions to suffering and death again? Yes, that will surely bring about a peaceful world in the future!"

Hogan stared at Klink, hearing, and not hearing the words. His head was pounding, his body felt like it was on fire, and he couldn't stop shaking. Klink's voice sounded like it was coming through a long echoing tunnel.

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Then he noticed the words had stopped and Klink was staring at him. Hogan tried to pull himself erect. But for some reason, the room was tilting. The floor was the ceiling and the ceiling was the floor. And somehow, it felt right.

Hogan's collapse stunned Schultz and Klink for a moment. Then Klink, as pale as if he'd been shot, was at Hogan's side, kneeling beside him. "Mein Gott, what have I done?" he murmured. "He's burning up. Carry him into the spare bedroom, Schultz, and get Sergeant Wilson."

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant." Schultz picked Hogan up and headed for the guestroom.

Klink went into the kitchen. From an upper cabinet, he pulled a medical kit. *Fever. What else for a fever? Ice. Something to cool the body.* He got a deep bowl from a cabinet and emptied the ice trays from the freezer into it. Then he carried the kit and the ice into the back bedroom. Schultz was just leaving the room.

"Herr Kommandant, perhaps, I should . . ."

Klink shook his head. "Nein, for this we need Sergeant Wilson."

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

Klink put the medical kit and ice on the desk and turned to Hogan. The American was shaking uncontrollably on the bed, more unconscious than conscious. Klink walked over to the bed and began removing Hogan's shoes.

Klink had finished removing Hogan's shirt when Sergeant Wilson came into the room, accompanied by Schultz.

Wilson stopped at the sight of Hogan shivering and half-dressed on the bed. And wondered how he could possibly explain. Not that he could. Not when Klink was slowly unwrapping the bandage around Hogan's arm, revealing the small wound. It had looked benign the last time Wilson had bandaged it; now it was clearly inflamed. But what startled Wilson the most was that Klink didn't look surprised.

Klink glanced at Wilson. "The wound is infected, Sergeant. And his fever is very high."

"Uh, yes, sir." Wilson went over to Hogan as Klink moved away.

"Schultz, the medical kit," Klink said.

Schultz picked up the kit and handed it to Wilson.

Klink watched silently as Wilson checked Hogan over. After a few minutes, Wilson bandaged Hogan's arm. Then he tucked the comforter tightly around Hogan.

"Do you have any more blankets, Kommandant?" Wilson asked.

"In the closet," Klink said.

Schultz took a couple of blankets from the closet and handed them to Wilson.

"The ice is good, Kommandant, but we need to put it around the colonel. Like in a hot water bottle?"

"I know where there are some, Herr Kommandant," Schultz said.

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“Get them.”

Schultz nodded and left.

Wilson stood and looked at Klink awkwardly. And he almost frowned. Hogan was semi-conscious, but Klink looked almost as bad. “If you don’t mind my saying so, sir, you could use some sleep.”

Klink visibly pulled himself together. “Later. How is he?”

“Well, his fever’s a hundred and four, but I think it’s spiking. I’ve seen it happen before. A sudden fever with no warning. The ice should bring it down. And if we can get some aspirin into him — that’ll help too. All we can do is watch him.”

“If the fever doesn’t spike, as you say, if it stays high,” Klink said.

“That’s a whole different kettle of fish. What I mean is,” he added as Klink’s face went blank, “then there is a problem. High fevers in adults are dangerous if they last too long. Even if it drops a couple of degrees, it’ll help.”

Schultz came back with several hot water bottles and began filling them with ice.

“I’ll need some water for the aspirin,” Wilson said.

“I’ll get it,” Klink said and left the bedroom.

Wilson went over to the desk, helping Schultz fill the bottles. “Uh, Schultz,” he began.

“Do not ask, Sergeant,” Schultz said in a warning voice. “It is best if you,” there was no humor in his voice, “know *nothing*.”

Wilson looked at the large Sergeant, noticing for the first time how menacing the German could look. Silently, he took some of the water bottles back to the bed. “We might need more ice later.”

Schultz nodded. “I will get some from the freezer in the mess hall.”

“Okay.”

Klink came back with a pitcher of water on a tray and several glasses. He half-filled one of the glasses and handed it to Wilson.

“Thanks, Kommandant.” Wilson put the glass on the night table beside the bed and began to lift Hogan’s head. To his surprise, Klink was there, helping him.

“I will hold him,” Klink said.

“Uh, thanks, sir.” Wilson took several aspirin and the glass in his hands. “Hopefully, he’ll cooperate.” He managed to open Hogan’s mouth. “Colonel,” he said loudly, “drink this.”

To Wilson’s relief, Hogan did take a sip of the water, enough to get the aspirin down. Klink laid the American back on the bed.

“Okay, that’s all we can do for now,” Wilson said as Schultz put the rest of the ice-filled bottles around Hogan’s blanket-wrapped body. “Just have to wait until the ice and the aspirin do their job.”

“How long?” Klink asked.

“A few hours, if we’re lucky.”

“Thank you, Sergeant. Schultz will take you back to the infirmary.”

“I can stay and watch him.”

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Klink shook his head. "You have other patients."

"Yes, sir. But if his fever goes higher or isn't better by morning —"

"I will send for you."

"Yes, sir. Good night, Kommandant."

Klink nodded as Schultz and Wilson left. Then he went to the bed and laid a hand on Hogan's forehead. An inward snort. *Expecting miracles in your old age?* It was going to be a long night. He left and headed for the kitchen to make a pot of coffee.

Schultz was back by the time the coffee was finished. He put a large bowl of ice into the freezer.

"Go to bed, Schultz," Klink said.

Schultz walked closer. For a moment he hesitated, before saying softly, "Wilhelm."

There was a thread of surprise in Klink's glance. He took the coffeepot off the stove and carried it to the table.

Again the hesitation. "Do I presume too much, or have I earned the right?"

Klink poured the ersatz coffee into two cups. "Say what you wish, Hans."

"He did not mean what he said, Wilhelm. It was the shock, the hurt of hearing about Majdanek; he did not mean it."

Klink took the coffeepot back to the stove. "You sound very certain."

"I am. Too much has happened over the past weeks for him to mean what he said."

"I hope you are right."

"I am. And I am right about something else. You are too tired. You are pushing yourself when there is no need."

"Now you are presuming too much." But there was a hint of humor in his voice.

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

"And you are right as well. As long as Binyamin is in the camp, as long as Hogan is ill, I cannot rest. When this is over, perhaps." He shrugged. "Go to bed, Schultz; there is no point in both of us losing sleep."

"I can watch Colonel Hogan."

"Nein. But," he looked at Schultz soberly, "this afternoon's events — are the men discussing it? No, wrong question — do they believe what we say happened?"

Schultz shrugged. "Some believe because they want to. Some because they are fools. The rest," he shrugged again, "they follow your lead, Herr Kommandant."

"How many know about Binyamin?"

"Perhaps half."

Klink nodded. "London honored my request that I be allowed to tell the POWs about the death camps instead of broadcasting it over the radio. But I fear I made a mistake; it would have been better if Hogan and the others

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had heard earlier. After he recovers, Hogan will have to tell the prisoners about them. Our men should know as well so they will not be surprised when others hate us.”

“Hauptmann Gruber and I will take care of it.”

“I must . . . ”

“Nein, Herr Kommandant. In this you must trust me, trust us. We know those men; we live with them. We will find the words. And they will understand better why Danziger had to die. And they will understand also why this camp is the way it is.”

“Danke, Hans.” He looked soberly at his long-time aide. “I have regretted many things over the past ten years. But choosing you to help me is not one of them. Danke schön.”

Schultz bowed formally. “Gute Nacht, Herr Kommandant.”

“Gute Nacht, Schultz.”

Schultz bowed again and left.

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Chapter 12

Wilhelm Klink picked up the cup of ersatz coffee and took a sip. Bitter. Almost as bitter as his mood. He glanced back at the bed. Hogan was sleeping, or unconscious; he couldn't tell. Klink walked over to the bed and looked down at Hogan. Hogan lay still — *as death*, his mind wanted to add. Resolutely, he forced the thought aside. Hogan was ill, but not that ill.

Not yet?

Klink shook his head angrily. Hogan was in no danger of dying. If the fever didn't break or got worse, he could request a penicillin drop from London. The American miracle drug worked wonders on infections, as he had reason to know.⁵⁰ Hogan would be fine. Unlike so many others . . .

He shook his head again. His thoughts were very gloomy this night. A reaction to Hogan's anger? A reaction to Binyamin's appearance? Or . . .

Klink turned away from the bed. He put the coffee cup down on the desk and walked over to the window. He opened the shutters for a moment. Everything was quiet now. Around the camp, the barracks were completely dark; only the searchlights and a few emergency lights broke the darkness. He closed the shutters and sat down in the easy chair beside the bed. His hand reached out and turned down the lamp on the nightstand beside the bed. Only a small glow lit the room.

He should sleep. Schultz and Wilson were right; he was tired. He hadn't gotten much sleep since Binyamin's arrival. Even less after last evening's excitement, thanks to Danziger's orders. He was tired, physically and mentally. But his mind insisted on working, and he knew he wouldn't be able to sleep.

A soft sigh escaped him. The last few days had been an emotional roller coaster, starting with Binyamin's appearance. Then last night . . .

He hadn't told Hogan, never would tell Hogan, how frightened he'd been when he'd heard those two faint shots in that clearing. He could see Hogan's and Gruner's bodies lying on the ground when he reached the clearing. The shock had frozen him for a moment. Until he pulled Gruner off Hogan, he had been very afraid that Hogan was dead. And he'd never tell Hogan how sick he'd felt when Hogan collapsed an hour or so ago.

And if Hogan died, he was very afraid of what his reaction would be.
His eyes swung to Hogan.

⁵⁰ "Is There a Doctor in the House?" However, since penicillin doesn't work on the flu or other virus-caused diseases, for the real reason it cured Klink, see M. Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal*. Also see Appendix.

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It's been easy for you, hasn't it, Robert? Death for you has been remarkably impersonal during this war. Minsk's death — that was the first that meant something to you. I checked your record when you got here. Your group had very few losses while you were there, and those few right in the beginning. Before you got to know those men, before it became personal. And despite everything you've accomplished in this camp and on your missions, you're still remarkably unsullied by death. I envy your innocence, your naïveté. Once, many years ago, I had been innocent. Until Binyamin's . . . death.

His was the first, Robert. A boy I had seen grow from childhood to youthful manhood. He was very dear to me, Robert. First, for Amalia's sake . . . Oh, she was special, Robert. My first love, though neither of us would admit it. Her family became a part of my life. First, Binyamin, then later Rudolf and their child. When she died, we all lost someone very precious to us . . .

From the first, when I started my fight, Binyamin was there. He didn't minimize the risks, but he accepted them with the kind of joy only a boy can know. He was doing God's work, he said. I suppose for him, it was. But for me . . . God had little to do with my work. Binyamin's death . . . Given how quickly they caught him, I think I knew he led them away from me. I think I knew he was dying in my place.

And I almost ran away, Robert. The pain was so very great. Made worse by the horror and sorrow I saw in his parents' eyes. They had never approved of his . . . my activities. Rabbi Weiner was wise in many ways, and he was incredibly naïve. He lived in his own world, and, at that time, he was still protected from the harsh realities of the Nazis. His only son had died, needlessly in his eyes. In his pain, his sorrow, he lashed out at the person he thought was responsible — me.

And I lashed back. I hated myself then, Robert. More than you can possibly imagine. He never forgave me . . . He never will.

And it took me a long time to forgive myself.

But Binyamin was only the first. Johann, the friend of my childhood . . . He died the following year on one of our first sabotage missions, leaving his wife and 11-year-old son. I nearly quit again, Robert. The only reason I didn't was Anna, Johann's wife. Even with her pain, she saw the growing evil, and knew we had to keep fighting.

We did, and it cost yet another person I cared for — Johann and Anna's son, Georg, only a boy of sixteen. He had begged to go on that mission. And I let him. And killed him.

And they weren't the only ones.

As we kept fighting, as the organization kept growing, I backed away from people, Robert. I had to. Partly to bring the Kommandant persona to life, but also to protect people who had once been friends.

To protect me. It hurt too much. Each death ripped pieces from my heart. And I was so afraid that I was turning into a machine who ordered life and death without counting the human cost.

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But fate, God, kept reminding just how human I was.

Kronman⁵¹, do you remember him, Robert? When he showed up in camp, we hadn't seen each other in ten years. We had been friends back at the Academy, but our careers kept us apart. I wasn't surprised to find him with the Resistance, though I was very displeased to find myself on that list. I had thought that my Kommandant reputation had grown enough to discourage anyone from considering me.

Remember that key, Robert? You thought he gave it to you because he was arrested. Well, his arrest precipitated it, but he was supposed to give you the key. And the list as well. Kronman was used as the messenger because he knew me and could easily get to you. And because it was known that he wouldn't live long if he were tortured. The Resistance cell that had compiled the list had been compromised. They knew they were in danger, so they wanted to get the list out quickly, and Papa Bear was the perfect messenger. So was Kronman. Despite Hochstetter's gloating last year⁵², Kronman died before he could reveal anything useful. And I deeply regretted his death; once we had been close.

Then the news about Mulhendorf.⁵³ He had been a friend since the last war. One I let go. When the Nazis took over, I could never be sure of him. He was an ambitious man and the Nazis were in power, that was enough for him. But he wasn't a Nazi, and the sights he saw in Russia and Poland scared him. My sources failed me that time, Robert. When Bohrmann showed up, I hadn't known about Mulhendorf's arrest. He had nothing to do with the assassination attempt; he was only on the fringes of the Resistance. But Hitler's paranoia knew no bounds, and Mulhendorf had enemies. A whisper and he was dead. When Bohrmann showed up and told me of Mulhendorf's death, I was stunned, and frightened. Was Bohrmann guessing? Or did he know something? And I was frightened for another reason. If Mulhendorf, the war hero, wasn't safe, then no one was. Especially the person I feared for the most.

Erwin Rommel — my oldest, my dearest friend since Johann.⁵⁴ Odd, since his death, I never remember him by the nickname he'd been given. Or myself for that matter.

Romulus and Remus. A smile. Names bestowed on us as a joke when we

⁵¹ “The Safecracker Suite”

⁵² For a more detailed explanation about this and other incidents, see Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal*

⁵³ “The Big Picture”

⁵⁴ Their friendship is detailed in *Dress Rehearsal*.

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were cadets. Neither of us wanted to be there; neither of us was the ideal soldier material. We turned the joke around by adopting the nicknames ourselves, and by doing so, saved ourselves from becoming the butts of crueler jokes.

His is the death I regret the most. Germany desperately needs men like Erwin Rommel, men of courage and conviction. I try not to second-guess decisions I've made in the past. But when I decided not to intervene in your mission to kidnap Erwin last year⁵⁵, I made possibly the worst mistake of my erstwhile career as the Stage. I put the organization above my personal feelings. And let both myself and my country down. If anyone could have stopped the madness, it was Erwin Rommel. His defection would have harmed the Nazis, perhaps Hitler as well. And all these endless deaths may never have come to pass.

Klink shook his head resolutely. He was dreaming now. There was no way to know what Rommel's defection would have done to the Nazis, to Hitler.

But he knew what Rommel's death had done to him. It had hit him harder than any of the others. Perhaps because Rommel was one more dear friend. Perhaps because it had come after a trying year. Perhaps because he was so sick of the deaths, of the lies, of the hiding. Perhaps because he was more alone than he had ever been before. His eyes wandered to Hogan.

Erwin was the last, Robert. The last friend I had left in the military. The last one who knew who I was, who knew the kommandant was an illusion. And when he died . . .

Then there was you . . . With your barbed jokes and easy smile. And your sometimes barely concealed contempt. Much to my annoyance, you got under my skin. I'm not even sure why. Or why I let you. I could have shut you down so easily. Yet, I could never bring myself to do it. And it wasn't because of your skills as a saboteur; you didn't need the camp for that. Nor your work with escaping prisoners. The one time when I could have been rid of you, when London told me they wanted to reassign you, I made certain you would stay by bringing in the most incompetent officer I could find. I knew you would never have left Crittendon in charge.⁵⁶ He nearly laughed aloud. If you only knew how difficult it was to arrange that fiasco! And to do so without alerting London until it was too late for them to do anything.

I'm still not sure why I did it. Maybe I saw in you the officer I could have been at your age if I cared enough to try. Or maybe I just needed you around to keep me on my toes.

⁵⁵ "Crittendon's Commandos"

⁵⁶ "Hogan, Go Home"

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Or maybe I needed a friend, even if you didn't want to be one.

Yet, when that day came, when you did offer me your friendship . . . I was frightened of it, Robert. When I looked at you, I saw the faces of the others — Binyamin, Johann, Erwin. And the thought of losing one more friend . . .

That night in the cabin after you rescued me from Hochstetter, I seriously thought about deceiving you. Of ensuring that you and Schultz were on a plane out of Germany, and then staying behind alone and disappearing. I'm glad I didn't — I've needed your support and friendship the past few weeks. I still do.

But after what happened tonight, now that you know the horrible truth about camps, the question is, do I still have them?

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Chapter 13

“Sergeant? Is that you?”

Hans Schultz heard Karl Langenscheidt’s soft voice as he entered his shared quarters.

“Karl, you are still awake? It is very late.”

“I could not sleep, Sergeant.”

“Karl, you are a sergeant now; you may call me Hans when we are alone.”

“Jawohl . . . Hans.”

Schultz sighed loudly. “That was not an order, Karl. You do not . . . What I mean is, I would like it if you would call me Hans.”

Langenscheidt sat up and pushed himself back against the bed board. “I would like that, Hans.”

“That is better.” Schultz started to undress.

“You are late as well.”

Schultz shrugged. “Colonel Hogan is ill; he has a fever. I took Sergeant Wilson over to the Kommandant’s quarters.”

“What was he doing in the Kommandant’s quarters at this hour? Were they playing chess?”

“Nein, not tonight,” Schultz said slowly. “It concerned, partly, what happened today.” He looked at Langenscheidt in the semi-darkness. “And that is why you are not asleep either.”

“I . . . I am trying to understand things. Many things. Not just what happened at the bridge.” He looked at Schultz. “This place, it is different, ja?”

“Ja, very different.”

“Colonel Hogan, he does things.”

To his surprise, Schultz chuckled. “A great many things. He has helped the local resistance.”

Langenscheidt gulped. “And others.”

“And others.”

“And the Kommandant, he . . . he also helps.”

Schultz looked at him evenly. “Ja, he also helps.”

“That is what I thought,” Langenscheidt whispered.

“And you think that is horrible, that he fights Hitler.”

Langenscheidt winced. “I wish you would not . . .”

“Say his name?” Schultz laughed harshly. “A great many people say his name. And curse the day he was born.”

“There was some good . . .”

“Some, some small good. If we Germans had used the sense the good God gave us, we could have done much more good. And without murdering innocent people.”

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Langenscheidt sat far too still on the bed; Schultz's eyes narrowed as they looked at him.

Finally, the young sergeant whispered, "My last leave . . . I saw . . . they said they were prisoners," the words rushed out. "But I saw women and . . . and children . . ."

"You saw a concentration camp?"

"The, the SS corporal, he said it was a subcamp — I didn't understand. He said they were laborers working for the glory of the Third Reich . . . He said . . ."

"I saw no glory . . . Only starved, exhausted . . . The prisoners here, they live in luxury compared to those people." His voice broke. "I was afraid . . . I wanted to . . . But I was afraid . . ." There were tears in his eyes as he looked at Schultz. "You know of them, don't you? How many there are in those camps? How many people?"

"Not as many as there were, Karl," Schultz said gently. "The ones in the subcamps may still live. But others, millions of others . . . died."

Astonishment, and horror, crossed Langenscheidt's face. "No, not millions . . ."

"Millions, Karl — Jews, Slavs, Poles, Catholics, Protestants, Gypsies, atheists, homosexuals, the mentally ill, the handicapped, men, women, children died because they were different, or because they were considered enemies. Millions . . . They will not forgive us, Karl, when the world knows. Danziger, he was one of those responsible."

"How long have you known?" Langenscheidt asked in a low voice.

"The truth about the camps, not very long; the Kommandant told me. I, too, was blind. I, too, did not want to believe."

"But you knew about Hogan and the Kommandant?"

Schultz nodded. "Ja. The Kommandant asked me to help him not long after he came to the camp."

"The Kommandant asked you? Colonel Hogan did not talk him into helping? He did things before Colonel Hogan came?"

"Yes, Karl. Years before he came to this camp."

"Years," Langenscheidt whispered. "And no one knew? The Gestapo? The SS? No one?"

Schultz sat down on the bed across from Langenscheidt and looked steadily at him. "Some discovered his secret. Hochstetter, he learned about the Kommandant."

"Hochstetter is dead . . ."

"Ja, he is. I killed him."

Langenscheidt's eyes widened, and his lips mouthed, "You?"

Schultz nodded.

"But . . . How? Why?"

"He was torturing the Kommandant," Schultz said in a quiet voice.

Langenscheidt paled even further. "Tor . . . torture."

"Ja. He was smiling as the Kommandant screamed."

Langenscheidt stared at him and then slowly looked away. "Is it bad to

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say I am glad you killed him?"

"Bad? I do not know. I only know that I had to stop him. If there were another way . . . I do not know. I do know if I had not killed Hochstetter, Colonel Hogan would have."

"Colonel Hogan? He was there?"

"He and his men. It was because of Colonel Hogan that we were able to find the Kommandant. Otherwise, otherwise . . ." Schultz stood and pulled on a nightshirt. "I still do not want to think about what would have happened if we had not found the Kommandant."

Langenscheidt stayed seated on the bed as Schultz went out to the washroom.

"You are thinking much tonight, Karl," Schultz said when he came back.

"Ja," he whispered. "Have you killed anyone like that before, before Hochstetter?"

"Nein. Never."

"I . . . I killed someone once . . . I did not mean it . . . I don't even remember firing . . . He was standing there, ordering me to sh-shoot the prisoners. Then he was dead." Tears glistened in his eyes. "It was wrong for him to order me to kill the prisoners."

"Ja, very wrong."

"But I did not want him dead."

"I know."

"Sometimes, I think I should have died."

Schultz shook his head. "Nein. You had to live. To safeguard the prisoners, and to get them back here."

"The others could have brought them back."

"Nein, Karl. You may not have known what was going on in this camp, but we, the Kommandant and I, and even Colonel Hogan and the prisoners, have needed you. You were the one the new guards looked to. You showed them what to do and how to do it. And when the supplies grew scarce, you kept control. You made certain that the supplies did not disappear, that no one got more than they were entitled to. And yesterday, when the Kommandant needed your help, you gave it to him. No one else could have done what you did in this camp, Karl. No one."

"You . . . you are just saying —"

"Nein!" Schultz said emphatically. "I do not say things to please you. We, all of us, have needed you. When the prisoners learn about the camps, we will need you even more. And we will need you when the war ends. It will be difficult for us, especially the new guards. You are a good man, Karl Langenscheidt."

"I am weak . . ."

"We are all weak, in one way or another. But you are also strong now. You know what is good and right. And you will do it. Germany needs men like you, Karl. Men who are good, and kind, and know to do what is right."

"Danke, Hans."

"It is very late. We are both tired. The day will come soon enough. Go to

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sleep, Karl.”

Langenscheidt moved back under the covers. “Hans, do you think the Kommandant would mind if I spoke to him? About the things that have happened?”

Schultz got into bed. “I do not think he would mind. I think you will find he understands how you feel, better than anyone else in camp. He took no pleasure in killing Danziger. He regrets the death of any man, even ones as evil as Danziger and Hochstetter.” Schultz sighed loudly and lay down. “Despite everything that has happened, despite the horror that was done to him, to others . . .” Schultz turned on his side. “Nacht, Karl.”

“Nacht, Hans,” he whispered.

But it was a long time before Langenscheidt finally fell asleep.

* * * * *

Sergeant Frank Wilson had a thoughtful look on his face when he entered the infirmary. An automatic glance around. It was quiet; the men were sleeping.

Save for one. He recognized the man who got up off his knees beside one of the cots. Quietly, he walked closer and waited until Private Ken Tiptoe⁵⁷, tall, dark-haired, in his late twenties, recognized him.

Tiptoe smiled at Wilson and walked over. Wilson motioned him into the small room that was his quarters.

“You’re here late,” Wilson said quietly.

Tiptoe shrugged. “It’s a busy war. You’re late as well.”

“Yeah.” Wilson poured himself a cup of coffee. “Care for one? Unless you’re tired.”

Tiptoe shook his head and then nodded. “No thanks to the coffee. And I am tired. It’s been a long day.”

Wilson grunted. “Yeah . . . Well . . .”

“And you have something on your mind.”

Wilson laughed explosively but still quietly. “That is an understatement. I know it’s late and you’re tired. But if I don’t get this off my chest . . .”

Tiptoe laughed more softly. “You’re the fifth person to use that phrase today.” Tiptoe, a minister of music, a seminary graduate, was the unofficial chaplain in the camp.

Wilson looked unexpectedly thoughtful. “I wonder if it’s for the same reason.”

“You tell me.”

⁵⁷ L. Cash: *New Beginnings*, used with her permission.

Scene One

Wilson looked at him and shook his head. "The past three days . . . You've been here long enough; you know how weird things can get. But . . . Oh, sit down already."

Tiptoe grinned and sat on the cot.

Wilson sat on the stool opposite him. "Three days ago, the work detail comes back, followed by the SS. And they come in with a stranger, a stranger that Klink identifies as 'Philip Wagner'. Later, Wagner collapses and they bring him here, along with orders to keep him isolated. Then the stories start. Seems that Klink and this guy have a history together, and that Klink thought he was dead. It gets a bit sketchy after that. But the gist of it is that Klink . . . I don't know . . . blew his stack. Something."

"Something," Tiptoe whispered. "Klink used to blow his stack all the time. Why is that new?"

"Not like this. Not . . ." He stared at Tiptoe. "You already know, don't you?"

"I've . . . heard from some of the guys who were on the detail. Wagner's Jewish, escaped from a labor camp. Klink didn't blow his stack. He blazed with righteous anger, like the wrath of God. It was something to see."

"Yeah, something. Then, the next night, Hogan gets one of his missions together. Not a few men the way it normally was, but a couple of dozen. Not to blow something up — well not completely — but to hijack some trucks filled with women and children."

Tiptoe nodded. "Slave laborers."

"Not their normal mission, is it? And during that mission, Hogan is shot in the forearm. And something else happened, but I'm not sure what."

"I know a little," Tiptoe said. "Someone else showed up on that mission. A resistance leader."

Wilson snorted. "A leader? The biggest, if half the stories about him are true. That I did hear."

"Did you hear he came here?"

"Here? What the hell for?"

Tiptoe shrugged. "The story gets jumbled. Some say he disappeared into the night like a shadow. But there's a whisper that he came back with Hogan. And there's a breath that he was seen in the tunnels."

"In the tunnels?"

"Just a breath, I said."

"Then there's today. Or yesterday, since it's past midnight. That SS snake shows up, orders the original work detail to line up and eyeballs everyone. Except the one he's looking for, Wagner, isn't here. He went out on a work detail. Then the snake goes after them and gets himself killed. Good riddance." He looked at Tiptoe. "And you know something about that, don't you?"

"The story is," Tiptoe said carefully. "The story is that there was an assassin waiting on the other side of the ravine and the assassin killed the SS colonel. That's the story."

"And the truth is?"

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"The truth is that there are some very confused men in this camp," Tiptoe said even more carefully. "And the truth also is that righteousness smote the demon in the wilderness."

"Righteousness? I . . . see." Wilson stood and put his coffee cup back on the shelf.

"What do you see?" Tiptoe asked softly.

Wilson didn't look at him. "Hogan collapsed in Klink's quarters; he's got an infection and a high fever. When I got there, Klink was unwrapping the bandage around Hogan's arm." He turned to Tiptoe. "And he didn't look a bit surprised to see the wound."

"No," Tiptoe agreed. "He wouldn't. Not if he was there when Hogan got hurt."

The two men stared at each other.

"I don't believe it," Wilson said flatly.

"You don't believe it? Or you don't want to believe it?"

"But . . . This is Klink we're talking about!"

Tiptoe nodded. "The man who was beaten by a deranged prisoner a few months ago and bore it without ill-will. The man who for years treated his prisoners with humanity and respect, a truth many of us were too blind to see until those poor men arrived from other camps. The man who was most responsible for the salvation of Hammelburg and not incidentally this camp during the fire. And the man who killed a godless murderer who wouldn't have hesitated to slaughter every man in this camp if it suited him."

"Okay, I'll grant you that. He's not the idiot we once thought he was . . . But you're talking about something else! For God's sake, if half the stories are true, if any of the stories are true, then . . ." Wilson sat down abruptly.

"Hogan didn't just decide to go on that mission," Tiptoe said softly. "Wagner asked him to save those women and children."

"Asked Hogan?" Wilson said.

Tiptoe shook his head. "He said even in the camps there were whispers."

"Oh dear God."

Tiptoe nodded. "Yes. I think God has had a great deal to do with him for many years."

"How many know?"

"I'm not sure. The ones I talked to . . . Most of them are confused. They know parts of what happened the past three days. But others know more — the ones who suddenly look wary and close their mouths." He took a deep breath. "I haven't stopped praying since I guessed."

"Do us all a favor, Ken, don't stop," Wilson said grimly.

Tiptoe smiled faintly. "Don't worry about that. The prayer groups are praying as well, though they don't know why. Now, how sick is Colonel Hogan?"

"Not sure. The fever is high and came on suddenly. But the ice we put around him and the aspirin I gave him should bring it down."

Tiptoe nodded and stood. "I think I'll add a few more prayers to my list. Do you think the Kommandant would mind if I visited?"

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“Tonight? I’m hoping he gets some sleep; he could use some. But,” he shrugged, “he said he’d watch Hogan, so he might be awake.”

Tiptoe smiled faintly. “Did you hear what you said?”

“What?”

“About the Kommandant.”

“I said I hoped he’d . . . Oh.” A quick smile. “Must be the company I keep.”

“Must be. Good night, Frank.”

“Night, Ken.”

Scene One

Chapter 14

Private Ken Tiptoe found himself heading not for Barracks 12, but for the Kommandant's quarters. He'd reached the gate when a loud, "Halt!" sounded behind him. Tiptoe stopped abruptly as a guard, his rifle held ready, approached.

"Is you, Reverend," said the heavily accented voice.

Tiptoe looked at the guard; in the dim light, he could just make out the burn scars on the man's face. "Not Reverend, Corporal Nagel. Not yet."

Nagel grimaced. "Was are you doin'? Your barracks is sere." Nagel gestured with the rifle.

"Uh, the Kommandant wants to see me," he lied less than convincingly.

Nagel glanced at the building; the lights were on in the Kommandant's quarters. "I vill go vis you."

"That's not necessary," Tiptoe began.

"Ja, is," Nagel said firmly and gestured toward the porch.

With reluctance, Tiptoe walked into the small yard and up the porch stairs. Nagel gestured for him to knock, and, with a silent sigh, he did. When the door didn't open immediately, he turned to Nagel. "I guess the Kommandant changed his . . ."

The door opened.

"Yes?" Klink demanded.

"Entschuldigen Sie, Herr Kommandant," Nagel said. "I bring reverend prisoner like you say."

Klink looked at Tiptoe for a long unblinking moment. "Danke, Corporal. You have done well." And Klink, to Tiptoe's surprise, stepped aside to let him in.

Nervous now, Tiptoe stepped inside the lit quarters and pulled off his cap; he, like most of the prisoners, had never been here before. He heard the door close behind him.

"Now," said the barely accented voice behind him, "give me one good reason why I shouldn't throw you in the cooler."

Breathing a silent prayer, Tiptoe turned around, thinking and discarding half a dozen stories. He finally settled for the truth. "I heard Colonel Hogan was sick, and I thought I'd offer my services."

Klink looked blank. "Services?"

"Yes, sir. I thought I'd pray with him."

"I'm afraid that Colonel Hogan is asleep, so —"

"That's okay, sir," Tiptoe interrupted. "He doesn't need to be awake. I can pray for both of us."

Klink stared at him for so long that Tiptoe started to squirm under that steady look. He also found himself wondering what Klink was thinking.

"He's in the guestroom," Klink finally said. "Down at the end of the

Scene One

hall.”

“Uh, yes, sir. Thank you, sir,” Tiptoe said.

“Try not to wake him, if you please.”

“Yes, sir.”

Tiptoe walked down the hall and into the bedroom. Hogan, flushed and clearly feverish, lay on the bed, covered with a thick comforter and several blankets. Water bottles were placed against his body. Hogan was moaning slightly when Tiptoe walked over to the bed and knelt beside it. His head bowed, his hands clasped, and he began to pray.

“ . . . In Christ’s name, amen.”

Tiptoe looked for a long moment at Hogan, felt movement behind him and stood.

Klink walked over to the bed and laid a hand on Hogan’s forehead.

“How is he, sir?”

“I think the fever’s gone down a little,” Klink said. “He seems less flushed.”

“That’s good, sir. Well, I’ll get back to my barracks now.”

“No,” Klink said to his surprise. “I would like to talk to you.”

“Sir?” Tiptoe followed Klink out into the living room.

“Have a seat, Private Tiptoe.”

“Sir, I shouldn’t really be here . . . ”

“You should have thought of that before you lied to Nagel,” Klink said dryly.

“I, uh . . . ”

“Sit down, private.”

“Uh, yes, sir.” Tiptoe sat on the very edge of a chair.

Klink glanced at him and went over to the sideboard. “Would you like a drink, private?”

Tiptoe’s brows rose, as did his voice. “Sir???”

“Brandy?”

Tiptoe cleared his throat. “Sir, I don’t think . . . ”

Klink poured brandy into two glasses and brought a glass over to Tiptoe, who took it as if he’d been handed a rattlesnake.

Klink smiled faintly and sat down on the sofa across from Tiptoe. “I’ve always been sorry we couldn’t get a chaplain in the camp. But POW chaplains are rare, and this camp was far too small to warrant one. However, except for the occasional visits of Monsignor Geisler, you seem to have filled that role.”

“I tried to do my best, sir,” Tiptoe said, balancing the brandy on his knee. *What am I doing here?* “I’m not ordained or . . . ”

“I’m glad you’re not, private,” Klink said slowly. “If you were, I might hesitate to talk to you. But you have no bothersome vows, such as the seal of confession, to worry about.”

“Sir, I may not be a priest or such, but I still . . . ”

“I’m not going to ask you to betray a confidence, private,” Klink said.

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“But,” he leaned forward, “I need to know what the prisoners think about the last few days.”

“Think, sir?” Tiptoe felt like there was a gaping chasm opening before him.

“Or perhaps I should be asking what you think you know.”

The chasm got deeper. “I don’t know anything, sir.” For once, Tiptoe’s glib tongue failed him. “Nobody knows . . .”

“Some do, private,” Klink said softly. “Some know quite a bit. Some have guessed quite a bit. I think you fall into that category. When men can’t figure something out, when they get confused, they’ll turn to someone who might help them sort things out. A priest, a minister, or, in this case, an unofficial minister. You. The last few days have been difficult. Things have happened, things were seen, that would require an explanation. I believe you’re smart enough to put it all together.”

“Maybe, sir,” Tiptoe said cautiously. “But I shouldn’t be talking to you. Colonel Hogan — ”

“Is ill at the moment, and even if he weren’t, I’d still be talking to you. Not his men or the officers.”

“Why, sir?”

Klink smiled faintly. “Because you’re not an officer and you’re not one of Hogan’s men.”

“Sir?”

Klink settled back against the cushions. “If I were running an army, the last thing I’d do is make a chaplain an officer,” he said. “Many men aren’t comfortable speaking to officers, even if one is there to help them. In this camp, Hogan and his men are off-limits; they’re far too busy for one thing. The other officers, well, as I said many men aren’t comfortable with officers. Which means they talk to each other or they talk to someone like you, who does have the training to help them, yet is on their level.”

“I see what you mean, sir.”

“Good. Now, what do you know or what do you guess about the past three days?”

“I, uh . . .” Then he shrugged mentally; he could only die once — he hoped. “Lt. Miller’s detail came back with a stranger, one that you gave a name to. You lied, sir. I think most of the men know that.”

“Do they know why?” Klink asked in a low voice.

“Some of them think you did it to keep from getting into trouble. What I mean is,” he added as Klink raised a brow, “you’d told that SS captain that you could identify every man in the detail. So, you’d have to lie if you couldn’t.”

Klink shook his head.

“But,” Tiptoe continued, “I don’t think that’s the general opinion. They’re not sure why you lied, but . . .”

“But?” Klink said as Tiptoe hesitated.

Tiptoe shook his head. “I’m not going to guess, sir. In fact, I’m not sure why you lied either. I don’t think you knew who he was when you said his

Scene One

name was Wagner.”

“I didn’t,” Klink admitted to Tiptoe’s surprise.

“Then why did you lie?”

Klink smiled faintly. “Because Schiff did.”

“Sir?”

“I guessed Schiff was lying when he gave that vague description of the escaping prisoner. I knew he was when he didn’t look for a tattoo on the men’s arms.”

“Tattoo?”

Klink nodded. “Binyamin has a number tattooed on his arm; it wouldn’t have been hard to identify him.”

“Binyamin — that’s his name?”

“You didn’t know?”

“No, sir; he didn’t tell me his real name when I talked to him. So you knew you had nothing to lose by identifying him as Wagner since Schiff didn’t care either.”

Klink nodded.

“But what if someone was looking for him?”

“The risk should have been negligible. Between Schiff’s report and mine, no one should have bothered to come back looking for an escaped slave worker.”

“But that SS colonel did.”

“The only reason he did,” Klink said softly, “was because Hogan waylaid the trucks carrying the women and children.”

Tiptoe sat stock-still. Despite his guesses, he hadn’t expected Klink . . .

“And the only reason Danziger cared about those trucks,” Klink continued in that same soft voice, “was because of the items hidden in them. Binyamin didn’t make the connection until I told him about Danziger’s reaction to the missing trucks. That’s when he realized what else the trucks were carrying.”

Since he had nothing to lose, Tiptoe asked carefully, “Would you have approved the mission if you had known what was in the trucks, sir?”

Klink didn’t answer. He smiled faintly, stood and walked over to the sideboard, pouring himself another drink. Klink turned and looked at Tiptoe, who was still seated and wondering if he dared continue with the questions.

Tiptoe looked up and met Klink’s gaze steadily. “Most of the guys don’t know about the trucks’ hijacking. But they have heard about the bridge blowing up and that Hogan was hurt. Is that what you were curious about, sir?”

Klink shook his head. “I’m more interested in the later incident at the bridge.”

“Well, sir, the official story is that Danziger was killed by an assassin, and that’s the story that’s been making the rounds of the camp.”

“And the men who were there? Especially the six who didn’t know what was going on?”

Scene One

"They're . . . surprised, sir."

Klink looked at the glass in his hand. "Are they talking about their surprise?"

"It's still early, sir," Tiptoe said slowly. "They're sort of turning it over in their heads, trying to figure it out."

"And talking to each other no doubt."

"I . . . Yes, sir. And they're not exactly quiet about it. What I don't understand is why you or Colonel Hogan didn't order them to keep quiet?"

"Would it have worked?"

"Yes, I guess . . . But . . . maybe . . ."

"Or maybe not."

"Or maybe not." He looked at Klink and asked bluntly, "Sir, why did you kill Danziger? Why not have someone else kill him? I mean, the night before you arranged . . ." He broke off as Klink looked at him. "I guess I should shut up."

Klink smiled faintly and walked back to the sofa. "There is one omnipotent being in the universe, and contrary to the mythology, I am not He. The sharpshooters I know are not in the neighborhood, and I didn't know that Danziger would come here until two hours before he showed up. Even if a sharpshooter were available, he or she might decide to kill anyone in an officer's uniform. It would be very awkward if I were to wind up dead because of a mistake. And . . ." He stopped and took a sip of his brandy.

"And, sir?"

Klink looked at Tiptoe soberly. "I don't take lives lightly, private. I've seen too much death. And I've seen too much anonymous killing, whether it's by bombs falling from 30,000 feet or a machine gun capable of taking out dozens. If I have no choice but to kill in cold blood, I won't do it anonymously or unexpectedly."

"May I ask why, sir?"

"There's a story I heard long ago about Thomas More," Klink said slowly. "He abhorred swearing and using the name of God or Jesus or the Virgin Mary in vain. In his view, a person who cursed was damned if that person died cursing. Of course, his friends and acquaintances thought him odd, saying that they would never do such a thing when they were dying. Then a man he knew was thrown by his horse while riding. And the man's dying words were a curse against God." Klink looked at Tiptoe. "Everyone," he said softly, "should know his moment of death, private. I have enough sins to answer for. Condemning a soul to eternal damnation because of something I had the power to change is not one of them."

Tiptoe looked at him steadily for long, slow minutes as Klink sipped his brandy.

"Are you praying for me, private?" Klink finally asked softly.

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Thank you."

"Sir," Tiptoe asked after a few more silent minutes, "why are you telling me these things?"

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“Because I made a mistake a few months ago,” Klink said quietly. “And I need your help as well as Colonel Hogan’s, and Schultz’s, and Captain Gruber’s to rectify it. Or soften it.”

“Mistake, sir?”

Klink nodded. “You talked to Binyamin?”

Tiptoe blinked. “Yes, sir.”

“What did he say?”

“Not much, sir. Just that you used to know each other and you thought he’d died. He was very discreet, sir.”

“He didn’t tell you about the concentration camps?”

“Just that he’d been to several with that SS colonel and that he’d escaped on his way to one.”

“And what do you know about the camps?”

“Very little, sir. Prisons for enemies of the Nazis and slave labor?”

Klink nodded. “Yes, and no.” He stood and walked over to the window. “Concentration camps have existed from the beginning of the Third Reich,” he said, staring out at the darkness. “Starting with Dachau. Communists, socialists, and other so-called enemies of the state, including religious leaders, were imprisoned. Then the net grew bigger. Those the Nazis deemed inferior, mentally or physically, were rounded up. Then Gypsies. Jews beginning in 1935 were singled out as a whole race, eventually deprived of homes, businesses, rights, access to transportation, schools, hospitals, shops, occupations, pets — the places and comforts of everyday life. Those prohibitions extended not merely to practicing Jews, but also to those who’d had Jewish grandparents. Hundreds of thousands of Jews and others were forced out of Germany. Most of those who stayed were eventually rounded up and put into ghettos where people lived in crowded inhuman conditions. With the invasions — Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Low Countries, France, and finally the Soviet Union — more people were taken. Jews, of course, and Gypsies. But also soldiers, political prisoners, clergy, ordinary people who dared to defy the Nazis — all were put into concentration camps, slave camps, where overwork, deprivation and starvation took care of many of them.

“As the Nazis advanced east, the killings began in earnest. They were called Einsatzgruppen — killing units. They ‘cleansed’ villages, towns, cities of Jews and other undesirables.”

Cleansed? A fist of pure dread squeezed Tiptoe’s insides as he listened.

“However,” Klink continued, “most people don’t take to murder easily. Not even the Einsatzgruppen. For one thing, if you turn men into savage killers, it becomes increasingly difficult to control them. A more efficient, less personal method of killing was found — the extermination camps.”

Ashen, Tiptoe stood, staring at Klink. “Extermination . . . extermination camps?” he whispered.

Klink nodded. “Beginning in late 1941,” he said softly. “Though it didn’t become a ‘Final Solution’ until January 1942. Officially ending November of last year. But by then, millions of people, young, old, sick or well, of

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every nationality and religion, had died in the gas chambers.”

Tiptoe’s forgotten glass slipped from his numb fingers to the floor, the brandy staining the rug.

“There were six extermination camps,” Klink continued in that surreal soft voice. “Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz and Majdanek, all in Poland. The first four were solely extermination camps, using gas chambers for the killings; they alone accounted for two million deaths. The other two camps had multiple uses — murders of those deemed unfit to live went on in one section, forced labor in other sections. Majdanek was also a Soviet POW camp.

“The concentration camp system continued to grow. Some were transit camps for those on the way to the killing centers. The rest became forced labor camps for the war effort where millions died from starvation, disease, exhaustion, or executions if they grew troublesome or were unable to work. God alone knows how many have died. Now, thousands die on the death marches.”

“Death marches?” Tiptoe managed to whisper.

“As the Allies advance, the camps have been and are being evacuated. Starving, exhausted prisoners are marched to other camps without provisions under brutal conditions. Many do not survive the journey. Binyamin and the ones with him were lucky; there was transportation for them. Most likely because Danziger wanted to get his ill-gotten goods away.” Klink shook his head, as if trying to make the nightmare disappear. He looked at Tiptoe’s pasty white face. “And that is the true horror of the Third Reich, private. The cold-blooded murder of millions of people. Millions whose only crime was that their lives were an affront to the ‘Master Race’.”

Tiptoe’s legs gave out and he sank down into the chair. He was shaking uncontrollably; he felt sick, faint.

Klink hurried over. He forced the glass of brandy he held to Tiptoe’s lips. “Drink it. Now!”

The fiery liquid poured into Tiptoe’s mouth, and he choked, coughing, his eyes watering. The faintness receded, though the sick feeling remained.

Klink stepped away from Tiptoe, watching him trying to absorb what he’d heard.

Long, slow minutes passed as Tiptoe sat there, horror-struck, his tearing eyes fastened on his tightly clenched hands.

Finally, he looked at Klink. “Does . . . does Colonel Hogan know?”

Klink nodded. “He found out before he came here; Binyamin told him.”

“What about . . . Does the rest of the world?”

“There have been stories about the deaths of Jews and others for

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several years in British and American newspapers and radio.⁵⁸ President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill also have mentioned the camps and the deaths in radio talks over the years. But for most, the news of the camps was of less importance than war news. And most people could not or would not believe how horrific the camps were. Now that the camps are being liberated, the truth will finally be exposed and believed. In time, the whole world will know and believe. And," his voice dropped, "they will never forgive us."

Klink turned away, but not before Tiptoe saw the pain on his face.

Tiptoe stood unsteadily and walked closer to Klink. "What do you want me to do, Kommandant?" he asked hesitantly.

"I don't know. In this . . ." Klink shook his head. "I asked London not to tell Hogan. For purely personal and selfish reasons," he admitted softly.

Tiptoe nodded, remembering how tense the camp had been after Martinelli's death. And Hogan's reaction to the death of that one man.

"And since then," Klink continued, and shrugged, "the time never seemed right. That was my mistake. I couldn't find the words or the time, and now time is at a premium." He looked at Tiptoe. "That is why I am asking for your help. How do I inform the prisoners of the evil carried out by some Germans? How do I keep them from turning on my men?"

"I . . . I don't know, sir," Tiptoe said. "I . . ." He took a deep breath. "Whenever I don't know what to do, sir, I pray. God will provide an answer. He always does."

Klink smiled faintly. "Yes, He does." The smile turned grim. "But I've discovered over the past years that I don't always appreciate the answer He provides."

And Tiptoe couldn't answer.

"Forgive me, private," Klink said softly. "I had no right to burden you with this."

Tiptoe shook his head slowly. "No, I'm glad I know before the others learn about it. I think, maybe . . ." He took a deep breath. "I need to pray about this, Kommandant. After I do, then maybe I can be of some help."

"Thank you."

"Then, I'll . . ." He took a step and kicked the glass still lying on the rug. "Oh. Sorry, sir." Tiptoe bent and picked up the glass. "I guess I, uh . . ."

Klink shook his head and took the glass from him. "Good night, private."

"Uh, good night, sir."

With an awkward smile, Tiptoe left.

⁵⁸ Breitman, Richard. *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew*.

Scene One

* * * * *

Ken Tiptoe walked across the compound to Barracks 12, his shock turning into anger — blind, searing anger. An anger that surprised and frightened him. And luckily for him, and anyone else, none of the guards challenged him on the way back to his barracks.

When he got there, as he expected, the lights were out and he heard the familiar sleeping sounds of the barracks. He walked into his room at the end of the barracks. For the first time, the mild surprise he'd always felt at being assigned a private room didn't come. It should have, he told himself. He was a private; he shouldn't have his own room. Only the officers and barracks leaders rated one. But Hogan had assigned it to Tiptoe when he'd lost the space he'd been using for counseling sessions in the conversion of available space into living quarters for the new men.

He felt — he didn't know how he felt. He'd promised the Kommandant he would pray. He knew that he should pray, but the words refused to come.

A sudden fit of rage struck, and Tiptoe threw his Bible on the rough table he used as a desk. Bigelow, a carpenter, had made it for him, he remembered dully, for help he'd provided. *Help, what help? How can I help anyone with this?*

Not bothering to get undressed, he crawled into his bunk. He was tired. The increasing number of prisoners since last year had kept him busy. Especially that last batch of prisoners, over three hundred evacuees from other prison camps — men who were ill, emaciated, lice-ridden, even dying. Normally, he had no trouble falling asleep.

But tonight, sleep wouldn't come. Tiptoe was haunted by visions conjured up by the Kommandant's words. Visions of people — women, children, normal people — rounded up like animals, crowded into ghettos, their lives, their livelihoods, disrupted, ruined. Then, stripped of everything, led into gas chambers where they . . .

His hands covered his face to shut out the sight. But he couldn't. Any more than he could shut out the other sights — people worked until they died, or worked until they dropped and murdered as they lay there. Or marched as those three hundred had been marched, in rags, with no provisions, no comfort, marched until they died or were killed when they couldn't move. Or . . .

Why, God? Why?

Troubled, Tiptoe got out of bed, lit a candle, poured water from a pitcher into the basin and splashed water on his face. He straightened, drying his face with a rough towel. Despite the dimness, his eyes met the eyes in the mirror and his thoughts were drawn back to a time shortly after he'd arrived at Stalag 13.

In terms of experience, Tiptoe had been, as they said in his native Tennessee, a wet-behind-the-ears rookie, just graduated from the seminary when he was drafted. He'd been in the camp only a couple of months when

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the first crisis occurred. An RAF private named Henderson had received news that the daughter born after his capture had died in an air raid on London. Frightened of what the despondent man might do, his barracks leader had gone to Colonel Hogan and Tiptoe. Since no other place was then available, Tiptoe had spent the night in Hogan's quarters, counseling Henderson and helping him work through his pain.⁵⁹

Tiptoe never forgot the look he saw in Hogan's eyes that night. First, compassion and concern for a man in his command, then anger. An anger that scared Tiptoe, for it was a dark, menacing anger that if left unchecked threatened to choke everything good in Hogan. For two years, that anger had lain dormant — until Martinelli.⁶⁰ Martinelli's death at the hands of the SS had unleashed the anger that Tiptoe had seen smoldering in Hogan's eyes years before. The compassionate man Tiptoe had known was gone. Every suppressed hurt or wrong, real or imagined, Hogan had experienced was focused on one person — Kommandant Klink. That anger had led to Klink's arrest by the Gestapo. Though Klink had been cleared, the resulting enmity between the two men had left many in the camp wondering if their private war would leave any survivors. Yet the anger, the demon, had not destroyed the good man within Hogan. Somehow, in a way Tiptoe suspected nobody would ever know, Hogan had buried his demon during a cave-in the week before Christmas and made his peace with Klink.

Hogan's experience had proven that no man was immune to the effect of evil in the world. But it also gave Tiptoe hope. The demon didn't have to be in control; he could be defeated. Tiptoe looked his demon in the eye and turned to the One that could give him victory.

Lord, help me! The words formed in Tiptoe's mind, the same words he had prayed a short time ago for Colonel Hogan. *In these troubled times, it's a comfort to know that you're in control.*

But, God, millions in the past two years. Millions died for no reason, except they were hated. If you are really in control, how could that happen?

Tiptoe retrieved his Bible from the table, and pulled the candle closer. The Bible opened to the book of Job, and he began reading.

"In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job."⁶¹ A great man, a God-fearing man, a man who had everything. Then, in a test of Satan's, Job lost everything — his children, his wealth.

But Satan wasn't finished with Job, as he told God, "Stretch out your

⁵⁹ L. Cash. *New Beginnings*.

⁶⁰ *Act One*

⁶¹ Job 1:1 *New International Version*. See Appendix.

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hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.' And Job was afflicted with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head."⁶²

Tiptoe read and reread the book of Job during that long night, trying to understand, looking for something that would make sense.

Suddenly Tiptoe realized something he'd never noticed before — Satan was never able to do more than God allowed him to do. *Okay, God is in control. But why would he let millions of innocent people be killed for no reason?*

"If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust."⁶³

If God abandons man, then man dies? Is that what happened — God abandoned us? Or . . .

He stared at the page, the words blurring together. Or had man done that himself? Had man abandoned God? Or had man decided he was God? Wasn't that what the Nazis were doing? Deciding they were God, deciding who would live or die? Maybe God permitted the evil that man created to remind the world what happens when humanity decides it doesn't need God.

Tiptoe sighed deeply. He didn't understand why Job had to suffer. He didn't understand why Henderson's daughter had to die. He didn't, couldn't, understand the senseless murder of millions of people. But it didn't matter.

Lord, I come to you, hurt and anguished over the loss of so many of your children. But I can't be more hurt and anguished than you are when your children destroy each other. God, I don't understand; I'll probably never understand. But I know you love us.

Forgive me for the hate I have in my heart toward those who committed those terrible deeds. Take away the hate and help me to love as you love. Lord, there is no way to hear the truth about the deaths and not be affected by them. But show me a way to tell the truth to this camp without spreading more hate. In Christ's name, amen.

⁶² Job 2:5-7 *New International Version*

⁶³ Job 34:14-15 *New International Version*

Scene One

Chapter 15

Robert Hogan blinked in the near darkness. Something felt odd to him. He couldn't pinpoint what it was . . . Something . . .

The bed. The bed felt so good. Firm, but blissfully soft. And he wasn't covered with a rough blanket. Down . . . That's it, it was a down comforter. And the pillow . . .

I've died and gone to heaven. Except he didn't think he rated heaven. Purgatory, yes, but not . . .

He turned his head, curious. *Not heaven.* A darkened room. Nondescript to tell the truth. But the bed was still wonderful.

Someone stirred. It was Klink sitting in an easy chair beside the bed.

Klink leaned over, and touched Hogan's forehead with a cool hand. He nodded with seeming satisfaction. He picked up a glass of water. Slipping his hand under Hogan's neck, he lifted the American's head up a bit, and held the glass to Hogan's lips.

Hogan took a couple of sips. "Thanks," he gasped after a moment.

Klink put the glass down on the nightstand. "How do you feel?"

"Tired, achy," Hogan admitted.

Klink nodded. "Light-headed?"

He had to think about it. "No, just tired."

"Good." Klink picked up the thermometer. "Open up." He put the thermometer in Hogan's mouth.

"This isn't," Hogan mumbled around the thermometer.

"Quiet!" Klink ordered. After a minute, he took the thermometer out and looked at it. "Good, your fever's gone. You had us worried; it was 104 earlier."

"104? That high?" Hogan pushed himself further up on the pillow, dislodging some of the water bottles. Klink picked them up and put them into the bowl of melted ice.

"How'd I get here?" Hogan asked.

"Schultz brought you in after you collapsed."

"I what?"

"Too much excitement and the fever. Not a good combination."

"Oh." He was having trouble remembering what had happened. Maybe it was just as well. What he did remember . . .

And he did remember. His anger, the words he'd thrown at Klink. Klink's even angrier response. And he found himself angry again. Not at Klink this time. But at his own ignorance . . .

"I guess I should apologize," Hogan said soberly.

Klink froze for a moment as he started to sit down. When he did sit, he seemed to fall into the chair rather than settling down on it easily. And he smiled sadly. "The apology should be mine. I know better than to get an ill

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man upset.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I know.” Klink’s eyes dropped to his hands. “I could never find the words to tell you about the camps . . . I didn’t want you to be . . . I don’t know . . .”

“You’re rambling.”

Klink nodded. “I’m thinking about the unthinkable, Robert. About a reality so heinous that I want to hide from it. And I can’t. No German can.” His sober eyes lifted to Hogan’s. “I fought back because I was scared of losing one of the few friends I have left. I wanted to prove to you that . . .” He shook his head. “But I can’t. This horror can’t be forgotten or ignored, or even compared to other horrors. To do so diminishes the lives of those who died. This horror is uniquely German; I know that. And Germans everywhere will be tainted by it for years to come. Getting angry at you, getting angry at the world, comparing it to other horrors . . . None of that will change our shame.”

Hogan was silent for a long time. He knew that Klink, despite everything, loved his country. And to learn what had been done by the Nazis in the name of that country . . . Hell, if his reaction to learning about the camps had been extreme, what had Klink felt when he learned about them? And what did Klink feel when he had to tell someone else about them?

“I’m sorry,” Hogan said quietly.

“So am I,” Klink whispered. “I pray you never have to choose between your conscience and your country, Robert.” He stood and walked to the window. “What do you do when everything you’ve sworn to protect, to honor, becomes monstrous, perverted?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I’ll find out when I get back home. I guess there’s a lot wrong there that I never saw,” Hogan said slowly. And it hurt to admit that he’d been blind too. He glanced at Klink’s profile. “How come you know so much about the States?”

A wan smile. “My English teacher in the Gymnasium believed that the way to learn a language and understand a culture was to read its literature and newspapers. As long as they were available, I continued the habit.” He looked at Hogan. “And you are still tired and unwell. Go back to sleep, Robert. We will talk later.”

Hogan settled back on the pillows. “The men. They have to know.”

Klink nodded. “All of them, yours and mine.” He hesitated. “Perhaps I overstepped, but I’ve talked to your Private Tiptoe.”

Hogan stared at him. “You did,” he said in a flat voice.

“He came over to see you,” Klink said evenly. “The men have been talking to him. He’d guessed most of what happened over the past few days.”

“So he knows everything.”

“He knows enough. And,” his eyes moved away from Hogan’s, “I told him about the camps.”

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Hogan expelled a loud breath. "How did he react?"

"How does any man of conscience react to the unthinkable? How will your men react?"

"I . . . I don't know," Hogan said tiredly.

Klink went back to the bed and removed the extra blankets. "Go back to sleep, Robert. You need the rest."

Hogan nodded, his eyes closing. "You could use some sleep too."

"I know," Klink said quietly, putting the blankets back into the closet. He turned back to Hogan. The American had burrowed deeper under the comforter and as Klink watched fell asleep.

A soft sigh. *Sleep*. Klink sat down on the easy chair. *Perchance to dream?* That quote from Hamlet seemed particularly apt lately. His dreams of late hadn't been the most pleasant. Since Binyamin's appearance, he'd dreamed of the camps he'd seen and the executions he'd witnessed. But instead of strangers who'd died before his eyes, the dead were his friends and family. And before Binyamin arrived, his dreams had been filled with laughing images of Hochstetter and Reiner and the horrors he'd endured. As a result, his nights for some time were less than restful; as a result, he was more tired than he'd ever been. And sitting in this darkened room was not going to make the rest of this night particularly restful either.

Since sleep was eluding him, he turned his attention to other matters. Thanks to Teppel's call, the question of what to do with Binyamin turned out to have an unexpectedly easy solution. In a few days, that problem would be resolved.

Then there was the promise he'd made to Allied High Command, the promise of a Rhine crossing. They didn't believe he could do it; he knew that. A tightness in his stomach since he knew that it might cost the lives of many of his operatives. But the sooner the Allies crossed the Rhine, the sooner the end would come.

And how many lives would the end cost?

He pushed that thought aside. How many lives would be lost by prolonging the inevitable? As long as that madman in Berlin refused to believe the end was near, the number of dead would continue to climb. Once the Allies had crossed the Rhine, perhaps even Hitler's insane mind could see the end.

And there was another reason. The Americans and the British had to take as much German territory as they could as quickly as possible; else Stalin's troops would rape and savage Germany. And if Stalin took enough of Germany, what would stop him from taking France and the rest of Europe? The terrors that existed under Hitler would pale in comparison to the terrors that would exist under Stalin.

Klink removed the monocle from his left eye and rubbed his aching eyes. He put the monocle on the nightstand, leaned against the chair back and closed his eyes. The Allies had to cross the Rhine and in another couple of weeks, God willing his people accomplished what he'd ordered, the Rhine crossing would be a reality. That at least was a semi-pleasant thought, and

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on that note, he finally fell asleep.

* * * * *

Klink was dozing when he heard a racket coming from the living room. The noise woke him fully. Glancing at a sleeping Hogan, he stood and walked to the door, straightening his uniform as he did. He opened the door quietly and stepped into the hall. And winced. The clanging was giving him a bigger headache and would wake Hogan.

Klink walked quickly into the living room and stopped in surprise. Hogan's men, all of them carrying brooms, pails and other cleaning paraphernalia, were making the racket.

"What is going on here?" he demanded, the kommandant voice surfacing in his irritation.

"Uh, sorry, sir," Newkirk said, his eyes darting around. "Just thought we'd clean up a bit. You know, cleanliness is next to —"

"Enough! You're loud enough to wake the dead."

"Yes, sir. Sorry, sir," Carter said quickly. "We'll just . . ." His foot kicked the pail of water, spilling it over the rug.

Klink had to resist the inclination to stamp his foot in annoyance as he used to do whenever Hogan's men got on his nerves. This time, he just stared at them silently. This time, they stopped fussing with the cleaning supplies and looked at each other sheepishly.

"Sorry, sir," Kinch said. "I guess this is a bit ridiculous."

"A bit," Klink said dryly. "I assume you know about Colonel Hogan."

"Yes, sir. Wilson said he was here."

Klink nodded. "And you want to know how he is?"

"Yes, sir."

"His fever is gone and he's sleeping. Unless you managed to wake him."

"Sorry, sir. Thanks for telling us."

They began to pick up their pails and supplies.

"Just a minute!" The kommandant voice was back. "There's a brandy stain on the rug." He nodded toward it. "And that water you spilled needs to be cleaned up. Since you're already here and are so well equipped, you can do it. There are also some water bottles and a bowl in the guest bedroom that need to be emptied. One of you, quietly, go get it and take care of it. Try not to wake Hogan; he needs the sleep." Klink looked at his watch and sighed. "Corporal LeBeau, you might see if there's anything in the kitchen you can use to make Colonel Hogan a light broth. Or get it from the mess hall's supplies."

"Oui, mon Kommandant." LeBeau handed his brush and dustbin to Newkirk and walked to the kitchen.

"Get to it, gentlemen," Klink said and walked back to his bedroom.

Newkirk dropped the brush and glared at Carter. "Great. Now we get to

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spend the morning cleaning.”

“Yeah. But we know how the Colonel’s doing,” Carter said brightly.

“We would have known if we just asked Klink. Now he’s annoyed with us,” Newkirk grumbled.

Kinch grinned. “I think he’s enjoying this. Well, we might as well get started.”

They were just finishing when Private Ken Tiptoe arrived. They looked at him in surprise. Not only was the visit unexpected, but Tiptoe looked as if he hadn’t slept all night.

“What are you doing here?” Newkirk asked.

“Thought I’d visit the colonel.”

LeBeau came back into the living room, carrying a bowl. “You’ll have to come back; he fell asleep while I was giving him the soup.”

“He’s okay now?”

LeBeau shrugged. “Seems to be. Just tired I guess.”

“How’s the Kommandant?” Tiptoe asked to their surprise. And was equally surprised when they looked at him suspiciously.

“Why do you want to know?” Kinch asked without a smile.

Tiptoe blinked. “I came over after I heard about the colonel. And we kind of talked.”

“About?”

Tiptoe blinked again; there was very little humor in their eyes as they looked at him. “I know what happened at the bridge,” Tiptoe said slowly. “And a few other things. He wants to see me again,” he said with open irritation. “Okay?”

The others looked at each other and then at him.

“I suppose we can trust him,” Baker said.

“Yeah, he’s almost a reverend,” Kinch said with a smile.

“Almost,” Tiptoe said. “Look, I didn’t mean to step on any toes, but,” he shrugged, “it’s been a weird week.”

“That’s an understatement,” Kinch said dryly. “For a lot of guys. Okay, we’ll stop picking on you. Klink’s in his office, but if I were you, I’d wait until Hogan was up.”

Tiptoe nodded. “I do need to talk to both of them. Thanks.”

“Uh, Tiptoe,” Newkirk began. “How much do you know?”

To their surprise, he smiled sadly. “Much more than I ever wanted to know,” he said softly. “See you later.” And he left, leaving them to exchange uneasy glances.

* * * * *

He’d been expecting it, but it was still a shock when General Burkhalter called in the early afternoon.

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“Good day, Herr General,” Klink said brightly. “It’s always a pleasure to — ”

“Shut up, Klink.”

“Shutting up, sir,” he said mechanically.

“You have the plans we discussed at the last staff meeting?”

“Of course, Herr General.”

“Then you know what to do.”

“Are you certain it’s necessary, Herr General? After all, we’re surrounded by the brave men of the — ”

“That’s exactly why it’s necessary, Dummkopf! You have your orders, Klink. Now carry them out.”

“I will certainly do my best,” he began.

“Humph! Try not to make a total mess of it, Klink. Just remember, your life might depend on it.” The telephone line clicked.

Klink slowly replaced the receiver. While it wasn’t a surprise, he’d thought he’d have more time. Burkhalter would give him a week to carry out the plans, but at the end of that time . . .

He sighed and stood. Another problem to worry about.

Unless . . .

There was a way, but it needed to be done fast, and he needed a radio. The closest one was in the tunnels. An ironic smile. He was getting spoiled, using Hogan’s resources instead of going to the cabin. But, an internal sigh, too much was happening too fast. And time, time was quickly becoming a luxury he couldn’t afford.

Klink sighed audibly as he left his office.

Scene One

Chapter 16

The news about Hogan's collapse was making the rounds of the camp. To those who believed the story of how he'd gotten hurt, it wasn't much of a surprise. They knew that getting shot was serious. To some of those who didn't believe the truth, Hogan's collapse was good for a few jokes — as long as they didn't make them in front of the "true believers", as they mockingly called the others. A couple of them had been imprudent enough to openly laugh at the story and had escaped without consequences only because Captain Mitchell happened to be walking by. But in Barracks 79, the laughs were long and hearty, for most of the men anyway.

Then the story of where Hogan had spent the night also got around. Most of the men didn't care. But in Barracks 79, it was more confirmation of Hogan's collaboration with the enemy.

But despite the tolerance of most of the camp, Hogan decided after he woke from one more long nap that he'd better return to his quarters.

Hogan was shaving when music began filtering into the guest bathroom. He stopped and listened. There was a violin solo, quiet, beautiful, and he listened, the razor still in his hand, soap still on his face.

I'll have to ask Klink what the name of that is. It was . . . soothing. That was the word. Like a peaceful chapel. And he smiled at himself; he couldn't remember the last time he'd set foot in a church.

Finally, the music ended, and he finished shaving. Hogan eased his arm up a bit. Still sore, but it no longer ached nonstop as it had before. As long as he didn't make any sudden moves, he would be fine.

Hogan walked into living room; Klink looked up from the score he was studying.

"What was the music?" Hogan asked.

"*Meditation* from the opera *Thais* by Massenet."

"Nice piece. Restful."

Klink smiled faintly. "Good for soothing the soul, even if he plays it faster than I think it should be played. The recording is by Jascha Heifetz."

"Heifetz? I know that name."

"You should," Klink said dryly. "He's popular in the your country. I saw him once."

"You did?"

Klink nodded. "A concert in Berlin in 1912. I saved every pfennig I had to see him. He was magnificent." An unconscious sigh. "One of the better memories of my life." He turned back to the score.

"What's that?"

"The violin solo you heard. I've always wanted to learn it." He looked at Hogan with a smile. "I think I've almost got it. Would you like to hear it?"

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He reached for his violin.

I guess even the Stage has some human foibles, Hogan found himself thinking as he was saying quickly, “Why don’t you wait until you get it right?” *Which will never happen. And that music is far too lovely to ruin.*

“I’d better get back to my quarters.”

“You’re welcome to stay,” Klink said distractedly, his eyes on the score.

“Yeah, that’ll go over great with the rest of the camp.”

“Sorry. I wasn’t thinking.”

Hogan grinned. “You mean that mind of yours does shut down once in awhile? I thought you were always plotting.”

Klink smiled faintly. “No, not always. Are you certain you wouldn’t like to hear it?”

“No,” Hogan said hurriedly. “Wouldn’t want to spoil the surprise when you do get it right.”

“Well, all right.”

Hogan turned toward the door. Before he got there, the violin sounded behind him.

Please don’t let him wreck it too badly; it really is too pretty.

The music continued behind him.

He’s not doing too bad.

Hogan’s hand was on the doorknob, expecting an awful screech. Expecting . . .

He’s not doing badly at all. He’s . . .

And Hogan listened. Finally, he listened . . .

And turned slowly to face Klink; Klink had a small smile on his face.

Hogan didn’t smile; he couldn’t. Instead, he wanted to cry as the exquisite sounds engulfed the small room.

Why was he so surprised? For weeks, he’d known that Klink had played a part. Why didn’t he realize that the inept Kommandant demanded an inept musician? Why should it surprise him that Klink was good?

Because Klink was more than good. Even to his untrained ear, the genius was evident. And Hogan finally understood the price Klink had paid to follow his father’s dream — he’d sacrificed his very soul.

The last notes faded away. It seemed sacrilegious to break the silence that followed.

“Did I get it right?” Klink finally asked softly.

Hogan nodded.

“Thank you,” Klink said, putting the violin down.

“That’s what you gave up,” Hogan finally whispered,

Klink nodded, and turned away from the look in Hogan’s eyes.

“I’m sorry.”

Klink shook his head. “It was a long time ago.” He put the violin into the case. The case snapped shut with a jarring finality.

Hogan didn’t know what to say. Everything he wanted to say would sound trite or pitying. And Klink deserved neither.

Klink finally broke the mood by glancing at the clock. “I still have work

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to do; I'd better put these away." He picked up the score and the violin case. "See you later." He walked back to his bedroom.

"Later," Hogan echoed and started for the door.

As he got there, Private Ken Tiptoe arrived, wanting to talk to him and Klink.

Klink came in from his bedroom and stopped.

Tiptoe managed a wan smile. "Sorry to bother you, sir. Uh, both of you, sirs."

"You don't look well, private," Klink said, walking to the sideboard.

"Truth is, I don't feel well. But," he shrugged, "I'm not the only one. Uh, thank you, sir." He automatically took the glass of brandy that Klink offered him.

Hogan unconsciously rubbed his sore arm and asked in an unintentionally irritable voice, "You wanted to see both of us?" He took a glass of brandy from Klink and sat down on the sofa. "Will you sit down?" he said after a moment. "I'm getting a sore neck staring up at you."

"Yes, sir." Tiptoe sat on the edge of a chair and took a deep breath. "I've been thinking and praying about the camps, sirs. Ever since I learned about them."

"I'm sorry," Klink said quietly, getting some brandy for himself. "I had no right to make my problem yours."

Tiptoe shook his head. "No, sir. As I said, I'm glad I learned about them before the others. I think, maybe, because I'm an outsider, I can see it from a different perspective. And maybe because I'm almost a minister too." He looked at the brandy in his hand and carefully put it on the coffee table. "Not used to this," he said self-consciously.

"Not quite part of the official diet for POWs," Klink said dryly. "Even in better times."

"No, sir. I mean, yes, sir. I mean, I don't drink, sir."

Klink looked taken aback. "Oh."

"But, I know for some people, it might help"

"I hope your idea isn't to get everyone drunk," Hogan said.

Tiptoe managed a small smile. "No, sir." The smile faded and his face and demeanor grew far too serious. "I don't think there's anyway to sugarcoat the truth about the camps. The guys are going to be angry. Some will hate all too easily." His sober eyes looked at the two colonels. "I don't know if this will work or not, but it might defuse much of the anger. I think there should be two tellings of the truth about the camps."

"Two?" Klink said.

"Yes, sir. Two. The first, sir, should be by your alter ego." Klink's brow lifted. "Yes, sir, your alter ego, informing the officers and those men who know about you."

"Why?"

"The anger and hate will be there no matter how people learn about the camps. But if your alter ego, a German who's been fighting the evil long

Scene One

before any of us, tells us about the camps, then maybe the ones who hear it from you will see that not all Germans are monsters.”

“He’s right,” Hogan said quietly.

Klink stood and walked over to the window. “Go on.”

“Those men will start talking about it. Word will get around. Then Colonel Hogan will make an official announcement to the barracks leaders and officers. As part of that, he’ll explain that you had told him about the camps.”

“I wish I had,” Klink said quietly. “Long ago.”

“Don’t, Wilhelm,” Hogan said softly, and to Tiptoe’s surprise. “Don’t beat yourself up over it. I did that enough for both of us.”

“And you were right,” Klink said in the same tone. He turned to Tiptoe. “All right, I’ll agree to do it your way.” A grim smile. “As you said, there’s no way to sugarcoat the truth.”

“There’s more, sir. Sirs.”

They both looked at him.

“Your friend, Binyamin — I think he should also talk about the camps. And I also think he and the others who were there should tell the truth about that SS colonel’s death, including why he died.”

Klink shook his head. “No, that I will not agree to.”

“But, sir . . . ” Tiptoe’s eyes went to Hogan.

Hogan sat back, nursing the drink in his hand. He knew why Klink didn’t want to agree. Over the past few days, Klink had slipped out of character very publicly. First when Binyamin arrived, and then with the subsequent unmasking in the tunnels after the mission. Over the years, Klink had been protective of his identity. With good cause. When others had found out about him, the consequences were enormous, and had nearly cost Klink not merely his life but also his sanity. Hogan had managed to talk Klink into letting the kommandant character go, and Klink had agreed. But the past few days . . . Still, Tiptoe’s idea made sense.

Hogan looked at Klink. “I think you should think about it, Wilhelm,” he said quietly. “Or let Binyamin make the decision. No, don’t say anything yet,” he added as Klink opened his mouth. “Just think about it. And talk to Binyamin.”

“All right; I’ll think about it.”

Hogan sighed silently; Klink’s tone wasn’t very promising. “When do you want to talk to the men?”

“There’s no point in putting it off. Tonight, midnight. And bring in Olsen and some of the underground leaders. They should also hear about the camps.” *And, he rubbed his aching temples, there’s something else they’ll need to hear about — if London approves my request.*

Scene One

Chapter 17

It was after 2300, and, one by one, the officers of the camp — four captains and seven lieutenants — some of the barracks leaders, Hogan's team, Sergeant Wilson, Private Tiptoe, and those who'd been there the night of the unmasking were assembling in the radio room in the tunnel. Sergeant Olsen and some of the resistance people from Hammelburg — the local vet and trainer of the camp's dogs, Oskar Schnitzer⁶⁴; the owner of the only grocery left in town, Max Fleischer; and the bartender at the Hauserhof Hotel, Otto Metzger⁶⁵, were also present. It made for quite a crowd and no one, save for Hogan and Tiptoe, had any idea why they were there.

No, one other person knew. A few minutes before midnight, to the utter amazement of most of the men assembled, the Stage entered from the tunnel leading to the outside tree stump entrance. Low murmurs sounded as the Stage walked over to Hogan and greeted him with a handshake.

"Okay, I think we're all here," Hogan said. His eyes swept the assembled men. He almost nodded. Tiptoe had been right; the Stage's mystique, his reputation, should help blunt the terrible truth. Especially since all of them knew the consequences the mythic leader faced if the Nazis caught him even at this point in the war. "I'd like you to meet our guest. I'm not going to bother saying his name; you all know who he is. He has something to tell us." He turned to the man dressed in black. "The floor is yours, sir."

"Thank you, Colonel Hogan," said the soft voice. "But first, I took the liberty of informing London that I would be here at this time. If your radioman would kindly tune to this frequency," he handed Hogan a slip of paper, "I would appreciate it."

Surprised, Hogan glanced at the paper before handing it to Kinch. "Any more surprises?" he asked in an irritated whisper.

"That depends on London," was the even reply.

The Stage looked at the assembled men. He knew all of them by name, though they didn't know it; most of them knew him personally as the Kommandant. Now, they were looking at him with admiration, some with awe. How will they look at him when he finished? With anger? Disgust? Hatred? He didn't know.

Admit it, you're afraid. Afraid of the pain of admitting what the country

⁶⁴ "The Informer"

⁶⁵ "The Gasoline War"

Scene One

he'd loved, the country he still loved, had become. Afraid of seeing in their eyes what he sometimes saw in his when he thought of the horrors of Nazis. Or was he simply afraid? "Wilhelm Klink is a very frightened man," he'd admitted to Hogan a few weeks ago. When had he not been frightened? The sad truth was he couldn't remember. And for a bleak moment, he wondered if he would always remain afraid, even after this nightmare life he led ended. If it ended.

His eyes closed for an instant as he submerged the very human and very frightened part of his mind. When they opened, it was the mythic Stage who looked at the assembly. And he stepped away from Hogan.

"For years, you have been fighting Nazi Germany. Some of you were born here; you know first-hand the fear and terror of living in a country where a careless word at the wrong time can result in death or imprisonment. Some of you are latecomers to that fight, and you know of that fear and terror because you have had the misfortune of being captured and placed into a prison camp. But," his eyes met each man's in turn, "none of you yet know the true evil you have been fighting — an evil that led to the cold-blooded murder of millions of human beings." *There, the words were out. And already I can see their eyes change. Already . . .*

And he continued in a toneless voice, repeating the words he had said nearly twenty-four hours before to an ashen, stunned Private Tiptoe.

Finally, his words ended . . .

And silence replaced them. A silence that was more unnerving, more damning, than an outraged uproar. A silence that the Stage was unable to violate.

Then a voice sounded, Tiptoe's voice.

"O Lord, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. How long will the wicked, O Lord, how long will the wicked be jubilant?"

"They pour out arrogant words, all the evildoers are full of boasting. They crush your people, O Lord; they oppress your inheritance. They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless. They say, "The Lord does not see; the god of Jacob pays no heed."

"Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? Does he who formed the eye not see? Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile.

"Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law. You grant him relief from your days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked. For the Lord will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance. Judgement will again be founded on the righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.

"Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers? Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O Lord supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation

Scene One

brought joy to my soul.

“Can a corrupt throne be allied with you — one that brings misery by its decrees? They band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. But the Lord has become my fortress and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. He will repay them for their sins and destroy their wickedness; the Lord our God will destroy them.”⁶⁶

“Amen,” the Stage whispered, and heard it echoed by others. He looked at Allied soldiers first, forcing them to meet his eyes. Some turned away, unable or unwilling to look at him. But most, most managed to look at him. With anger in their eyes and hatred, but it was an anger that didn’t seem to be directed against him.

Then he looked at the Germans gathered in a corner. He could see the guilt and shame he also felt reflected in their eyes.

And he had seen Sergeant Glenn Olsen physically distancing himself from Max Fleischer. But after a few minutes, Olsen moved back to the pasty-faced Fleischer. Fleischer wasn’t a young man and he had grown leaner as the years went by thanks to the rationing for civilians. But hearing about the camps had made him seem frailer and older than his years. And it was he who broke the silence that followed Tiptoe’s prayer.

“I . . .” he said in a broken whisper. “We have a nephew we raised as a son when my sister died. He . . . he was caught after he helped get a Jewish family to safety. Friends told us he had been sent to Dachau. That was five years ago. Is there any hope he still lives?” he asked in an anguished whisper.

“There is always hope, Herr Fleischer,” the Stage said softly, his glance flitting to Hogan. “No matter how impossible the situation.”

“Is there anyway that you,” Fleischer began in a desperate voice. And stopped as the Stage shook his head.

“Not even my resources extend to the camps. Two years ago,” he said with unmistakable pain in his voice, “I made the mistake of trying to infiltrate Auschwitz with the vain hope of a mission to destroy or at least damage the crematoriums. The undertaking cost the life of Lear, one of the Six, a man who had been with me since the beginning. I saw him die to protect me; he knew they would have broken him if he lived. And he was not the only one. His second, a woman named Lena, was also caught, tortured and eventually killed. They did break her, and that led to the torture and deaths of twenty-three others who were unable to escape and sent another sixty-seven running for their lives. Most attempts to track down individuals in the camps have also resulted in deaths or imprisonment. Some have managed to free or protect prisoners who were in the camps. But only because they had over the years built up connections

⁶⁶ Psalm 94: *New International Version*

Scene One

and resources that allowed them to do so. When it comes to the camps, the SS noose is very tight and virtually impossible to escape. And organizations such as mine found themselves powerless to damage the system.”

“I thought the great Stage could do anything,” said a bitter voice to his left.

A voice he recognized, and he turned to face a belligerent Peter Newkirk. “If I could I would not need the help of thousands of individuals,” he said softly, and to the surprise of most, “some of them mere children, across the face of Europe. Including the men in this camp. My war has never been one of vast armies engaging each other in open combat, where the best weapons and the greatest number of men and equipment will eventually win. I must choose the battles I fight carefully, Corporal; battles I can win. If I did not, I would have died or disappeared into one of the camps years ago. Or do you still see the hated Hun when you look at me and wish me dead?” he asked in an even softer voice, his cool eyes meeting Newkirk’s.

Newkirk couldn’t hold the gaze and turned away.

The Stage looked at the others in the chamber. “Do the rest of you?”

The men exchanged sober and uneasy looks, and a delayed murmur began to sound. A murmur that was interrupted by the radio screeching loudly.

Kinch hastily turned down the sound. “Sorry; I wanted to make sure I heard it.” He put the headphones on and acknowledged the call. “Stage, it’s for you,” he said after a few minutes.

“Put it on the speaker; this affects everyone here.”

Kinch nodded, adjusted a few dials, and handed him the microphone.

“Go ahead,” the Stage said quietly.

“Edmondson here, Stage,” said a rough voice. “As I expected, the Air Corps screamed all the way to the top, complaining that B-17s were good enough for the entire job.”

“Precision bombing from 30,000 feet?”

“That’s what I said when I explained the mission you wanted. Then they screamed about the pilots. Until,” they could hear the humor in his voice, “until I told ‘em you’d offered to supply Luftwaffe pilots. Then they stopped screaming. Not to mention Ike got tired of hearing them. So, those captured Messerschmitt jets are yours.”

The Stage looked at his watch. “And the B-17s?”

“Left on schedule. They should be at the target in forty minutes.”

“And the jets?”

“They’ll be over the target shortly after 0830.”

“Good. Tell the pilots to use recognition code C. Have they been warned that they may lose the engines when they get back?”

“Yes, which is why the Air Corps isn’t happy. They don’t want to lose any of the jets.”

“Tell the Air Corps there’s a town in Bavaria with enough jets to keep them happy after the war.”

“Oh?”

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"You'll have the location in a few weeks. Just make certain Patton doesn't destroy it in his haste to get to Berlin."

A quick laugh. "That's almost as impossible as your missions. Speaking of impossible, Stage . . ."

"Yes?"

"I was told to tell you, nobody expects you to deliver the crossing."

"Haven't you heard, Edmondson," his eyes met Newkirk's, who turned away, "I'm expected to do the impossible."

"Not this, Stage." Edmondson's voice turned unexpectedly sober. "That damn river is too long and too well guarded."

There was a sudden tension in the room as the men realized what they were talking about.

"The Allies will have their crossing, Edmondson, within two weeks," he said softly. "Even if it costs the life of every operative I have along the banks. It will be south of Dusseldorf, but I may not be able to give you a location beforehand."

"All right, Stage. I'll tell 'em to keep their eyes open."

"You do that." He gave the microphone back to Kinch.

Hogan was looking at him intently. "You promised the Allies a Rhine crossing?"

He nodded.

"You're crazy!"

"So I've been told."

"You just got through telling us you pick battles you can win," Hogan said. "This doesn't sound like one."

"The Rhine has to be crossed. And soon. The cost to Germany is too great if there is a delay of more than a few weeks. Even if those fools in Berlin can't see it," he said with rare bitterness.

"To Germany?"

His smile was also bitter. "Yes, to Germany. The war has to end quickly for Germany's sake. I love my country, Colonel Hogan. In spite of its crimes, in spite of the madness. So do those who follow me. And you find that incomprehensible."

Hogan found himself shaking his head. "No, not really."

The Stage looked away; there was unexpected pity in Hogan's eyes. "Herr Schnitzer, you and the others must return to Hammelburg. Inform your people that they must stay away from the eastern pass and roads shortly after dawn. The pass and the roads will be destroyed by the Messerschmitts."

"Destroyed?" Schnitzer echoed with uneasiness.

"Yes. The destruction of the pass and roads will make it impossible for the Panzers or any other army to get through and it will keep Stalag 13 safe."

"Safe?" from Hogan.

"Burkhalter has finally ordered the evacuation of the camp."

"Over my dead body," Hogan began angrily.

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“Yes, it would be,” was the response. “When the SS, backed by the Panzers, arrives to kill the Kommandant, you and anyone else who interferes. Even if Burkhalter hadn’t ordered the evacuation, do you think the camp would be safe from the war? If the armies retreat through here or are backed up into this area, it would be a bloodbath for the prisoners remaining here. But with the pass blocked and the roads gone, Burkhalter will be unable to do anything about the camp. And Model will be unable to send troops into the area. I may not be able to do anything about the concentration camps, but I can keep this camp and the men in it safe.”

“Thanks,” Hogan said soberly.

“Call it payment for services rendered.”

Hogan managed a small smile, and then asked curiously, “Why use the Messerschmitts?”

“Because of the proximity of Hammelburg. Obliterating the pass and roads will require bombing at a height of less than 5,000 feet. Allied planes will be spotted and destroyed long before they reach the targets. The jets with the correct recognition codes will be ignored. And they are fast enough to evade any fighters sent after them. But the roads leading to the Adolf Hitler Bridge will be bombed by B-17s, just in case the Panzers decide to cross there using temporary bridges.”

“You seem to have everything covered.”

“I try, Papa Bear. Herr Schnitzer, you must leave now.”

“Jawohl, Stage, and danke.” A heavy sigh. “We will warn the town, and we will talk of the camps. We, all of us, have much to talk about. And pray about. And . . . and cry about.” He shook his head. “Gute Nacht, Colonel Hogan, meine Herren.”

Schnitzer, Metzger and Fleischer, who was helped by Olsen, went toward the exit.

“We’ve got a lot of thinking to do too,” Witton said quietly. “I don’t know what to say.”

“The camp has to know, Colonel,” Martin said soberly.

“I know,” Hogan said.

“Does Klink know about the camps?” Mitchell asked, a hint of anger in his voice. “And the others?”

Hogan looked evenly at him. “Klink knows. He’s taking care of telling his men.”

“I see.”

Hogan shook his head. “No, you don’t. Neither do most of you.”

He walked away from the Stage toward the entrance to Barracks 2; the men turned to face him.

“You know what happened a few days ago when Miller’s,” Hogan nodded at the lieutenant, “work detail returned. You know Klink lied when he identified one of the men as Philip Wagner. Wagner is a Jew, an escapee from a concentration camp. As for why Klink lied,” Hogan shrugged, “I’ll leave that to you to figure out. But most of you don’t know what happened afterwards in Barracks 2. It turns out that Philip Wagner was once close to

Scene One

Klink, a boy Klink had seen grow up, a boy Klink had seen, he'd thought, murdered before his eyes ten years ago." A low murmur of surprise started among the listening men. "And when Klink realized who Wagner was . . ." Hogan shook his head. "The word angry doesn't begin to cover it." His eyes began meeting those of the men around him, beginning with Newkirk's. "Klink's talked with Wagner a few times, and Wagner told him where he'd been for the past ten years. And where he'd been was in and out of those camps the Stage talked about.

"Then two days later, a seething SS colonel named Danziger arrived in camp, itching to get not only Wagner, but anyone else who'd helped him. Including us."

"It's a good thing that underground assassin followed him," Warren said.

"There was no underground assassin, Warren," Hogan said, knowing Klink might take his head off later. "Klink killed him."

"What?" Mitchell's voice sounded above the others. "Come on, Colonel, Klink wouldn't . . . You, yes. And I could see Klink letting you get away with it. But —"

"No, Captain," came Samuelson's uncharacteristically loud voice. "I was there. So were they." He nodded toward the Mulcahy twins. "The Kommandant killed that fiend. Killed him because Danziger knew Klink was protecting Wagner. And Danziger made it perfectly clear what he intended to do to Klink and Wagner. And all of us know that Danziger wouldn't have stopped with them. Every man on that detail was as good as dead, and God knows how many others would have died. The Kommandant saved our lives."

"And his own," Mitchell said.

Hogan nodded. "And his own. Does it matter?"

"No," Tiptoe said unexpectedly and forcefully, ignoring the fact that most of the men in the room outranked him. "The only thing that matters is the Kommandant saved the life of a concentration camp victim before he knew that it was a man he'd known. He also protected the men on that detail, and later he protected untold numbers of us from the retribution of a mad SS officer. And it wasn't the first time he'd done that. How many times had he interfered with the Gestapo or the SS by asserting his authority as the kommandant of this camp? He didn't have to. We've talked with men who've escaped from other camps where POWs were harassed, bullied, beaten, starved and killed. If nothing else, the sight of those emaciated men who'd arrived a few weeks ago should have proven once and for all that Wilhelm Klink is not an evil man or a follower of the policies of Nazism. Nor any of the guards. Even Captain Gruber who in the past did treat us less leniently than we liked has followed the Kommandant's lead; he also saw the Kommandant kill Danziger. And he accepted the reason why. Whatever we think of the concentration camps and other Germans, we cannot think that all Germans are monsters and killers. If we do, we find ourselves perilously close to the mindset that created those camps in the first place."

Scene One

His gaze had taken in every man in the room as he talked. When he finished, he was looking at Newkirk. "Hate, jealousy, vengeance are terrible emotions, and they're emotions which led to the rise of the Nazis. Isn't that right, Stage?"

He looked around for the masked man. So did the others.

"Hey, he's gone," Warren said.

"Where'd he go?" Mitchell asked.

Despite the seriousness of the meeting, Hogan found himself chuckling. He hadn't been paying attention either. "Wherever he," Hogan started. And was interrupted by the sound of bombs dropping not far away.

Kinch looked at his watch. "The first bombing run, Colonel."

"I hope they know we're here," Samuelson said, a trace of fear in his voice.

The sounds, even through the tunnels, intensified.

"I wish we could see what's going on," Miller murmured.

"We can," Carter said. "If we go up the hill overlooking the camp. It's high enough."

"Uh, huh," Hogan said evenly. "And I'd bet that some of the guards have the same idea."

"Oh. Right, sir."

"Okay, back to the issue at hand. Start talking about the camps informally. Tomorrow, make that later today, after the second mess, we'll get the barracks leaders together, and I'll tell them."

"Sounds good, Colonel," Witton said.

"Then, dismissed."

Hogan watched as the men began dispersing into the tunnel complex. Baker sat down at the radio for his shift. Hogan looked around for the others. He'd seen Carter and Kinch going up the ladder to Barracks 2. But he'd lost track of Newkirk and LeBeau. LeBeau had gone white as a sheet as the Stage talked about the concentration camps. And Newkirk . . .

Newkirk had surprised him. Newkirk and LeBeau had always been more disrespectful, more open about their animosity toward Klink than most of the men. And Hogan had thought that Newkirk's, and LeBeau's, apology after Richmond's funeral had taken care of it.⁶⁷ But now he wasn't sure. At least about Newkirk. The news about the camps had set him off again, even at the Stage — and he knew better than most of the others in the room.

Hogan shook his head, heading for the ladder to his barracks. For now, he was willing to let Newkirk think things through and realize what he was doing. But if Newkirk continued . . .

God, I hope not! If one of my men treats the Germans badly, then how can I expect the others to behave? And if he begins to do it openly . . .

⁶⁷ *Act Three*

Scene One

I don't know what's wrong, Peter, but for God's sake, think! I need to count on you, especially now that we can see the end coming.

Hogan sighed loudly, attracting a puzzled look from Baker. Hogan smiled at him, belying his own worries, and started up the ladder.

Scene One

Chapter 18

Sergeants James Kinchloe, Andrew Carter and Walter Red Hand, despite their fatigue, didn't head for their bunks. Instead, Kinch went over to the stove and picked up the coffeepot and some tin cups as Carter and Red Hand sat at the table.

"Coffee?" he asked softly so as not to awaken the men sleeping on their bunks.

"Thank you," Red Hand said, taking a cup.

"Carter?" Kinch asked the pale young sergeant.

Carter looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Coffee?"

"Uh, no, thank you." And he fell silent.

Kinch and Red Hand exchanged looks. Something was bothering their young friend.

Hell, it's bothering me! Kinch thought as he put the coffeepot back on the stove.

A noise from the tunnel entrance, and the bunk lifted up, showing Hogan.

Hogan looked at the seated men. "Something wrong?"

Kinch shook his head. "Just getting a final cup, Colonel. Would you like one?"

"No, thanks. Don't stay up too long. It'll get busy later."

"No, sir," Kinch said. "I mean, yes, sir."

Hogan smiled faintly. "Good night."

"Good night, sir."

The door closed behind Hogan.

Kinch took a sip of his coffee and made a face at its bitter taste. He should sweeten it; where was that sugar?

"I don't believe it," Carter said too loudly. "It's a lie!"

Kinch and Red Hand were startled, and concerned.

"What is a lie, Little Deer?" Red Hand asked in a gentle voice.

"What he said . . ."

Again the glances between Red Hand and Kinch.

"Andrew, are you saying the Stage lied to us?" Kinch asked softly.

Andrew Carter blinked. "I didn't say that!"

"You just said it was a lie."

"It has to be!" Carter said indignantly. "Nobody can kill millions of people and nobody knows about it."

Kinch and Red Hand exchanged looks again, and Kinch shook his head.

"Little Deer," Red Hand said quietly, "you know the Stage. You know who he is, what he's done. Do you believe he would tell us an untruth? An untruth so . . . ugly?"

Scene One

"N-no-oooo . . . But . . ."

"If he did not lie, then he told the truth."

"But he's wrong! He's got to be wrong!" Desperation crept into Carter's voice. "It can't be true! Okay, the SS is bad. And . . . and the Gestapo. And even some soldiers. And I know they kill people . . . But he said," his voice threatened to break, "he said women, children, old folks . . . He said millions. That many people. You can't kill that many people!"

"And how many die in bombings, Little Deer?" Red Hand asked. "How many thousands, hundreds of thousands?"

"But that's different!"

"Is it?" Red Hand said less gently. "Because it is war? The same weapons can be and are used against civilians. A bomb doesn't care if it's a soldier or a baby. It kills just the same. So does gas."

"But —"

"Give a man, give a country enough hate," Red Hand said quietly, "and people will kill. Kill anyone, including the babies and the old. It has happened before, Little Deer. In other times, in other places. Even Indians have killed the innocent."

"But he said millions —"

"Millions," Kinch said softly. "Two thousand years ago, there were spears and arrows and swords. Then came cannons and artillery. Then rifles and machine guns. Now we have bombs that can wipe out a city with thousands of people in it. And in time . . ." His head shook. "Sometimes I find myself thinking that only thing people have gotten better at is killing each other."

"That's not fair," Carter whispered. "There are a lot of good things. Like medicine."

"Yeah, medicine." Kinch smiled cynically. "We can fix people so that they can go back to killing each other."

Carter stared at him. "You're wrong!"

"Am I? I don't know, Andrew. I knew there was a lot wrong here. I knew people would always find excuses to hate and kill. But this . . ." He looked at Carter. "And what do you think will happen when the others find out? How do guys like Chaykin and Yeager act now? What do you think their reaction will be? And it won't be because they like Jews. They don't. What they like is the kind of mentality that let the Nazis terrorize and kill innocent people." He stood. "I'm going to bed. Maybe I can forget for awhile." Kinch turned and walked back to his bunk.

Carter looked after him in surprise. "He's angry. Kinch is angry."

"Of course, he is angry, Little Deer. I am angry too. At the stupidity, at the senseless, unjust hate. And you should be as well. What you should not be is blind."

Carter stared at him.

"Far too many people are blind to the ugliness around them. They see only their own little worlds and ignore what is outside. As the Germans did. It was easier to ignore the Nazis and what they did than to risk doing

Scene One

something about it." A skewed smile. "Of course, it is easy for us to say the Germans should have known, should have done something. We did not live under the Nazis or have to risk losing our families, our lives." He shook his head. "And that is why people will damn the Germans. They will say the Germans should have done something. Conveniently forgetting the times they let ugliness exist in their own neighborhoods because they were afraid of getting involved, afraid of getting hurt."

Carter stared at him. He felt a thread of surprise that Red Hand, a man of few words, had said so much. But he was more surprised at what Red Hand had said. And he was confused as well. In Andrew's tidy little world, people cared for each other, looked after each other, and wouldn't let anything bad happen to anyone.

They wouldn't? What about Mrs. Hanks? Her husband used to beat her whenever he got drunk. Which was pretty much all the time. And nobody said anything.

Or old man Branson. All the kids knew what he was like and avoided him. But there were some who couldn't avoid him.

"But that's different," he said aloud. "That's not killing people. That's not . . ." And he fell silent as he saw Red Hand's knowing gaze.

"It is not hard, is it, Little Deer? To be blind and not see," Red Hand said softly. He rose. "Think on it, my friend. And learn." He walked over to his bunk.

Carter sat at the table for a long time before finally going to his own bunk.

And as the candle flickered in the night air, others in the barracks who had not been sleeping and who had overheard the conversation also struggled to understand the inconceivable.

* * * * *

Corporal Louis LeBeau had disappeared into the crowd and instead of going up to his quarters, he used the ladder to the infirmary's supply room.

LeBeau opened the door quietly and looked at the thin man lying on the cot a few feet away from the door. Or he thought he'd opened the door quietly. To his surprise, Binyamin heard the door opening. LeBeau pulled off his beret and walked over to the cot.

"I did not mean to wake you," LeBeau said in German.

Binyamin smiled faintly. "I am a very light sleeper. A habit instilled by Danziger."

LeBeau nodded. Now that he was here, he wasn't sure what to say.

"You wish to see Sergeant Wilson? He has gone to his room."

LeBeau shook his head. "No." He looked at Binyamin indecisively.

"You wish to see me?" Binyamin guessed.

LeBeau laughed harshly. "I am not sure. But . . ." He made up his mind.

Scene One

“Are you a rabbi?”

“I was studying to be one when I was captured,” he said sadly.

LeBeau nodded. “The Stage told us about the concentration camps. And the death camps. You were at some of them.”

Binyamin nodded.

LeBeau pulled up a stool and sat beside him. “Were you ever in France?”

“A few months.”

“Were there camps in France?”

“Ja. Some were labor camps. Most were transit camps for Jews sent to Auschwitz and elsewhere.”

LeBeau flinched. “Then,” he whispered, “perhaps we should talk.”

Binyamin looked at him for a long moment before saying quietly, “Perhaps we should.”

LeBeau moved nearer to the cot and began talking in a low whisper.

They talked far into the night about the camps, about France, about things that LeBeau had forgotten or that he had wanted to forget.

Finally, LeBeau, his back aching from the low stool, got up. “Merci, Rabbi, for telling me these things.”

“I hope I was of some help.”

LeBeau nodded. “You were. For so long, I was blinded by La Belle France that I was determined to forget who I was.”

“The French have a great culture, a great appetite for life.”

LeBeau nodded. “Yes, we do. But,” his eyes met Binyamin’s soberly, “we also prefer hiding the truth if it violates our French pride.”

“Many people do.”

“Perhaps. But sometimes we French prefer living with our delusions.” LeBeau shook his head. “And our illusions. I know I did. It is time to stop.”

Binyamin nodded. “For most of us, that is true.” Then he smiled gently. “Wilhelm has given me permission to use the library before lights-out.”

“For what?”

“Do you think you could find nine men for a minyan?”⁶⁸

LeBeau looked at him evenly. “I need only find eight, and, yes, I can.”

“Danke schön, Louis LeBeau.”

LeBeau bowed. “Merci beaucoup, Binyamin Weiner. I will see you later.”

* * * * *

⁶⁸ A minyan is a Jewish prayer service requiring a minimum of ten adult men.

Scene One

Corporal Peter Newkirk found an unused part of the tunnel complex and looked around. They'd once used this room to make trinkets to sell to German civilians as a way of making money. But that was long ago and this room had been abandoned. As a result, some of the roof had collapsed from the hard winter's freeze and snow. He didn't dare go far inside for fear of being trapped; instead, he sat on a bench near the entrance. It was quiet here. And private. And he needed both right now.

He sighed softly to himself as he thought about the past few hours.

God, what a bloody mess I made. How could I say those things? To him, of all people?

He deserved it, came the unbidden thought. Him and all krauts. They should all be . . .

Tortured, killed? Hochstetter and Reiner already tried. And they're just the ones we know about.

I didn't really mean to. It's just the shock . . .

You meant to. For once, be honest with yourself, Petey boy. You still hate them. You still hate . . . him?

Not a pretty picture is it, Petey? Not pretty at all. So much hate, so much anger.

And not for the first time. Even as a kid, it didn't take much to get me going. Only then, it was just a bloke or two. Now, it was a whole group of people, all Germans.

All? Schnitzer, Otto, Max? Schultz? They're Germans too. And so is the Stage. He doesn't hate, does he?

Well, why should he? Who'd he lose? Maybe he never lost anyone that mattered. We all heard him — he doesn't care if his operatives die as long as they do the job. He doesn't . . .

The bloody hell he doesn't. When his nephew died, he cried in the office, and he knew about the bug. And when he was telling us about that guy Lear, he sounded like it hurt.

Maybe it was an act. I mean the man's a bloody genius at playing parts. Maybe he . . .

Maybe I'm a bigger fool than I ever thought he was. Especially since I mouthed off in front of the Colonel, the officers and everyone else, including my mates. He shook his head. I botched it up. I deserve to be court-martialed, drummed out of the team, drummed out of the camp, drummed . . .

He glanced at the tunnel outside the room and unconsciously straightened his shoulders. *There's only one way to make things right, Petey boy. And you know what it is.*

He stood and walked slowly down the tunnel complex to the ladder leading to Klink's quarters. He stared up at the ladder, and before he could change his mind, leapt nimbly up the ladder.

* * * * *

Scene One

Wilhelm Klink, dressed in a navy blue robe, came out of the bathroom and walked to the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator door and looked at the contents. The days or rather nights when he could have a “nightcap” of warm milk or hot cocoa were long gone. The refrigerator with its nearly empty shelves stared back at him mutely. The only thing in there with any pretense of taste was the half-filled wine bottle. And even that was debatable; it was one of the lesser vintages in his cellar. He took the bottle and poured himself a glass of wine. Then he put the bottle back into the refrigerator and carried the glass back to the living room.

A glance at the clock. Nearly three a.m., long past his bedtime, and he was so very tired. He turned on the record player. The music and wine would relax him before going to bed. He sat down on the sofa, sipping the wine. Then, as the music engulfed him in its soothing beauty, he put the glass down. His eyes closed as he listened to the *Meditation*.

He jerked awake. Something had intruded on his dozing mind. The something was the sound of the potbelly stove moving.

Now, what does Hogan want? It had better be important, or . . .

He frowned as he saw Newkirk’s head come out of the floor.

Newkirk saw Klink and gulped nervously. Holding fast to his resolve, Newkirk came up from the tunnel, and stood facing Klink, his cap twisting in his hands.

“Is there a problem, Corporal?” Klink asked, reaching for the wineglass. “Something that couldn’t wait until a decent hour?”

Newkirk flinched at the mild tone. He’d rather that Klink yelled at him; it would give him something to react against.

“I, er, I, uh, just came by to apologize for what I said earlier.”

“I see,” said the flat voice.

“Well, that’s all I have to say.” His cap still twisting in his hands, Newkirk turned away.

“Halt!” came the order. “You are not dismissed, Corporal,” said the harsh voice.

Surprise and anger warred on Newkirk’s face as he turned around. “What?”

Klink stood, his expression stern. “You come in here uninvited at three in the morning after behaving in a rude manner earlier, without considering whether I wanted or cared to see you and without any regard for my privacy, to say you’re sorry. And you think you can just, I believe the expression is, waltz out of here and think that excuses you. Not this time, Corporal. Since you brought on this confrontation, at the very least you owe me an explanation for your behavior.”

Newkirk could feel himself getting angry again. “I don’t owe you nothin’, you st . . .” He stopped, suddenly realizing what he was saying. This time, he had the grace to look flustered, and ashamed.

“Should I finish that sentence, Corporal?” asked the steely voice.

“No, sir,” Newkirk said, unusually subdued.

Scene One

"This is more than the camps, isn't it?"

"Look, sir, let it go. I'm sorry, that's all I can say. If it's not good enough, then, all right, it's not." He looked down at the cap still twisting in his fingers.

"Do you think you're the only one who's ever lost a loved one, Corporal?" was the soft question.

Newkirk looked at him in astonishment.

"Do you think that justifies your hatred of me, of all Germans?"

"I . . . I don't know what you're talking about," Newkirk mumbled.

"When I knew you were part of Hogan's team, I had London send me all the information they had on you," said the quiet voice.

"You know."

Klink nodded. "But I want you to tell me."

"No," Newkirk said flatly. "You don't have the right —"

"When you've hated me for years, when you insult me to my face, when you come into my quarters uninvited and as far as I can see unrepentant, I have the right. Now, Corporal, you tell me why you still hate me, hate all Germans."

Emotions warred within Newkirk, twisted his face. Finally, the words tumbled, raced out, "Because you killed Hal! Gawd! He was gonna be a pilot; he was so thrilled — that's all he could see. And get hisself and Mum and Mavis and the kids out of that cold-water flat they lived in.

"He had his whole life to live. He was a baby, not even twenty-one. And you killed him!" The tears he'd long suppressed started to flow. "He shouldna died; it wasn't right!"

"No, Corporal, it wasn't," Klink said in a weary voice. "It wasn't right that little Willi died, or Binyamin, or the tens of thousands who die in the bombings, or the millions of others. And why do you think all those people died, Corporal? Because of hate. Hatred of outsiders, of the different ones, or just blind, unreasoning hate for no reason." He looked at Newkirk. "Beware your hate, Peter Newkirk. It will destroy you, or others, if it continues."

"Don't tell me you don't hate," Newkirk scoffed. "Hochstetter, Reiner."

Klink looked at him evenly and shook his head. "I hate what they represent, I hate what they've done, but hate them as people?" He shook his head. "I can't. I don't have the energy or the luxury."

Newkirk stared at him. "Luxury!"

"Perhaps that is not the right word. But . . . When Colonel Hogan thought he hated me, did he think clearly? Did you? That's what hate does — it blinds you until all you can see is your hate. And when enough people hate so easily, then others, countless others, pay the price." He rubbed his face. "I am very tired. The morning will come all too quickly, and the day will not be easy. The hate you feel, well, you will have plenty of company when the prisoners hear about the concentration camps." He looked soberly at Newkirk. "Apology accepted, Corporal. But next time, use the door."

"Uh, yes, sir. I mean, no, sir." Klink's eyebrow lifted. "What I mean is I

Scene One

think I know what you mean. I guess it was just easier to hate you instead of seeing what you'd really done here. I guess part of me felt like I was betrayin' Hal if I didn't hate Germans and want them dead."

"Would your brother have wanted you to feel like that?"

Newkirk shook his head. "No, he wouldn't. He was a good kid; didn't have a mean bone in his body. He always wanted the best for everyone." His head shook again. "I guess I've got some thinkin' to do. Sorry to bother you, sir." He started for the door.

"Corporal," Klink said mildly, "I think you'd better leave the way you came."

"Oh. Yes, sir, sorry, sir." Sheepishly, Newkirk went back to the stove and disappeared into the tunnel.

Klink shook his head. *I made it sound so easy, didn't I? Just stop hating. A distorted smile. How long did it take me when I found out? How long . . .*

Klink turned away, intending to head for the bedroom. And stopped and looked back at the stove and frowned. *Is there anyway I can block that entrance from here? Hogan doesn't need it. The guards let him walk around at will. But it would stop other unauthorized visitors.*

Another problem to deal with in the morning. A silent sigh. Lately, there seemed to be no end to the problems to deal with. He shook his head. After shutting off the record player, he walked back to his bedroom, taking the glass of wine with him.

Newkirk wandered down the tunnels, his mind in turmoil, thinking about what had happened. *He's right you know. Hate does blind you. He didn't kill Hal . . .*

He didn't, but his Luftwaffe pals . . .

Easy now, Petey. Easy. You're doing it again. You're . . .

He stopped abruptly as he reached the radio room.

Baker looked at him curiously. "Still here? I thought you went to get some sleep."

Newkirk shook his head. "Couldn't. Too much thinking to do."

Baker nodded. "I know what you mean. Can't stop thinking about those camps. If it hadn't been the Stage who said it, I'm not sure I'd have believed it. It's just too . . ." He shook his head this time.

"Yeah," Newkirk said noncommittally. "Why don't you go up, mate? I'll keep watch down here. I'm not sleepy."

"Are you sure?"

Newkirk nodded. "Yeah. I got some more thinking to do, and I can do it just as easy here."

Baker smiled faintly as he pulled off the headphones. "I'd rather do it in bed. Thanks, Newkirk."

Newkirk nodded and put on the headphones. "Night, mate."

* * * * *

Scene One

Richard Baker quietly climbed into his bunk and lay down. Around him were the sounds of snoring and sleeping men. The normal familiar sounds of the night in the barracks. Except normal wasn't the word he'd use tonight. He almost wished he hadn't taken Newkirk up on his offer to watch the radio. That at least kept him from thinking too much. But now in the quiet of the barracks, he was thinking too many thoughts. The news of the camps had firmed up his resolve to stay here as long as he could. Germany would need all the help it could get after the war. When the news of the camps hit the papers back home . . .

He winced; he had no trouble imagining the uproar, the hate, that would follow. And he knew that all Germans would be tarred with that brush, whether they had anything to do with the camps or not.

Baker understood hate like that all too well. It had followed him all of his life. One colored man stole, then all colored men were suspected of theft. One colored man looked at a white woman, then all colored men had to be beaten or hung to keep them away from white women. It had been many long years since he'd seen that lynching; he'd been only a boy. But the memory of it was burned into his mind. That lynching had caused his parents to pack up and leave their farm for Atlanta and the hope that maybe their children wouldn't have to deal with that kind of terror any more.

Atlanta had been good for them. His father had gotten a decent job with a produce wholesaler. As the business expanded, so did his father's responsibilities and income. And they became part of Atlanta's growing colored middle class population. In that community, he'd found an unusual freedom. Unlike Kinch, Baker had gone to college and graduated with a degree in business from Howard University. While at Howard, he'd been lucky enough to meet people, colored and white, who could see beyond the stifling segregated life he'd known while he was growing up. And he'd stayed in Washington, D.C. after graduation, working in a variety of white collar jobs, including a stint at a colored radio station, not quite sure of what he wanted to do.

Then came the war, and he'd enlisted in the Army. Baker got lucky again. Instead of getting into menial occupations, like most colored men, his radio background proved to be a boon.

As it had in this camp. Getting shot down while on a rare surveillance mission didn't seem to be the best thing that could happen to him. But, oddly, it turned out to be when he found himself at Stalag Luft 13, a place where his color didn't matter. And where he had a glimpse of life in uniform as it could be.

Oh, he had no illusions that life in the postwar Air Corps was going to be as easygoing (as long as you didn't think about the odds of getting killed) as life was under the unorthodox Colonel Hogan. Or as free from outward prejudice. But, if nothing else, his experiences here had given him some hope that things didn't need to stay the same after the war. Most of the men and officers here accepted him and Kinch and the other coloreds as

Scene One

equals. And he'd heard that the colored fighter pilots, those Tuskegee Airmen, had the best record in the Air Corps.⁶⁹ And everyone knew it. Once this war ended, and it couldn't be more than a few months now, not even the Air Corps could go back to the way it was. There were changes coming, and Richard Baker wanted to be part of them.

⁶⁹ The 332nd Fighter Group under the command of Colonel Benjamin Davis had the distinction of never losing a bomber while flying escort. It was the only fighter group able to make that claim.

Scene One

Chapter 19

Wilhelm Klink stood unseen outside the door to the guards' barracks common room, listening as Gruber told the guards who were going on duty about the concentration camps. Then he heard nothing for long slow minutes.

Finally . . .

"Nein!" came Schuster's explosive retort. "Herr Hauptmann, Nein! That is Allied propaganda."

A few low murmurs agreed with him.

"It is not," Gruber said in an even voice.

"I have seen subcamps," Langenscheidt said in a low voice. "Sl-slave laborers, children, women, exhausted, starving."

"We are all starving," said Wendorf with a bark of laughter. "Or close to it. And we have heard the stories of the Soviets too. But not of these camps. Nein, we are not murderers."

"Have you seen these camps, Herr Hauptmann," asked the much quieter one-armed Oskar Kaufmann.

"I have not," Gruber had to admit.

"I have." Klink stepped into the room. "As you were," he said as the men jumped to attention. His eyes went to Schuster and Wendorf and the others. "I have seen the camps. I have seen the crematoriums and smelled the stench of burning human flesh. And seen the cold-blooded murders of innocents. The camps are real. The deaths are real. And refusing to acknowledge that they exist, that millions were murdered, will not change the truth. And it is a truth that every German will have to face when this war ends and for many years to come."

"But," muttered gray-haired and stooped Private Schoenfeld, "Herr Kommandant, we didn't do anything. We didn't know."

"The world will not care or listen," Klink said sadly. "All they will see are the deaths. And that Germans caused them. And that is what we will have to live with. Beginning now. Some of the prisoners already know about the camps. By tomorrow, they will all know about the camps. And it may be . . . uncomfortable for us."

Alarm crossed some of the faces; anger crossed others; resignation still others.

"What do we do?" asked the youngest guard, Gustav Hirschfeld, in a shaking voice.

"We do our duty," Schultz said firmly. "No more, no less. We do not give the prisoners more reasons to hate Germans."

"But we must defend," began Schuster.

Klink shook his head. "Colonel Hogan will control his men, and I," his eyes met Schuster's, "will control mine. There will be no violence, no

Scene One

killing, on either side.”

“Not all of the prisoners are as tolerant as Colonel Hogan, Herr Kommandant,” Klaus Krieger, one of the oldest men in the camp, said evenly.

“They are not,” Klink agreed. “But Colonel Hogan understands the need to keep peace. I cannot promise that there will be no incidents of any kind. Nor can he. But I can promise that he will put a stop to them if they occur. As will I. Too many have already been hurt in this war. As long as I am in command, there will be no bloodshed. On either side.”

“And when you are not in command?” Schuster asked defiantly as the others stared at him in disbelief.

But Klink merely nodded. “That time will come. Before it does, you will have a decision to make. For now, we are apart from the war. In time, the war will find us. The Allies will find us. You will have to decide to which Germany you are loyal. The one that murdered innocent people for no reason, the one that will die, the one that deserves to die. Or the Germany that will be reborn from her ashes and live in peace with her neighbors.”

“What do you want us to do, Herr Kommandant?” Hirschfeld pleaded.

Klink shook his head. “The choice is yours to make.”

“Many of us have forgotten what a choice is, Herr Kommandant,” Kaufmann said quietly. “Many of us have done what we were told, regardless of our feelings.” He looked at Klink soberly. “And that is why the camps existed.”

“One of the reasons, Corporal.”

“To which Germany are you loyal, Herr Kommandant?” Reinwald asked, curiosity in his voice.

Klink nearly smiled as most of the others stared at Reinwald, surprised that he would dare ask the question. “The one I have always been loyal to, private,” he said evenly. “I have spent most of my life in the military, from an age younger than Private Hirschfeld. And I swore an oath to Germany, to defend her from all her enemies, internal as well as external. And it is an oath I have never forsaken. You may not agree with my choices, but whatever I have done, whatever I will do, that oath has been the reason for it. And part of that means safeguarding the prisoners in my care and the men in my command for as long as I can.”

“Does that include safeguarding a man who had no business coming to this camp?” Wendorf asked belligerently.

“Safeguarding him was a side effect; I was protecting the work detail.”

“By putting us at risk,” Schuster said.

“You admit there is a risk.”

“I know it is not wise to lie to the Gestapo or the SS. They kill.”

“Ja, they do. Germans as well as others. Is that the kind of Germany you want your children to live in?”

Schuster didn't answer though several of the others shook their heads.

Klink glanced at the clock across the room. “It is nearly time for roll call and the change of shift. The next few days will be difficult for all of us.

Scene One

There is very little left that Germans have to be proud of. Doing your duty well, despite the anger you will encounter, can be one of them. Force them to judge you by what you do and not by the actions of a few. It is the only way to earn their respect. And forgiveness.”

He fell silent, watching the expressions of the men before him. A mix of emotions was visible on their faces. Some fear, some determination, mostly resignation to what the day will bring. But a couple of them — those Gruber, Schultz and Langenscheidt would have to watch. His role as the kommandant of the camp was coming to an end — more quickly than any of them could guess. But he would not leave as long as there was a danger to it, especially from within.

Gruber looked at him, asking permission to dismiss the men. Klink nodded soberly, and, after saluting him, the men filed out slowly. After a moment, Klink followed them, going to his place on the porch at the Kommandantur, waiting for the prisoners to assemble for roll call.

Roll call. And another cold, damp morning, with yet another overcast sky.

Hogan looked around at the shivering men standing in front of each barracks and resisted the impulse to rub his sore arm. His team looked tired, more tired than normal. And it was a look reflected on other faces as well — the faces of the ones who'd been in the tunnels a few short hours ago. It didn't look like they'd gotten much sleep. And neither did he. Despite hearing about the camps from Binyamin, he'd still felt cold horror creeping over him as the Stage told them about the camps. And he'd also felt the disbelief. Despite what he'd thought he'd known about the Nazis, it was still too much to grasp, too unbelievable. And if that was his reaction, how did the Germans in the tunnel feel? They'd been living with fear for much longer than he. And even they had trouble believing how bad it really was.

An inward sigh. What the rest of the world will believe once the news of the camps became known — that, unfortunately, he had no trouble envisioning. All Germans would be tarred by the brush of Nazism, including the ones who'd fought against it the longest.

But not here. Not if I can help it. He looked at Klink on the porch. *Not if we can help it.*

Roll call had ended. Some of the men were returning to the barracks; others were starting to make their way toward the mess hall for breakfast. Klink was walking down the office stairs, intending to go back to the guards' barracks for the talk with the evening shift.

Then the sound started, and stopped the men in their tracks. Others came out from the buildings to see what the noise was.

Hogan had reached Klink, Langenscheidt, Gruber and Schultz, who were looking skyward.

“See anything?” Hogan asked, his eyes also on the gray horizon.

Klink shook his head.

Scene One

“There!” Langenscheidt shouted and pointed over the field across from the back gate. “There, Herr Kommandant!”

They looked.

“My God,” Hogan said reverently as the three aircraft zoomed toward them. In seconds, all three were over the camp, and disappearing over the low hills on the other side. “Those were the jets?”

Klink nodded. “The Me-262’s.”

“How fast are those things?”

“Cruising speed, over four hundred.”

“That’s almost twice as fast as a P-51!”

Klink nodded.

“Amazing,” Gruber said. “What are they doing here, Herr Kommandant?”

Klink looked soberly at his second-in-command. “I’m afraid . . .”

Then they heard it. In the distance, but there was no mistaking the sound of massive explosions.

Even Langenscheidt realized what was happening. “They are bombing. What are they bombing?”

“The eastern pass,” Klink said softly. “And the roads leading east.”

“But . . . But why are they bombing our roads?”

“The jets are manned by Allied pilots. They are destroying the roads to this area. And out of this area,” Klink continued, earning looks from Gruber and Schultz. “We are now truly cut off from the war.”

“May I ask why, Herr Kommandant?” Gruber asked.

“Burkhalter ordered the evacuation of the camp,” Klink said quietly. “Now it no longer possible. And there is no longer a possibility that the fighting will reach us. Not until the pass and the roads have been cleared. And that will not happen for a long time.”

Gruber nodded.

Langenscheidt was staring at Klink with an open mouth, not quite believing what he’d heard. “Who are you?” he managed to gasp, getting a sharp look from Schultz.

The sound of the returning jets forestalled any answer. Again, the jets zoomed over the camp. One of them waggled his wings, getting a smile from Hogan.

“I would love to fly one of those,” Hogan said.

“I thought bombers were more your style.”

“I like things that go fast, and those babies are fast,” Hogan said.

“Yes. But if they keep pushing those engines, they’ll burn up by the time they return to base. The designers haven’t figured out how to handle the power and keep the engines from burning out.”

“They will.”

Klink smiled. “For which air force?”

“Mine, of course.”

“Of course,” Klink echoed ironically. “Care to accompany me to town?”

“Why?”

Scene One

"To see what damage the jets did."

Hogan nodded.

"Sergeant Langenscheidt, you will drive us. Please get my car."

Langenscheidt gulped, saluted and left.

"Hauptmann Gruber, I'm afraid I'm leaving it to you and Sergeant Schultz to handle the evening shift. If there are any doubters as there were this morning, I will talk to them before they go on duty tonight."

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

Schultz and Gruber left them, returning to the guards' barracks.

"Doubters?" Hogan asked.

"Some of the men thought the stories about the camps were Allied propaganda."

"I wish they were."

"No more than I do," Klink said softly.

Langenscheidt stopped the car beside them. Klink opened the door and got inside, followed by Hogan.

The car drove slowly out of the camp. Not unobserved.

Yeager spat noisily as Klink's car passed him and some of his bunkmates. "Add one more to the list, Stinky."

"List? What list?" Liebowitz asked.

"The list we're going to show the brass when they show up," Stinky said, pulling a notepad from his pocket. "Of the stuff Hogan's done or said." He scribbled a few lines and put the pad back into his pocket. He grinned as he walked away with Yeager.

Liebowitz frowned and shook his head. For some reason, knowing there was a list bothered him. He was still shaking his head as he walked toward the mess hall for breakfast.

"How's your arm?" Klink asked.

"A bit sore," Hogan admitted. He glanced at Klink's profile as they drove toward Hammelburg. "You look like hell. How much sleep did you get?"

"Not much," Klink said. "A couple of hours last night."

"Uh, huh. And the night before when you were babysitting me? And the night before that when Danziger made you go look for the convoy? A couple of hours again?"

"Roughly."

"How long do you think you can keep it up?"

"You sound like my mother. Or Schultz."

"Both of them have more sense than you."

Klink rubbed his forehead. "I am not in the mood, Colonel Hogan."

Stubborn, pig-headed . . . Just like me, Hogan was forced to admit. *Only more so*. He sighed. Getting angry wouldn't help either one of them. Besides, his arm hurt.

Langenscheidt glanced back at the two men in the rearview mirror, half glad they were silent, and half wishing they'd talk to each other. It would have saved him having to listen to himself. *Who is he?* The question kept

Scene One

going over and over inside his head. *Who is he?* And did he dare ask the Kommandant again?

Hogan winced as they drove past what remained of Hammelburg. *God, what a mess! And how long will it take to clean up? A long time now that most of the population was gone. And how many of them would come back? And what would they come back to? At least, this damage should be it. If the roads and the pass were blocked, what was left of Hammelburg would survive. If . . .*

After driving down a winding road for awhile, Langenscheidt stopped the car at the gated entrance to the drive of the River View Lodge. The lodge overlooked the plain and Ruhr River beyond the pass. At last report, part of the Fifth Panzer Army was encamped down there, waiting to use the autobahn to Dusseldorf. Waiting to hold back the Allied forces everyone knew were coming.

Klink and Hogan got out of the car.

"Wait here," Klink told Langenscheidt. He took off his overcoat and dropped it inside the car.

"It's a bit cold," Hogan said, pulling up his collar.

"I'll warm up on the hike up to the lodge." Klink hung the strap of the field glasses around his neck.

"And why are we walking?" Hogan said, following Klink inside the gated entrance.

Klink pointed at the rutted, muddy road. "I'd rather the car didn't get stuck."

Hogan grimaced and nodded.

It took half an hour of strenuous walking in the trees alongside the nearly impassable road to reach the circular gravel parking area of the lodge.

"Nice place," Hogan said, stopping to catch his breath and admiring the sprawling three-story turreted structure. "I didn't know this was here."

"No factories or bridges nearby to blow up," Klink said.

Hogan smiled. "I guess not."

They walked into the front lobby. The owner, Frau Magda Engel, looked surprised to see them and she hurried over.

"Herr Oberst," she greeted in a flustered voice. "It is an honor to —"

Klink held up a gloved hand. "Bitte, Frau Engel," Klink said. "I am Kommandant Klink of Stalag Luft 13, and this is Oberst Hogan, the senior prisoner at the camp. We are here to see what damage the bombing did. You have an overlook here, do you not?"

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant. Others have also come to see the damage. If you would, bitte, go straight through this door and into the lounge, there is an outside terrace there."

"Danke, Frau Engel. Do not trouble yourself. We will find our way."

"Danke, Herr Kommandant, Herr Oberst." She settled herself behind the

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desk again and bent over her books, a frown settling over her face as she looked at the paltry amounts.

There was a sober group assembled on the overlook. Klink and Hogan nodded to Bürgermeister Rudolf Scheinfeld; the head of the Town Council, Kurt Hausner; Monsignor Jürgen Geisler, the pastor of the only standing church; Chief of Police Werner Krueger, and the only doctor left in Hammelburg, Ernst Bauer⁷⁰.

“Kommandant,” Hausner greeted. “You also saw the planes?”

“They flew over the camp,” Klink said, his eyes on the distant black smoke. “Do you know what happened?” He lifted the field glasses to his eyes.

Krueger nodded. “The pass is completely blocked, and the roads. As for that,” he nodded at the distant plain, “it appears that a fuel or ammunition depot was hit. Frau Engel said there was a huge explosion and the fire spread from one tank to another, triggering more explosions.”

Klink passed the glasses to Hogan as the others went back into the lodge.

“My God,” Hogan breathed softly as he saw the burning tanks and tents. He hoped, he prayed, there was no one inside those tanks or tents. That was a nasty way to die. He lowered the glasses and looked at Klink, Klink who was too still. “You didn’t do that. It was an accident.”

“Was it? How many Germans did I kill today?”

“How many did you save?”

“Once, long ago, that helped lessen the pain. But now . . .” He shook his head. “Now, I find myself wondering if that alone justifies it. What makes their lives worth less than the ones who live?” He caught Hogan’s worried look. “Forgive me. As you said earlier, I am tired. Of many things.”

Klink turned away and walked into the warm lodge.

Damnit, why didn't I take him away from this mess when I had the chance? Because I wasn't thinking. Hogan glanced at the burning wreckage in the distance. He's saved our butts. Made sure those tanks can't get to us. Made sure we're safe. How do I get him to stop doing so much? How do I get him to think of himself for a change? How?

Hogan shook his head and followed Klink into the lodge.

Hogan walked into the middle of a conversation. Scheinfeld, Hausner, Krueger, Geisler and Bauer were sitting at a table, discussing the orders received from Berlin. None of them liked the orders, but none of them could figure a way out of them.

“With the pass and the roads gone, no one can come here,” Scheinfeld said hopefully.

⁷⁰ Act Three

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"They can still send a few men," Krueger said bluntly. "Not many, but enough can come and make difficulties for us."

"What's going on?" Hogan asked Klink who was warming himself at the fireplace.

"Berlin has ordered every man and boy from the age of fifteen into uniform to defend the Fatherland."

"Every man?"

Klink nodded and walked over to the seated men. And waited until they acknowledged his presence. Which they did, with some embarrassment.

"Herr Kommandant," Scheinfeld said, "please do not misunderstand us. We are all loyal —"

"Yes, we are," Klink said softly. "The question is, to which Germany? The one that murdered millions of innocents? Or the one with a culture and heritage we can be proud of?"

The men looked at each other uneasily.

"Murdered?" Hausner said after clearing his throat.

"Yes, murdered," Klink said. His eyes met each of theirs, daring them to look away. Which they did. "It has been long enough for you to have heard about the camps."

"Propaganda," Scheinfeld said less than convincingly.

"I have seen them, Herr Bürgermeister," Klink said evenly. "They exist."

Hausner appeared to collapse into his chair. "I . . . I saw something once." He shuddered. And sat straighter. And met Klink's eyes. "I will not allow my sons to defend that Germany," he said bluntly. "I will not defend that Germany."

"Nor will I," Doctor Bauer said evenly.

"Nor I," Krueger echoed emphatically. Then he smiled wanly. "Which means I should execute myself as a traitor."

"I know some men you might execute, Chief Krueger," Klink said with open amusement. "You are not one of them. Nor," his eyes swept over them, "is it anyone else here."

The men smiled slowly.

"It appears we have finally admitted where we all stand," Bauer said. "The question still remains, what do we do? Will Berlin, will Model, accept silence from us?"

"We can try," Scheinfeld said. "The telephone lines to the outside are also down."

"But radio communication is not," Krueger said. "We will hear from someone in authority."

"There is another solution," Klink said.

"What, Herr Kommandant?" Hausner asked.

"First, you should identify the diehard Nazis in town," Klink said. "Not nominal ones who joined the Party but do not support it."

"As I did," Hausner said dryly.

"As you did. But you know who is a Nazi and who still believes the lies

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told by Berlin. If you do not know all of them, there are others who do.”

Krueger nodded. “Ja. By my count, there are no more than twenty-four, twenty-five left in this area.”

“How many of them would fall under Berlin’s order?”

“Not twenty. The remainder are women or too infirm to be of use.”

“What about Hitler Youth members?”

Monsignor Geisler shook his head. “That I can answer. We have been fortunate here. Reverend Bloch, Reverend Sattler and I formed our own Christian groups for the children when the Hitler Youth was founded. In discreet defiance of the government, their parents supported us rather than the Hitler Youth. Of the boys and youths still here, none were in the Hitler Youth. And they have no love for the Nazis.”

“Good. I suggest that Chief Krueger find the Nazis today, inform them of the order, and tell them that since we are now cut off, if they wish to comply with Berlin’s order, they will have to leave Hammelburg immediately. Then make them leave. I have a couple of men who can accompany them.”

Krueger nodded. “That would take care of any who might cause trouble. But what of the rest? All of us and most of the remaining men all included in that order. Age, disability or occupation will not exempt most of us.”

“No, they will not. However, I have a solution. Since any evacuation of the camp is now out of the question, and since there is no possibility of outside help, I may need additional guards at the camp. As the highest ranking officer in the area, I can deploy those guards where I see fit.”

“I see what you are suggesting, Herr Kommandant,” Krueger said with a small smile. “You swear the men in, have them on your personnel roster, and release them to the town where they are needed.”

Klink nodded. “They will each receive their orders from me, along with written confirmation. When the time comes, they can tender their resignations and end the war as civilians. Or not. The choice is theirs. Berlin need only hear that their orders were followed and every man over fifteen is in the armed forces. As for the truth . . .” He shrugged. “It has been a long time since Berlin cared to hear the truth.”

The mood visibly lightened among the small group.

“Then we are agreed?” Hausner asked. “The Nazis are to be told to leave, which, as loyal Nazis, they will do. The rest of us will join the Kommandant’s command.”

“Agreed,” said Scheinfeld, and heard it echoed by the other men.

“Then,” Hausner said as he stood, “we are finished here. We all have work to do. Danke, Herr Kommandant.” Hausner bowed. “We are again in your debt.”

Klink shook his head. “We have distrusted each other as Germans long enough. It is past the time to begin working together. For all our sakes.”

Hausner nodded and took his leave, as did the other men, leaving Klink and Hogan in the comfortable room.

Frau Engel hurried over to them. “Would you like anything to eat or

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drink, Herr Kommandant? Oberst Hogan?"

"Nein, danke," Klink said. "It is time we returned to camp."

Frau Engel nodded. "Please come again."

Klink smiled faintly. "Perhaps after the war. It is beautiful up here."

She smiled for a moment before anxiety crossed her face. "Perhaps next time there will be green fields to see instead of burning tanks." Her lips trembled and she left abruptly.

"Her husband is in the Panzers," Klink said quietly as Hogan looked after her in surprise.

"I hope he's not down there."

"No, he's in a worse place — the Eastern Front. She may never see him again."

Hogan shook his head in sympathy as he followed Klink out of the lodge.

Back at camp, Hogan was nearly mobbed by the officers and his men as he got out of Klink's car.

"Colonel, we need to talk," Witton said grimly.

Hogan glanced at Klink, who nodded at him and walked toward his quarters.

"What's up?" Hogan asked.

"Colonel, you're going to have to speed up the timetable for talking to the barracks leaders," Witton said. "Word is already going around the camp, and some of the men are using it as an excuse to pick on the guards."

"Damn! Okay, round up all the barracks leaders and everyone who'd heard the Stage. Get them to the mess hall in half an hour. I'll tell Klink."

The men scattered and Hogan walked over to Klink's quarters. He nearly bumped into Langenscheidt who was heading the same way.

"Is something wrong, Colonel Hogan?" Langenscheidt asked.

"Yeah," he said curtly, and opened the door after a perfunctory knock.

Klink, hanging his overcoat on the rack, looked at Hogan with surprise. And asked after seeing his expression, "What's wrong?"

"The news about the camps is getting around faster than I thought. I'm meeting with the barracks leaders in less than half an hour."

Klink nodded. "I wish I could say I was surprised. But I'm not."

"It might get nasty."

"I know. My men have been warned. Good luck."

"To both of us."

Hogan left, leaving Langenscheidt staring after him in confusion.

Then Langenscheidt turned to look at Klink. Klink, who said softly, "I never answered your question earlier."

"N-no, H-herr Kommandant."

"Do I frighten you so much, Sergeant?"

"Everything frightens me, Herr Kommandant. The news about the camps, the news about the war." He shrugged helplessly. "Perhaps it would have been better if you had not kept me here. Then I would not be thinking so many things I wish I did not think." And he stopped, confused by what

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he'd said, and confused by Klink's smile.

"But who would have helped me two days ago?"

"Someone else . . . Sergeant Schultz."

"I already have a use for Sergeant Schultz. I need you as well."

Langenscheidt looked at him for long minutes, his expression gradually turning more resolute. "Who are you?" he asked in an unfamiliarly firm voice.

Klink shook his head. "I will not burden you with that name, Sergeant. Just believe that I am a tired man who has fought the Nazis for too many years."

Langenscheidt nodded. "So Sergeant Schultz said. But today . . . You knew about those jets. You knew Allied pilots flew them. You knew what their targets would be . . . You arranged for those planes to destroy the roads."

"Yes, I did. It was the only way to keep this camp safe, and Hammelburg, and the people in the surrounding countryside."

"Why do you care about this camp? The area?"

"I have spent nearly five years of my life in this camp, Sergeant. Five insane years — the longest I have ever spent in one place since I joined the military. I have grown comfortable with the people, the camp. And I have found friends here. More, the prisoners, the guards, are my responsibility. I had the power to keep them safe. And I used it."

"How many died in the bombings?"

Klink shook his head wearily. "One is too many. I know more than one died."

"And you killed Danziger."

Klink nodded. And turned away.

"I . . . I killed someone once . . . I did not want to," Langenscheidt whispered. "He ordered me to kill prisoners . . . I told him to take back the order. He wouldn't . . . And he died."

"I'm sorry," Klink said quietly, turning back to him.

"I see him in my dreams, Herr Kommandant. I don't want to. I want to forget him. I don't want to know I killed him." His eyes teared. "How do I forget, Herr Kommandant? How?"

Klink shook his head. "You don't want to forget. When you do, when you stop remembering that it hurts to take a life, then . . . then it becomes easy to kill. And when it becomes easy . . ." His eyes grew distant. "That's what happened in the camps. It became easy to kill. And it became easy to justify the killing." He shook his head. "No, my young friend. Killing should never be easy, should never be forgotten."

"But it hurts!"

Klink walked closer. "I know. But . . . Did you have a choice? What would have happened if you did not kill him?"

"He would have killed me," Langenscheidt whispered. "He would have killed the prisoners."

"Then you saved the prisoners' lives. Good came out of his death. Accept

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that, Karl Langenscheidt. Hold tight to that truth. As I hold tight to the truth that the deaths I am responsible for are a good for others. Sometimes that thought alone gives me the strength to go on for one more day.”

“I will try, Herr Kommandant.”

Klink nodded and touched his shoulder with a fatherly gesture. “I am very glad I was able to keep you here, Karl Langenscheidt. You have done well. And you are a caring human being. Germany will have need of men like you after the war.”

Langenscheidt flushed with embarrassment and pride. “Danke, Herr Kommandant. I, too, am glad I was able to stay.”

“Good. Return to your post, Sergeant. I fear the men will need you soon.”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.”

With an uncertain smile and a salute, Langenscheidt left.

At least I was able to relieve his mind. If he is lucky, he will never have to see death again. As for me . . .

Klink rubbed his tired eyes, and straightened. *As for me, I still have a camp to run.*

He walked toward the inner door to his office.

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Chapter 20

It was a loud, vocal group that awaited Hogan in the mess hall. And the loudest were Sergeants Chaykin and Yeager. But when they saw Hogan, the men grew quiet. So quiet that Hogan found himself longing for the noise. And longing to be away from the camp. Someplace peaceful. Someplace where he didn't have an aching arm or angry men staring at him. And he wondered where Tahiti was. It sure wasn't here!

The silence was complete by the time Hogan reached the front of the mess hall. There was no way to soften the truth about the camps. All he could do was tell them. Tell them the way the Stage had told it, and hope for the best.

A deep breath to steady his voice, and Hogan began with the Stage's words, "For years, you've been fighting . . ."

There was a brooding silence when he finished. A very long silence. A silence that was beginning to make Hogan and some of the others uneasy. A silence that he wanted desperately to break and knew he couldn't.

Finally, it was broken by a whispering voice, "So, it is true. I thought it was just . . ." The man shuddered.

"Why are you surprised?" Chaykin scoffed. "We're surrounded by these stink . . ."

The rest was drowned out by the hue and cry that Hogan had expected. One small group was agreeing with Chaykin; another was lambasting him. Yet a third was trying to keep peace between the two sides.

The uproar was making Hogan's splitting head ache even more. So, he ended the noise the only way he could. He grabbed a large pot and hurled it against the wall. The clatter startled and quieted the arguing men.

"That's better," Hogan said, rubbing his aching arm. "Your barracks' mates have probably heard something by now. So, you'll need to tell them about the concentration camps. But you also need to tell them a few other things.

"One — the news about the camps came from a German. A German who'd been fighting the Nazis at least twice as long as any of us. He didn't need to tell us about the camps."

"Saving his butt," Yeager sneered.

Hogan, just, held on to his temper. "Two, those atrocities were caused by some Germans, not all, not even most Germans. Definitely not the ones in this camp or this area.

"Three, a good number of those killed were German. Killed because they were fighting Hitler, or because they were suspected of opposing Hitler. Or because they were in the wrong place, or were the wrong race or the wrong religion.

"And there's one other thing you can tell them . . . Those planes that

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flew over this morning. They were Messerschmitt jets. And they were flown by American pilots.”

“What?” from several voices.

“You’re crazy,” came Yeager’s voice.

Hogan’s eyes fastened on him. “Would you care to repeat that, Sergeant? I didn’t quite hear you.”

Yeager cleared his voice. “I mean that’s crazy. Sir. How could Americans be flyin’ those jets?”

“They were flying them because a resistance leader, specifically the Stage, asked them to,” Hogan said, his eyes staying on Yeager, seeing the look of disbelief on Yeager’s face. “He’d asked for a bombing run on the pass and the roads east of here.”

“Why, sir?” came a voice from the left.

“He called it payment for services rendered.” Most of the men smiled faintly. And Hogan managed a small smile as well. “What it means is that Burkhalter can’t evacuate the camp — ”

“Evacuate!” from Morrison near the front.

Hogan nodded. “That’s what they do to the camps in the way of the fighting. Evacuate them and send the men further into Germany. That’s how we got those three hundred men a few weeks ago. But with the roads and pass gone, an evacuation is out. And it also keeps the fighting from backing into here when the Allies do get close.”

“So, we’re cut off,” said another voice near the back.

Hogan nodded. “Yeah. And we’re safe. So is the town.”

“And a kraut planned that?” Chaykin said with disbelief.

Hogan had to count to ten before he could say evenly, “Yes, the Stage planned that.” But he knew that Chaykin and Yeager and a couple of others didn’t believe him. “Tell your men that as well. Which means the odds of living to see the end of the war just got a whole lot better for all of us.” His eyes swept the assembly. “Any questions?”

Silence was the reply.

He straightened. “Then that’s it, gentlemen. Dismissed.”

Slowly, talking less angrily, most of them anyway, the men began leaving.

Witton and the other officers walked over to Hogan.

“Do you think it’ll work, Colonel?” Martin asked.

Hogan looked at him soberly. “The truth, no. There are gonna be angry men out there. And I can’t blame them; I’m angry too. But so is Klink, and Schultz, and Gruber, and the town.” He shook his head tiredly. “Start circulating, gentlemen. If anyone’s making trouble, I want it stopped immediately. And if it gets nasty, I want to know about it immediately.”

“Yes, sir’s” sounded from the officers and they also left.

Hogan sighed inwardly. It was going to be a long day.

The news about the concentration camps and the deaths of millions spread like wildfire in the congested camp. Many couldn’t believe it. Then

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some of the new arrivals, some of the still gaunt men, started talking about what they'd seen and heard in other places. Some talked of airmen who had been shot down and taken not to a POW camp, but instead to a camp called Buchenwald where they'd been beaten and starved and saw others killed for no reason. Others talked about POWs they'd known who'd arrived from a place called Dachau in even worse shape than they'd been when they showed up at Stalag 13. And the stories about those places, and the fact that a few POWs were in them, also made the rounds of the overcrowded stalag.

As Hogan and Klink had feared, despite the efforts of the officers and most of the barracks leaders, some of the anger about the concentration camps spilled over onto the guards. Sometimes it was belligerent heckling; sometimes it was deliberately blocking the way of the off-duty guards; a few times, there were shoving incidents.

After an incident involving one of the amputee guards, Hogan knew he had to confront the issue or else Klink would have to. And Hogan knew that would further exacerbate the tensions in the camp. So, he called another meeting with all the officers and barracks leaders in the mess hall after the second meal.

"All right, everyone settle down," Witton said in a loud voice.

The noisy murmur of voices began to quiet as the men looked at Hogan.

Hogan's eyes swept the room. The officers nodded at him encouragingly. Most of the barracks leaders who'd been there awhile also looked at him without animosity. But there were a few who looked at him with less than friendly eyes. Especially Sergeants Virgil Yeager and Clarence Chaykin.

"Thanks for coming," Hogan said, and heard a soft snort coming the group where Yeager and Chaykin sat. Hogan's eyes narrowed. "Is there a problem?" he asked, his eyes fastened on Yeager.

"Problem? No, no problem," Yeager said with a humorless smile. "Sir," he added as an afterthought.

"Good," Hogan said. "Because we've got enough problems to deal with." He straightened and looked at the men before him soberly. "I know the news of the concentration camps shocked everybody. And there's nothing I can say that would ease the horror or anger we're all feeling. At the same time, we'd better get our act together. Whatever atrocities happened in other camps, concentration or POW, those things didn't happen here. The Germans here, guards and civilians, didn't commit those atrocities and didn't mistreat anyone. You need to remind the men in your barracks of that."

"What about Martinelli?" Chaykin asked belligerently. "Sir."

Most of the others looked at him uneasily as Hogan stiffened. "What about him, Chaykin?"

"He's dead."

"Yes, he is," Hogan said evenly. "The SS killed him."

"On Klink's orders."

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Hogan's eyes narrowed as loud mutterings arose from the others who'd witnessed Martinelli's death.

"You're daft, mate," RAF Sergeant MacKay said loudly.

"Am I?" Chaykin said. "The SS just happened to be there?"

"They were watching the camp," Hogan said. "Had been ever since Martinelli arrived. Martinelli had made himself unpopular with his escapes. And they were just waiting for an excuse to get him."

"And Klink gave them one," Chaykin sneered. "And," he walked closer, "You thought so too. Once. Sir."

"I made a mistake," Hogan said quietly.

"Did you? Sir. Seems to some of us that Klink's no better than any other kraut we've heard about."

"That's funny coming from you," Hogan said, cutting into the pending argument. "Or have you forgotten that he let you and your cohorts out of the cooler early after the trouble⁷¹ you caused before Christmas?"

Chaykin's eyes flitted to Kinch and Red Hand.

Hogan smiled humorlessly. "Don't bother looking at them, Chaykin. They didn't tell me. Klink treated you a hell of a lot more generously than I was feeling when I found out. But I wouldn't count on his generosity now. Not if your guys start picking on his men. So, I'm warning you right now. Any more trouble and you won't have to worry about Klink putting you in the cooler; I'll do it myself." His eyes bored into Chaykin's and Yeager's. "Is that understood? I said, is that understood?"

Sullen, "Yes, sirs" sounded from the two.

"Good. Now, go back to your barracks and tell the rest of your bunkmates. No more trouble with the guards or any other German in or near this camp. Dismissed."

Slowly, talking in undertones, the men dispersed. Witton waited until most had left before walking up to Hogan.

Hogan glanced at Witton. "Is there a problem, Captain?"

Witton met his eyes frankly. "I hope not, Colonel. Oh, don't get me wrong, sir. The incidents had to stop. You're right; Klink couldn't ignore them if they continued. But . . ."

"But?"

"I don't think this going to make you popular with the ones that Chaykin and Yeager represent."

"This isn't a popularity contest, Captain."

"I know, Colonel. And the truth is I'm not sure how else to handle it. It isn't as if you can transfer them to another camp if they do make trouble."

Hogan smiled humorlessly. "At least not any more."

"Sir?"

⁷¹ Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal 2: Encore*

Scene One

"We've had troublemakers before," Hogan admitted. "And I talked Klink into getting rid of them by sending them to other camps. But as you said, can't do it now."

"Sir, there is another option they might take."

"Escape? I've thought of that. And I'm just mad enough to let them. But anyone with half a brain can see that's not doable any more. We're surrounded by the Fifth Panzer Army. There's no place for them to go. So, like it or not, we're stuck with them."

Witton shook his head and left.

"Clarence, you're crazy," Yeager was saying as they walked back to their barracks. "Where would you escape to?"

"I don't know, Virgil. Anywhere's better than . . ."

"Yeah, like a grave. Nice and quiet. There's a whole kraut army out there. We're stuck here for the duration. But," he grinned suddenly, "we just added another mark against Hogan's name. When our boys get here, Hogan's gonna need every bit of his Irish tongue to keep from getting busted to private. As for Klink, he's got the others believin' he's a good kraut. Ain't no such animal. Too bad that assassin didn't take care of Klink when he had the chance." Yeager shrugged. "After the Allies move into this place, after Hogan's kicked out, Klink'll get his. And after we're through with him, he'll wish he'd never been born. Assumin' he's still breathin', that is," he added with a grin. A grin that Chaykin returned.

"Colonel." Kinch and Red Hand walked over to him.

Hogan waited.

"How did you find out?" Kinch finally asked.

Hogan shook his head. "Overheard Gruber and Schultz talking about it New Year's Day."

"Maybe I should have told you, Colonel," Kinch said evenly. "But you had enough to deal with back then. It was taken care of, and nobody got hurt."

"Nobody?" Hogan managed a small smile. "Chaykin's puss was ugly enough before, but with those missing teeth . . ." He shook his head and looked at Kinch and Red Hand. "I guess I've been a bit blind about what did go on here sometimes. I got used to all of us working for the same goals, the end of the war, making the world safe for democracy, the good old USA, that kind of thing. I didn't stop to think that the good old USA for me might not be the same USA for Negroes or Indians. Or even people like Chaykin and Yeager." He shook his head. "It was much easier when it was just us against the Germans." A faint smile. "I guess even colonels have a few things to learn."

Kinch smiled faintly. "Thank you, sir."

Hogan shook his head. "Nothing to thank. Now, get out there and keep the lid on things." His expression turned far too serious. "We can't afford to have the camp blow up now."

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“No, sir,” Kinch said, and he and Red Hand left, the door closing behind them.

Hogan looked around the now empty mess hall. Unconsciously, his hand started to lift to his sore foreman. And he caught himself and lowered his hand to his side. He looked around again, taking in the rough wooden tables, the even rougher drafty walls. Odd, he was feeling almost nostalgic about the place. God knew why! He’d hated the place when he first got here. And he still hated the place. Of that, he was certain. So, why did it suddenly feel like home to him? More a home than the one he’d grown up in?

He sat on the table behind him. Maybe because for the first time in a long time, he felt part of a family. Not a blood family, but maybe one even stronger. Newkirk, LeBeau, Kinch, Carter and finally Baker had become a surrogate family to him. Not brothers exactly, more like cousins who were friends. Good friends.

And they weren’t the only ones. Schultz, good old Schultz, was the uncle every kid should have — funny, good natured and caring

Hogan had been really close to one other person in his life, his boyhood friend, Timothy Sonntag, the American-born German kid from the large family next door.⁷² He and Timothy had fun. But, in many ways, they were also rivals. And then they drifted apart for awhile. And Timothy had died, or so he’d thought. Well, it turned out he didn’t die, and Hogan hoped to God that Timothy, who now went by the name of Mike Anders, would survive the war. They had a lot of catching up to do.

But even that friendship didn’t have the depth of his friendship with Wilhelm Klink. The friendship that should never have been. Sometimes, he still couldn’t believe it existed, that it was real. But it was.

And sometimes it scared him. He hadn’t wanted to find friendship here. He’d been leery of it, even with his men. For the simple reason that it hurt when it ended. He’d found that out when Timothy died, or when a friend turned out not to be. And the odds had been that he’d lose at least one of his men thanks to his sabotage operations.

Well, he hadn’t. And now, with the end so close, with the sabotage missions ended, they should all survive to the end of the war.

The end of the war. He sighed inwardly. He could finally see an end. And then what?

They’d go their separate ways — that’s what. Different men, bound together by a common goal. Bound together by their need of each other. And once that goal, that need, was over, they’d drift apart. And he didn’t want that. But how could he prevent it?

By doing something about it, Bobby-boy, he could hear his late father

⁷² Mel Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal*

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saying. *Assuming you're not afraid to.*

Afraid? Why should I be afraid? I've outwitted some of the biggest brains in Germany. I've bluffed the Gestapo, the SS, the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe. I took a penny-ante operation and made it something important.

He smiled mockingly at himself. And I had a lot of luck and help doing it. A whole lot of luck and a whole lot of help. From people I knew and people I'll never know. And especially from . . .

I've grown up here, haven't I? I've finally learned I need other people, and that I need to rely on other people. I don't want to lose what I've found here. It won't be easy keeping track of those guys. But I'll make sure I do it. And make sure they do it too.

Then there was Wilhelm Klink. What would happen to Klink when the war ended? And the friendship, the brotherhood, that had developed between them? Could they maintain that relationship when it was finally over? *You and me, to the end*, he'd promised. The end was almost here. And he'd be back in the States, and Klink would be here in a devastated Germany.

No. He wasn't ready for that. He didn't want to leave that fast. Not until he knew that Klink had a home, had safety, after the war. Not until he knew that the closeness Klink and he had found in this unlikely place would survive past the end of the war.

And he found himself wondering if there was a way to stay in Germany after the war ended.

Scene One

Chapter 21

An uneasy truce settled on the camp. Some of the heckling continued, but there were no more physical incidents involving the guards. And for that, almost everyone was grateful.

The next morning, Klink got a call from Chief Krueger. Eighteen Nazi supporters were joining the Wehrmacht and needed to be sworn in. And needed to be escorted to the nearest Wehrmacht unit. Which was no problem at all. As Klink had expected, Schuster and Wendorf from the morning shift and Thalheimer from the evening shift offered to accompany the volunteers. Another eight guards volunteered to go with them and join the fighting.

So, shortly before noon, Klink was on the top floor of the Hauserhof Hotel, which now functioned as the Rathaus, swearing in the men. And shortly afterwards, the eleven Wehrmacht guards and the eighteen newly inducted soldiers were following a couple of high pass residents down a steep trail to the valley below.

“Good riddance to them,” Krueger said under his breath as he saw them start on the trail.

Monsignor Geisler was more charitable. “They may never return, Herr Krueger.”

Krueger harrumphed loudly. “With all the trouble they’ve caused, I hope not. Excuse me, Monsignor; I am not as forgiving as you.”

“We will all need forgiving in the future, Herr Krueger,” reminded Geisler. “Perhaps we should practice it ourselves.”

Krueger had the grace to keep silent, but the expression on his face was far from acquiescent.

That afternoon, the remaining men and boys in Hammelburg and the surrounding countryside gathered in the church to swear their oath of loyalty. Not, as some of them had feared, the oath to Adolf Hitler. Instead, Klink had substituted it with the oath he’d sworn years before to the Germany he still loved. An oath that none of the men and boys had trouble taking.

After the oath-taking, Gruber and Schultz handed each man and boy their individual orders, orders which told them to serve Hammelburg and Germany the same way they had throughout the war.

“Well, that’s over,” Scheinfeld said with relief.

“For now,” said the more pessimistic Hausner as the remaining male population of Hammelburg left the church. “I find myself wondering what we do now.”

“We carry on,” Scheinfeld said.

Krueger shook his head. “I think we need to do more than that. The Allies will be coming here in time, even if the Panzers do not.”

Scene One

Klink, overhearing, agreed with him. "I suggest you assemble the Town Council. You have two vacancies that need to be filled. And it might be wise to consider what to do when the Allies arrive. Or before the Allies arrive."

"Are the Allies that close?" Bauer asked.

Klink looked at him soberly. "Perhaps, here, they might be. Guten Tag, meine Herren."

The five men looked after him with puzzled expressions.

"Now what the devil does that mean?" Krueger asked.

Bauer looked thoughtful. "We will find out soon enough. But his suggestion is a good one. We do need to make plans."

Hausner nodded. "Agreed. Tomorrow morning — is nine all right with everyone?" They nodded. "Good. We will assemble the Council and talk. Until then, meine Herren."

* * * * *

The camp finally settled down from the excitement of the past few days. Or so Hogan thought. Until . . .

"Colonel." Kinch came up from the tunnel after dinner. "Message from the Underground. There's a small plane coming in at 2100. It'll land in the field," his finger pointed on the map, "here."

"What's the mission?"

"Just said there are two people in it, and they'll fill us in."

"Okay. LeBeau, Carter, you go meet them." He glanced at his watch. "You'll get there just in time."

"Yes, sir," Carter said as they headed toward the ladder, following Kinch into the tunnels.

"Company now, sir?" Baker asked.

Hogan shrugged and winced as he pulled his arm. "We'll find out soon enough."

Carter came down the tunnel first, wearing a smile big enough to split his face.

"What are you so happy about?" Hogan asked with irritation; his arm was sore again. "Did you pick up the passengers?"

"Yes, sir." Carter continued his silly grin.

"And?" Hogan demanded.

"Haven't changed a bit, have you?" said a loud cheerful voice.

Hogan's face went through a variety of emotions — surprise, disbelief, then joy. "Mike? Mike!"

He nearly ran to greet the tall, blond man with the infectious grin. Forgetting his arm, he grabbed Mike's arms tightly. And let go just as fast as an unexpected pang shot down his arm, and he winced. "Sorry, bum arm at the moment."

Scene One

Mike smiled ruefully. "To match my bum leg." He tapped his right leg. "Still not a hundred percent."

"How have you been? I'm glad you're in one piece."

"It's a miracle I am," Mike said with less enthusiasm. "The OSS had given me up for dead last year. I was caught in the battles on the eastern front. Let's just say it hasn't been the best year of my life."

"I know the feeling," Hogan murmured.

"Uh, Colonel," LeBeau interrupted. "There's someone else to see you."

"Who?"

Hogan found himself in an embrace with a warm, soft body and lips that kissed him heartily. After a few moments of delight, and Mike's less than pleased voice saying, "Hey, you're supposed to be my wife!", Hogan pulled back to look at the girl he held. "Helga?"

"Surprise!" Helga Teitelman, Klink's first secretary, said with a smile. She snuggled closer. "You kiss as well as ever, Colonel."

"I try to keep in practice."

"You." Helga pulled away from him. "I know you do."

Hogan pulled her closer, ignoring the pain in his arm. "I missed you."

"I doubt that," she said tartly. And then smiled. "But it is nice to see you again."

"How did you hook up with this reprobate?"

Mike put a possessive arm around Helga's shoulders and pulled her away from Hogan. Helga, amused by the rivalry between the two men, stepped away from both of them.

"After I left here in May of 1943 to visit my aunt in Berlin," she said, perching on a stool, "and saw the horrible things that were going on, I knew I had to help the Resistance."

"You could have helped here," Hogan protested. "Hell, you closed your eyes to a whole lot of things."

"Ja. But at the time, I didn't realize just how much went on. Besides, I thought I could be more useful in Berlin. And I was," she added smugly.

"Which is why she's with me," Mike said more seriously. "Her people decided she was in danger, so they got her to Leipzig. When I needed to leave Germany, they figured a married couple would stand a better chance with the cover they set up."

"You're married to this bum?" Hogan shook his head in sympathy. "Poor girl."

"Only on paper, as I keep telling him."

"Okay." Mike got down to business. "Where's this package we're supposed to pick up and take to Switzerland?"

Hogan shook his head. "Don't have a clue."

Mike stared at him. "You don't? Didn't you arrange this trip?"

Hogan started to shake his head and was interrupted by a dry voice saying, "He didn't; I did."

Mike and Helga turned to stare at the tall, lean man in the Luftwaffe uniform.

Scene One

“Kommandant Klink,” Helga said weakly.

“Fraulein Helga,” Klink said as he walked over. “You are looking well.”

“Uh, danke, Herr Kommandant,” she said with confusion. “I, uh . . . ” She looked at Hogan uncertainly.

“Kommandant, this is Mike Anders, an old friend,” Hogan said. “Mike, this is Kommandant Klink.”

“Herr Anders,” Klink greeted with a nod.

Anders had lost his smile. “What the hell is going on?” he demanded.

“It’s a long, long story,” Hogan began.

“Which he doesn’t have time to tell,” Klink said smoothly. “I am sorry to interrupt the reunion, but you are on a tight schedule. You have a map to give me?” Klink held out his hand.

“Not you. I was told to give it to one person only,” Mike said in an unexpectedly harsh voice.

“Yes, yes, yes,” Klink said impatiently. “‘Let our alliance be combin’d, our best friends made, our means stretch’d; and let us presently go sit in council’. And your response is, ‘covert matters may be best disclose’d, and open perils surest answered’.”⁷³

Mike reached inside his jacket pocket and pulled out a map. “I still don’t believe it,” he murmured to Hogan as Klink opened the map and laid it on the table.

“Corporal LeBeau,” Klink said, “please bring Binyamin down here. And tell Sergeant Wilson you need enough bandages to wrap broken ribs. Sergeant Carter, Schultz is in my quarters. Tell him I need my kit and please bring it down to me. And Corporal Newkirk, if you could find a civilian shirt and coat that would fit Binyamin?”

“Yes, sirs,” echoed in the room and the men scattered.

Klink pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and picked up a pencil. “Listen carefully. You must follow the flight plan exactly. If you do not, you will probably die.” Klink bent over the map; Anders did as well. “You will take off at precisely midnight.”

Mike checked his watch. “Doesn’t give us much time.”

“I know,” Klink said. “While your plane has Red Cross markings, that is not a guarantee of safe conduct. However, both sides have been told to watch for a Red Cross plane which is carrying important Swiss personnel to Switzerland.”

Anders stared at him. “Both sides?”

“Yes. Pay attention, please. You will take this heading, down to this point, just north of Köln⁷⁴. Then you will take this heading west.” He

⁷³ William Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 1

⁷⁴ Known as Cologne in English.

Scene One

scribbled it on the map. "This will be the most dangerous portion of the trip. The space between Köln and Aachen is in flux. You will broadcast your position to both sides using these frequencies." Another note on the map. "While I cannot guarantee that there won't be any trigger-happy soldiers on either side, their commanders have been told to cooperate with you. Hopefully, the danger zone won't last for more than half an hour. Once you are safely in Allied space, you will proceed to a small airfield near Liege. Here." He circled it on the map. "They are expecting you and they will refuel your plane. From there, you will fly over Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, using this route." He traced it on the map. "Finally, you will reach Swiss territory. You will land in Basel where representatives of Baroness Mathilde Dietrich will meet you. The Baroness is highly influential, so no one will interfere with you." He pulled a packet from his jacket. "This is the paperwork you will need in Basel. Do not let it out of your hands."

There was a sound in the adjacent tunnel. "This is unbelievable," Binyamin's voice said. "You men did all of this?"

"In eight months," LeBeau said with pride.

"Amazing." Binyamin stepped into the radio room as Carter appeared with a bread-size box. "Wilhelm." Binyamin smiled at him. "What is going on?"

Klink straightened and looked at his friend. "It is time for you to leave," he said gently.

"Was? Nein, there is no need."

"Yes, there is," Klink continued in the same gentle voice. "You are not one of the POWs; you have no legal standing here. And," his voice dropped, "your family is waiting for you."

Binyamin paled. "My family? They live?"

"Your parents, Rudolf and your nephew — yes, they live."

Emotion twisted his face. "I did not dare hope." Tears made their way down his cheeks. "I thought . . ." He turned away.

Klink turned back to the map, emotion tightening his voice. "Are the instructions clear?"

Anders nodded soberly. "Yes. But how do I get out of Switzerland?"

"You can arrange that with Allan Dulles; I believe he's in Berne." Klink picked up the map and handed it to a surprised Anders. "Before you leave, there is something else that must be done. Sergeant Carter, the kit, please."

Carter came over and put the box on the table. Klink opened it. It was a makeup kit worthy of a Hollywood master.

"Binyamin," Klink said gently. "There is not much time, and this must be done."

Binyamin straightened and blew his nose. "Jawohl." But tears still shimmered in his eyes as he turned back to Klink.

"Sit here, bitte." Klink pointed to a stool. Binyamin complied.

"What are you doing?" Hogan asked.

"A precaution. Binyamin, please remove your shirt." Klink was opening small jars of makeup. He looked at Binyamin's tattooed arm appraisingly.

Scene One

He picked up a small jar and a brush. Using the brush, he lightly spread the makeup over the tattoo. He picked up another jar and began blending the makeup.

"Where did you learn that?" Hogan asked.

"I spent part of my misspent youth in theaters," Klink said, still working on getting the right mix of flesh tones. "Be careful using the arm; it will rub off if you use it too much. That should do it." He put the jars back in the kit and looked at LeBeau. "Where are the bandages?"

"Sergeant Wilson said he had to get them out of some boxes," LeBeau said uncomfortably. "He'll bring them down."

"He'll what?" Hogan began. "Carter, stop him before he —"

"Sorry, Colonel," Wilson said from the entrance. "Didn't know I . . ." He cleared his throat as he saw Klink. "I guess I'm not supposed to be here."

"Too late for that," Hogan said with annoyance. "Sorry, Kommandant."

Klink waved a negligent hand. "The bandages, please."

Wilson walked over with the bandages. "What are you doing, sir?"

"Herr Stein was caught in an Allied bombing," Klink said pedantically. "And his ribs have been broken. He is returning home to Switzerland to recuperate."

Wilson shrugged. "Sounds good to me." He handed the bandages to Klink. Then he noticed the others in the room. "Anders! Helga." A grin. "A night of surprises."

"I'll say," Anders murmured and turned to Hogan. "I was gonna ask when you recruited him, but given that he knows what's going on and you don't, maybe I should ask when he recruited you."

Hogan shook his head. "More complicated than that. How did you get here?"

"I called Teppel for help when I got to Berlin." A rueful smile. "I thought he went rogue on me. I was picked up by an SS colonel who turned out to be working for the Stage. Though how the hell Teppel knew how to contact the Stage . . ." His voice faded as he looked at Hogan, then at Klink. "Oh, my God," he whispered.

"I told you it was complicated," Hogan murmured.

"You're moving in exalted circles, Robert." He watched as Klink finished with the bandages.

"I am sorry for the discomfort," Klink was saying. "But if you are seen, they must think you have broken ribs."

"I will be fine," Binyamin said, starting to get up.

"No, there is more." Klink turned back to the kit, taking out a small bottle and another brush. "This will lighten your hair." He dipped the brush into the jar. Using the brush, he added blondish highlights to Binyamin's black hair. "It will take several washings, but it does come out. And the final step." He turned back to the kit and replaced the bottle and brush. Then he took out a small case and opened it.

"Contact lenses!" Anders exclaimed.

"Stolen from a lens-maker. Very useful." He turned back to Binyamin.

Scene One

“Your eyes are too dark to change completely, but they can be made lighter. They will take a little getting used to. Tilt your head up and look at the light.” Klink carefully inserted the lenses into Binyamin’s eyes. “How do they feel?”

“Strange, but not painful.”

“Do not rub your eyes while wearing the lenses; they can damage your eyes. Fraulein Helga,” he took a tiny bottle from the kit, “if his eyes become dry or the lenses become uncomfortable, put a couple of drops into his eyes.” He handed her the bottle.

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.”

“Corporal Newkirk has a different shirt for you. If you please, Corporal,” Klink said, placing the case and the other items back in the kit. “I’ll leave this down here, if you don’t mind.”

“Fine with me,” Hogan said. “Newkirk, put in the wardrobe room when we’re finished, will you?”

“Right, sir.”

“I believe that is everything,” Klink said, glancing at his watch. “It is time you left.”

“Wilhelm,” Binyamin said in an emotion-filled voice, “come with us. Bitte.”

Klink shook his head slowly. “It is not yet over.”

“But soon it will be. Colonel Hogan,” he appealed.

Hogan shook his head. “He won’t listen to me.”

“You are tired; you have done enough!” Binyamin persisted.

“Binyamin.” Klink touched his arms gently. “I will leave when it is time, and not before.”

Binyamin lifted his hands to Klink’s arms. “Promise me you will stay safe.”

Klink smiled faintly. “I promise you I will try.”

Binyamin hugged him fiercely. “Then,” he said softly, and added more words in Hebrew, words that the others knew were a prayer. At the end, LeBeau’s soft voice said, “Amen.”

“Amen,” echoed the others.

“Amen,” Klink whispered. “Go quickly.”

Binyamin nodded and stepped away, fighting back tears. “Danke, Colonel Hogan. If your men had not found me, I would not be alive.”

Hogan smiled faintly. “Don’t mention it; saving people is our specialty. LeBeau, Carter, take ‘em back to the plane.”

“Yes, sir,” Carter said. “If you’ll follow me.”

With a backward glance at Klink, Binyamin followed.

Anders threw an arm around Hogan’s shoulder. “Buy you a drink when you get to London.”

Hogan smiled. “Take care, Mike.”

“Sir,” Anders walked over to Klink, “thank you. I owe you my life.”

Klink shook his head. “Deliver Binyamin safely to Basel.”

“I will, sir.” He shook Klink’s hand. “I hope to see you again in a safer

Scene One

world." He bowed slightly.

Helga was saying her own fervent goodbye to Hogan. "Will I see you again?"

"That depends," Hogan said with a smile. "Send your telephone number when you get settled."

Helga laughed and kissed him again. "Auf Wiedersehn, Colonel." Then she walked over to Klink and looked up at him soberly.

"Auf Wiedersehn, Fraulein," Klink said with a slight bow.

"I thought I understood men, Herr Kommandant." She shook her head. "I was very wrong." She stepped closer to him and kissed him lightly on the lips. "Auf Wiedersehn." Then, to his surprise, she kissed him more fully. She ended the kiss slowly, almost reluctantly. "Stay safe, Kommandant."

He stepped away from her and nodded. "Auf Wiedersehn, Fraulein."

She smiled in farewell and left, followed by a grinning Anders.

Slowly, the others drifted away. Wilson, with a nod goodbye, went back down the tunnel. Baker, manning the radio, settled himself on a stool, a book in his hand. Kinch and Newkirk headed up the ladder to their barracks.

Hogan joined Klink who was still looking down the tunnel. "Why didn't you go with them?"

"The plane isn't big enough."

"I'm serious," Hogan persisted.

Klink was silent as he began walking down the tunnel to the entrance to his quarters. "Why didn't you leave when you had the chance?"

"And leave Crittendon in charge? No way."

"If he weren't in charge, or earlier this year?"

"I have a job," Hogan began. "No. I have a responsibility to these men. They believed in me. They followed me when they had no reason to. I owe it to them to stick it out."

"That's as good an answer as I can give you."

"But it's different for you. You can run your operation from any place; it doesn't have to be here. How many people would know that you aren't in Germany?"

"I would know," Klink said softly and left.

A couple of days later, Hogan received a message that the plane had reached Basel safely. Binyamin had been reunited with his happily stunned family; Anders was in London, as was Helga.

At Stalag 13, the routine of the last few weeks continued, the men wondering when the Allies would appear. Surely, it was just a matter of time . . .

* * * * *

Scene One

March 1 — The U.S. Ninth Army and First Canadian Army force the Panzer Lehr Division out of Mönchen-Gladbach. Various units of the Allied armies continue their advance toward the Rhine.

March 2 — The Allied armies reach the Rhine, north and south of Dusseldorf. The 83rd Division captures Neuss, across the Rhine from Dusseldorf.

March 3 — The Germans on the west bank of the Rhine begin withdrawing. Hodge's First Army captures Krefeld, northwest of Dusseldorf.

March 4 — The U.S. First Army crosses the Erft River, advancing on Cologne.

And the war continued its relentless march toward Stalag Luft 13 . . .

Act Four

Scene Two

Scene Two

Chapter 22

“Meine Herren.” Kommandant Wilhelm Klink nodded to the men assembled in the meeting room on the top floor of the Hauserhof Hotel — Bürgermeister Rudolf Scheinfeld, Kurt Hausner, Monsignor Jürgen Geisler, Chief of Police Werner Krueger and Doctor Ernst Bauer.

There were a few moments of small talk as the men greeted each other.

Then the Bürgermeister got down to business. “Herr Kommandant, you wished to see us.”

“Yes.” Klink sat at head of the table. “You men are the leaders of Hammelburg. I do not want you or the town to be surprised.”

“Surprised about what, Herr Kommandant?” Hausner asked.

“The Allies are not far away,” Klink said bluntly. “They are now north and south of Dusseldorf. They have reached Köln, and it is only a matter of time before they cross the Rhine.”

There were grim nods among the men.

“We understand the fighting is terrible,” Geisler said worriedly.

“The fighting cannot reach us surely,” Doctor Bauer said.

“With the roads blocked, we hope not. But one never knows, ” Krueger said. “Is that what you wish to talk about, Kommandant?”

Klink nodded. “Yes. Changes are coming whether we wish it or not. To expedite the change here, I have decided to surrender Stalag 13 to Colonel Hogan.”

Silence greeted his words. An odd mix of emotions crossed the faces of his listeners — relief, surprise and worry. They all knew that the surrender of his command without orders or a fight would guarantee Klink an immediate execution if any outsiders learned of it.

“I also think,” Klink continued after a moment, “that it would be wise if the town did the same.”

A longer silence now, finally broken by Hausner. “I do not know what to say.”

“Say yes,” Bauer said dryly.

“What?” Scheinfeld managed to say.

“It is the wisest course of action,” Bauer continued.

“But, Berlin — ” began the Bürgermeister.

“Berlin does not care about Hammelburg,” Krueger said bluntly.

“We are still surrounded by the Fifth Panzer Army,” started Hausner. “They could decide to reopen the roads and send troops — ”

“They won’t,” Klink’s quiet voice informed them. “Chief Krueger is correct. Hammelburg has lost whatever importance it once had; Berlin is not concerned with us.”

“But if German troops come here?” Hausner persisted.

“With the last link to Dusseldorf and the western front destroyed and

Scene Two

the pass and roads connecting us to the east blocked by the recent air raid, we are an island in the middle of the war. A dead-end area that has no resources. However, if by some chance Field Marshall Model does decide to open the pass and the roads, the camp has twenty-five hundred men in it. A reasonable number to defend the town and the camp against those who would be foolish enough to enter the area. And," his eyes swept over them, "I am certain there are others who are willing to defend the town."

"Yes," murmured the Bürgermeister. He was well aware of the amount of resistance activity in his town.

"When do you plan to do it, Herr Kommandant?" Geisler asked.

"I intend to talk to Colonel Hogan tonight. Tomorrow, my men will be given a choice as to whether they wish to stay or not. And on the morning of the seventh of March, I will surrender the camp."

"You have not given us much time, Herr Kommandant," Scheinfeld said.

A thin smile. "Surely you have already considered such a course of action."

"Yes, we have," Hausner admitted. "But we did not think it would be so soon."

"Do you wish time to think about it?" Klink asked.

"What is there to think about?" Bauer said. "We either surrender or we wait and let others make the decision. Then it will be much harder on us. Colonel Hogan is a fair man; he will deal justly with us."

"And those who come after him?" Hausner asked. "The Allies may not keep him in charge."

"That is a possibility," Klink conceded. "At least they will not come ready to destroy you."

There was silence for a time in the room. Then Klink stood. "I have said what I came to say, meine Herren. The choice is now yours."

"What time will you speak to Colonel Hogan, Herr Kommandant?" Scheinfeld asked.

"At 2000."

The Bürgermeister also stood. "You will have our decision by then, Herr Kommandant."

Klink nodded. "Guten Tag, meine Herren."

The door closed behind him.

It was eight in the evening when a knock sounded on the barracks' door. Hogan and his men were surprised when Klink, accompanied by Doctor Bauer, Bürgermeister Scheinfeld and Kurt Hausner walked into the barracks.

"Evening, Kommandant," Hogan said cheerfully. "Gentlemen."

Klink didn't return his smile. "May we talk to you, Colonel Hogan?"

Hogan grinned. "It's your camp, Kommandant."

Klink didn't respond to his tone. "Alone, please."

His soberness finally got through to Hogan. "This way."

Hogan led them into his room, curious eyes following them.

Scene Two

"What's on your mind, Kommandant?" Hogan asked as he closed the door.

There was no joy, no humor in Klink's eyes. Just an odd determination. "Colonel Hogan," he began tonelessly, "I wish to discuss the surrender," an odd break in his voice, "of Stalag 13."

Hogan stood still, almost dazed. In the past, how often had he dreamed of this moment! How often had he fantasized what he would say, what he would do when Klink said those words to him. Now, it was here . . .

And he had nothing to say.

Was it because he knew who Klink was? Partly. But also because he now realized how painful a decision it was. Even for Klink. Klink hated the Nazis, had hated them from the beginning. He had fought against them, risked and suffered torture at their hands. Still, this camp was Klink's command. More so than at any other time in its history. And it hurt to surrender his men, his command, to another.

Hogan nodded soberly. "When?" His voice had cracked; he cleared his throat.

There was relief in Klink's eyes; he'd expected Hogan to react, if not with glee, with a joke about the situation.

"I would like to give my men a choice," Klink said, "as to whether they wish to stay or not. I would like to tell them tomorrow and surrender the camp on the seventh at nine in the morning. Whoever wishes to leave may do so before then."

Hogan nodded. "I can live with that. And the terms of the surrender?"

"The terms," Klink almost winced, "are for you to decide, Colonel Hogan."

"The terms are unconditional surrender," Hogan said.

Klink nodded soberly, expecting no less. "Agreed." And hesitated. Then, "As the commanding officer of Stalag 13, I take full responsibility for any and all past actions of the men under my command."

"Kommandant," Hogan started, "that isn't necessary."

Klink's eyes met his. "Yes, it is, Colonel Hogan."

"All right, Kommandant," Hogan said slowly. And looked at the others.

"I am here," Scheinfeld answered his unspoken question, "to say that the town of Hammelburg is prepared to surrender to you after you accept the surrender of Stalag 13."

"The same terms?"

The men nodded; it was more difficult than any of them had envisioned. "The same terms."

"All right. I would like you three and anyone else you think should be here in the camp before nine on the seventh."

"Agreed, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan nodded. "Anything else, gentlemen?"

The men shook their heads.

"Then I have a favor to ask, Kommandant," Hogan said. "I would like to talk to the captains tonight. It will mean extending the lights out."

Scene Two

“Agreed, Colonel,” Klink said in a toneless voice.

“Thank you, Kommandant.”

A small bow from Klink. “Good night then, Colonel.”

A “good night” from Bauer, Hausner and Scheinfeld as well.

Hogan expelled his breath after the men left.

Almost immediately, his men crowded into the room.

“What’s up, Colonel?” Kinch asked.

Hogan didn’t answer directly. “I want to see Witton, Martin, Mitchell and Warren now. Go get them. Baker, I want to call London right now.”

Curious, but doing as they were ordered, the men scattered.

Hogan and Baker disappeared into the tunnel.

Hogan, with a happy Baker listening in, explained the situation to London.

“Good show, chaps!” The voice on the other end was jubilant.

Hogan smiled thinly. “The question is, what happens next?”

“We’ll inform the higher ups, of course. They’ll want to talk to you tomorrow about what will happen. Until then, Colonel Hogan.”

The radio went silent.

“You don’t look too happy, Colonel,” Baker observed. “I thought you’d be jumping for joy when this happened.”

Hogan smiled thinly. “I was just remembering how I felt when I had to surrender. Not a pleasant feeling.”

“But,” Baker was confused, “Klink’s on our side.”

Hogan nodded. “Yeah, he is. But that still doesn’t take the sting out of it. This camp has been his baby for almost five years. And now he has to give it up. Like I said, not a pleasant feeling.”

“What do you think London will do, Colonel?”

“I have no idea,” Hogan admitted. “But I just hope they know what they’re doing. And, Baker, for now, mum’s the word.”

“Yes, sir.”

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Chapter 23

In London, Hogan's message was passed to Brigadier General Cameron Forbes⁷⁵ who grinned as he read it. So, that idiot Klink decided to give up. He'd bet Hogan was happy about that.

The message went to Forbes's superior, Major General J. J. Gaines. Stalag 13. He grunted in acknowledgement. He was under orders to route messages he received about that particular stalag to a certain high-level office.

The message reached that office.

"So, he decided to do it after all," said the sober looking man in a three-star general's uniform.

"Once he made sure the camp was safe, he probably figured it was time to let go," said his aide, a harried captain. "

"I suppose. I wonder if he'll stay," Lieutenant General Edward Edmondson said in a distracted voice. "Oh well, I guess he'll let us know soon enough."

"What do we do about the camp, sir?" Captain Elliot Mason asked. "Keep Hogan and his men in charge?"

Edmondson smiled. "I don't think Hogan knows much about running a camp or a town. His skills lie in other directions."

"True, sir. But he'd have help."

"What if he decides to leave and takes Hogan with him? Not to mention that camp is smack dab in the middle of Model's 300,000-man army group. Hogan's a flyer, not admin or staff." He swiveled his chair around to face a map of Germany. "No. Have G-1 appoint an administrator for the camp and the area. Let Gaines know. And make sure they route the name up to me, will you? Sometimes, G-1 forgets to let me know what's going on."

Mason grinned. "Yes, sir."

Still smiling, he left to make the call.

General Gaines grunted as he hung up the telephone and glanced at his watch. Late again. Well, couldn't be helped. He picked up the phone.

"Get me G-1, Acker . . . Yes, I know what time it is," he said irritably. "There's bound to be someone there. Let them do some work for a change instead of sleeping . . . Yes, I'll hold."

Captain Martin Ricks was talking quietly on the telephone in the

⁷⁵ Forbes was a colonel in "Easy Come, Easy Go".

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otherwise empty office.

"Look, Frank, you've got to lay low. And tell the others as well . . . I know you think it's a big joke," he said with some anger. "But I've seen the complaints . . . Yeah, I lifted them . . . No, you're not, damnit! . . . Okay, sorry, Frank. But I don't think it'll blow over. Not this time . . . Look, Frank . . . Okay, okay . . . Yeah . . . Talk to you later."

He hung up the phone. "Not if I can help it," he muttered beneath his breath. What a mess he'd gotten himself into. If anyone ever found out . . .

The telephone rang. For a moment, he was tempted not to answer it. But he was already in deep with the CO.

"Personnel," he said. "Captain Ricks here . . . General Gaines. A pleasure, sir. What can I do for you?" he said in his most obliging voice. "An administrator and staff? May I ask for what, sir? . . . A POW camp in the middle of Germany?" he managed to choke out. "That's highly unusual, sir . . . Yes, sir, I understand, sir." He didn't, but whatever the brass wanted.

Then it hit him, and he smiled. "I think I have just the man you want, sir. Colonel Francis Randall. He was in charge of a similar area in North Africa and also did a stint in France . . . Yes, sir. Very experienced . . . Yes, sir, I'll get the paperwork together and have it in your office tomorrow morning . . . Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

He hung up with a smile still on his face. *Yeah, that'll work. It'll get Frank out of England, away from any nosy investigators. And it'll get him out of my hair. Who knows, maybe the krauts'll get efficient and invade the area. A dead Frank Randall would be good for me too.*

* * * * *

Hogan, to the annoyance of his men, talked to the captains alone.

"Then we're agreed?" Hogan asked them.

"Agreed, sir," Witton said. "Since Klink's men know how to run the camp, we keep them in place under our supervision."

Martin nodded. "Seems to be the most practical thing to do."

Hogan straightened up. "Okay, gentlemen, if there are no more questions, I'll say good night."

"Good nights" echoed from the men as they left the room.

Witton was the last. "For someone who just had the camp handed to him, you don't look too happy, Colonel."

A wry smile. "Odd, isn't it. I'd been looking forward to this since the day I got here. Now . . ." He shrugged.

"It had to come, Colonel. Everyone knew it."

"Yeah. I guess part of it is I don't know what London's going to do."

Hogan found out the next day. And he couldn't say he was happy about it. He sighed as he signed off the radio.

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"I don't believe they're doing that," Baker said quietly.

Hogan shrugged. "What do we know about running a camp? They have to give the guys in admin something to do. Well, get everyone down here. Might as well tell them the good news."

"Klink's surrendering?" Newkirk said incredulously.

"Yup," Hogan said. "Tomorrow morning at nine."

Kinch grinned. "That's the best news I've heard in years."

"It sure is," Carter said enthusiastically. "That means it's almost over, doesn't it?"

"Well, for us," Hogan said dryly. "For the rest of the war, there's still a way to go."

"And the town is surrendering as well?" LeBeau asked.

"Right after Klink does."

"That's the good news, sir," Kinch said. "So what's the bad news?"

"The bad news," Hogan said, "is that London is sending an administrator for the area and the camp."

"You'll still be in charge, right, sir?" Newkirk said.

Hogan shook his head. "I'm afraid not."

"They can't do that!" Carter exclaimed. "This is our camp; we should be in charge."

"Well, they're doing it," Hogan said. "And they've got a point. What do we know about running a camp? And a town?"

"We could learn," LeBeau said.

Hogan shook his head. "It's too late for that. He'll be here on the tenth. Colonel Francis Randall and his staff."

* * * * *

Colonel Francis Randall saluted General J. J. Gaines smartly.

Too smartly, thought Gaines. *Just a bit too smartly. And how do you fault a man for that?*

"Have a seat, Randall," Gaines said, not at all sure he approved of the officer G-1 assigned to the post. Randall's security clearance was a lot lower than he'd expected, which meant that Hogan would have to decide what to tell Randall about his operation.

"Thank you, sir," Randall said. He took off his cap and sat down, the cap balancing on his knee.

Gaines picked up a folder and gave it to Randall. "I understand you've been wanting to get out of England, Randall. Well, you've got your chance."

"Sir?" Randall took the folder and opened it.

Gaines sat down and leaned back in his chair. "There's a Luftwaffe POW camp that's surrendering to its senior POW officer. To give it its proper name, Stalag Luft 13 is surrendering. It's one of the smallest camps the

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Germans have, east of Dusseldorf.”

“Dusseldorf?” Randall’s brows lifted. “I didn’t know we’d taken Dusseldorf.”

“We haven’t. And probably won’t for awhile; Model’s Army Group B is all around it.”

“But — ?”

Gaines raised a hand. “I don’t know why the camp’s surrendering, Randall. But it is. Along with the town nearest the camp.” A frosty smile. “I suppose they can see what’s coming and decided to spare themselves the trouble of being fought over. Not that there’s much to fight over. The town was nearly destroyed by a fire not that long ago. At any rate, the camp and the town are surrendering. And that’s where you come in.”

“Me, sir?”

Gaines nodded. “We want you to assemble a staff capable of sustaining the camp for several months. The airfield nearest the camp is a mess thanks to Underground activity so we can’t get a plane in or out. And that’s assuming we’d want to try, given its location. Which means those men will be stuck there for some time. You’ll be taken there with three C-47’s and a fighter escort. You and your staff will parachute in, along with a couple of jeeps and tons of supplies, mainly food and clothing.

“Stalag 13 has some twenty-five hundred men. A dozen officers with a Colonel Robert Hogan as the senior POW. The rest are noncoms and enlisted men. It’s a mixed nationality camp, with men from nearly all the Allied nations in there, primarily airmen. Since it is behind the lines, we need you to secure the area for us. That means getting those men, a good many of whom have been there for years, into some sort of fighting shape.”

“Fighting shape, sir?”

Gaines smiled thinly. “We’re not thinking of having those men go on the offensive and we don’t anticipate any threats to the area. The natural terrain around it is rugged with limited road and bridge access. And just over a week ago, the last western access and the roads to the east were destroyed or blocked. So it’s completely isolated from the Germans and us. But it would be nice to have an area we can count on if we needed it. A kind of back door inside Model’s army.”

“I’ll make certain they get into shape, General.”

Gaines nodded.

“I do have a question, sir. The senior POW is a colonel?”

Gaines nodded again. “Technically, he’s senior to you. But you’ll be the one in charge. Everything you need to know,” *everything we’re going to tell you*, “is in that folder. Hogan’s a good man, a bit of a maverick. And a survivor. He can fill in the blanks for you, Randall. And help with the town. He’s made quite a few contacts with the locals; the area’s been a hotbed of

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Resistance activity over the past three years.”

“I see,” Randall said.

“Well, that’s it, Randall. You’ll have room for twenty-eight men on one of the C-47’s.⁷⁶ You have a free hand in picking the men, as long as someone higher up doesn’t want the same fellow. The catch is you’ll be leaving on the tenth at 0400.”

Randall frowned. “That’s not much time, sir.”

“No, it’s not.”

“Then I’d better get to it, sir.” Randall stood. A smart salute. “Thank you.”

Gaines saluted as well. “Don’t thank me, Randall,” he muttered as Randall left. “It wasn’t my idea.”

Then again, maybe he was just being a pessimist. Randall did have the necessary experience. And there wasn’t time to go looking for someone else. Oh well, once Hogan filled him in on what had been going on there, Randall will probably loosen up a bit.

Randall was reading the folder as he walked out of the building.

A stocky major joined him. “Anything good, Frank?”

A feral grin. “We hit pay dirt, Jimmy. I just got handed a POW camp and town right smack dab in the middle of Germany.”

“Huh?”

“A gold mine, Jimmy.”

“A POW camp? What kind of a gold mine is that?”

“You’re forgetting the town.”

“Look, Frank — ”

“They gave me my own ticket, Jimmy. An isolated area. No brass looking over my shoulder or able to drop in unexpectedly. No inspectors sticking their noses where they don’t belong. And tons of supplies to take into the area.”

That shut Jimmy up. “Which means — ”

“Which means I make the rules. How many of the old gang can we get in the next twenty-four hours, Jimmy?”

“Maybe fifteen.”

“Then get going, Jimmy. This is the one we’ve been waiting for.”

⁷⁶ Planes during the 1940’s were small. The C-47, commercially known as the DC-3, carried a maximum of 28 passengers, less if used as an ambulance. When used as a glider with the engines removed, it held up to 40. The C-46 could hold up to 50. No plane, civilian or military, carried more. Still flying today, the plane was used in every major campaign of the war to deliver supplies and troops.

Scene Two

* * * * *

As news of the capture of Cologne by Hodges' First Army circulated throughout the camp, the guards, one by one, talked to Klink and Gruber. Succinctly, Klink told them he was surrendering the camp to Hogan the next day and each man could choose whether he wanted to stay or not. Those men who wanted to leave could do so at eight o'clock on the morning of the seventh. Klink would give them orders to go to any part of Germany they wished.

After the last man left, Klink stood and walked to the window. His eyes swept the compound. Not counting Gruber, Schultz and Langenscheidt, there were one hundred and thirty-one guards in the camp and two thousand five hundred and thirty-four prisoners. He'd spent nearly five years of his life in this camp. In many respects, the best years of his life and definitely the worst years of his life. Now, it would soon be over. And his life would be turned upside down. Shortly, he would be the prisoner.

But he didn't have to be. He could leave.

Leave and do what? If he left, it wouldn't be as Wilhelm Klink, Luftwaffe colonel. He would not take the risk of venturing away from the area as himself. No, if he left, he would leave as the Stage. A man without a past or a future. And his present would be filled with hiding from the Gestapo and SS, living in the open or in primitive conditions, moving constantly, trying to evade the armies battling around him.

He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. He was almost fifty years old, this month in fact. And tired. A tired Stage was no good to anyone, especially himself. If he were not so tired, he might consider leaving. But not now. The war was nearly over. He could direct his operations as he always had, via the radio. Hogan wouldn't object.

He *was* tired. Otherwise, he would have remembered that Hogan might not remain in charge.

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Chapter 24

It was eight o'clock on the morning of March seventh in the year of Our Lord nineteen hundred and forty-five. And everyone, guards and prisoners, knew what would happen this morning. There was an excitement in the air, an excitement with an undercurrent of tension. Some of the prisoners had been waiting for this moment for nearly five years. Now, it was almost here.

Seventeen men walked into Klink's office and walked out with orders authorizing them to travel to cities and towns all over Germany. Their reasons for leaving were simple. They wanted to be with their families when it all ended. Once they were safely away from the area, their uniforms would be discarded and they would disappear into the mass of civilians crossing Germany. The rest of the guards, one hundred fourteen men and boys, many of them physically unable to attempt the arduous journey down the trails, were staying — staying with the man they had grown to respect, the soon-to-be-replaced Kommandant of the camp, and staying with a man they thought they could trust, the American Colonel Hogan.

The prisoners, dressed in their best for the occasion, wandered around the camp, watching the seventeen men leave. Watching also as the guards climbed down from the watchtowers or came out of their barracks and assembled in the compound into two neat rows of fifty-seven men apiece. Sergeants Schultz and Langenscheidt stood at the head of the rows. Captain Gruber stood on the porch in front of the office, waiting nervously.

A car entered the gate and drove up, stopping beside the Kommandant's quarters. Five men got out: Bürgermeister Scheinfeld, Kurt Hausner, Monsignor Geisler, Police Chief Krueger and Doctor Bauer. The five men walked over to the porch and waited beside Gruber.

The prisoners slowly arranged themselves into orderly rows in the open space between the barracks and the Kommandantur building. Volunteers brought out the twenty odd men who were still housed in the infirmary. They also wanted to be part of a day some of them once thought they'd never live to see. Hogan, the other officers and his men walked over to the office. Hogan and the four captains went up the stairs; the rest of the officers along with Hogan's men lined up in front of the porch. Hilda, looking nervous, walked out on the porch and stood over on the far right.

Then Kommandant Wilhelm Klink came out of his office.

"Achtung!" Schultz called.

The Germans snapped to attention, saluting their Kommandant. To the surprise of the German civilians, the prisoners, all twenty-five hundred and thirty-four of them, also saluted.

Klink returned the salute; the irony was not lost on him.

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“Good morning, Kommandant,” Hogan said.

“Colonel Hogan.” Klink’s eyes were veiled, unreadable. “Captain Gruber.”

Gruber walked over and saluted.

“You know what to do,” Klink said quietly.

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant,” Gruber said. He turned to the assembled soldiers. “Flag detail.”

Three men broke away from the precise rows and marched over to the flagpole in the compound.

“Achtung!” Schultz shouted.

The German soldiers saluted as their flag was slowly pulled down the pole.

Klink, Hogan noted, stood at attention, but didn’t salute — his final act of defiance as the Kommandant of the camp. Of course, none of the prisoners saluted the Nazi flag as it was lowered to the ground.

The detail folded up the flag with precision and walked back to Captain Gruber. Gruber saluted and took the flag. He went up the stairs. Another salute and Gruber handed the flag to Klink. Klink took it without a word, tucking it under his left arm. Gruber, his face expressionless, went back to his place.

The moment had come.

Klink stepped away from the others, walking to the top of the stairs. His eyes swept the camp, the prisoners and the guards. He turned, his glance flitting over Hilda’s pale face and the faces of the men from town. His gaze rested on Hogan.

The two men looked at each other, both knowing this moment had been inevitable from their first meeting. But Hogan’s perception of this moment was far different than it had been those many months ago. Then he was a defiant, brash, and admittedly cocky American who’d had the misfortune of being shot down. He was certain of the outcome of the war; more certain with each word he’d exchanged with the Kommandant of the camp. The Kommandant he had despised, if not hated, from the moment they first met. How often had he dreamed of what he would do to Klink when this moment arrived, how he would make Klink crawl, figuratively if not literally, maybe even beg, literally.

Then as the years passed, things changed. The hatred, if there was any, disappeared. More importantly, the contempt, the derision, disappeared. Instead, to his astonishment and initial disgust, he discovered other feelings in himself toward Klink. Feelings he didn’t want to acknowledge. Feelings he had hidden successfully from himself and from the man who stood before him. And it had taken that man’s pain and near death for Hogan to finally admit the truth to himself as well as Klink. If the surrender had come then, Klink would have come to him as a child goes to an older and wiser brother who would look after him.

But now, with everything he had learned about Klink, with everything that had gone on between them, it was two equals facing each other. Their

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roles were reversing, yes, but they were merely trading places; it didn't negate their equality.

Klink walked slowly towards Hogan. Hogan, to the surprise of many, met him halfway.

"Colonel Hogan." Klink's even voice could be heard throughout the camp, courtesy of the camp's public address system. "As Kommandant of Stalag Luft 13, I formally surrender this camp to you. I ask only that the men left in my command be treated fairly by you and your men. I take complete responsibility for their actions while they were in my command. And I am prepared to accept the consequences for those actions."

His last statement surprised many in the camp, including the remaining Germans.

"Colonel Klink, I accept the surrender of this camp. I give you my word that your request will be honored."

"Thank you, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan stepped away from Klink. "Flag detail."

His men: Sergeant Andrew Carter, American, Sergeant James Kinchloe, American, Sergeant Richard Baker, American, Corporal Peter Newkirk, English, and Corporal Louis LeBeau, French, stepped away the office and marched smartly to the flagpole.

"Attention!" from Captain Witton.

The former prisoners snapped to attention and saluted as the three Americans hoisted the American flag up the pole. The former guards, following the lead of their Kommandant, saluted as well.

Hogan watched expressionless as the flag rose slowly up the flagpole. But the thudding of his heart belied his expression. *I wonder if this is the way Francis Scott Key felt when he saw that flag flying over Fort McHenry? A different war, a different enemy, but . . . Never paid much attention before, did I? What it means . . . what it cost.*

An unexpectedly ragged breath as he looked across the compound. Men he'd known for years, men who'd looked on death and destruction without blinking, men who'd survived the horror of their planes burning and crashing, men who'd once felt they'd never see home again, had tears in their eyes as they looked at those thirteen stripes and forty-eight stars. Some, the ones who'd been here the longest — Hogan averted his eyes from their expressions and looked at his men. Carter was staring up at the flag with awe, almost as if he'd never seen it before. Kinch and Baker, both serious, quiet men, looked at it thoughtfully. And Hogan, remembering his conversation — his fight — with Klink found himself wondering if the reality of their lives back in the States overshadowed the faith, the promise, that the flag meant to most of the other Americans in the compound. He hoped not; he hoped that they could see the dream, the future that the flag represented. He looked up at the Stars and Stripes. *God, I just pray I never forget what it really means, what it really cost.*

The men stayed at attention as the British flag was hoisted up by Newkirk, followed by the French flag. Over a third of the camp came from

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the British Commonwealth, some two hundred were French. Their countries had known war the longest, had suffered the most among the Allies. Some had despaired of ever seeing this day. LeBeau, one of the shortest men in the crowded camp, looked like the tallest as he hoisted the French flag up the pole. His face shown with a fierce pride as his hand snapped up in a salute. And Newkirk, the irreverent kidder, the one who downplayed serious emotions, had tears streaming down his face as he stared up at his flag.

For a moment, for two, for three, all Allied eyes remained on the colorful banners fluttering above them. For a moment, for two, for three, no one took a breath, no one moved. No one could.

Then the five men stirred and slowly walked back to Hogan.

But it wasn't over yet.

Bürgermeister Rudolf Scheinfeld nervously walked over to the American Colonel. He wet dry lips. "Colonel Hogan, as Bürgermeister of Hammelburg, and with the unanimous consent of the Town Council of Hammelburg, I surrender the town of Hammelburg and its environs to you. We humbly ask for your protection against those who would invade our town."

"Bürgermeister, gentlemen, I accept your surrender," Hogan said, "and pledge you our support."

"Danke schön, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan turned away from him and back to the assembled camp. Thousands of eyes, many of them wet, looked back at him. His eyes swept the camp; it was almost over.

"Prisoners," Hogan ordered in a firm voice, "lay down your arms."

There were some puzzled looks on the former guards' faces, faces that flushed as they realized whom he meant. Slowly, their rifles and machine guns were placed on the ground.

"Captain Gruber," Hogan said, "please escort your men back to their quarters."

Gruber saluted. "Jawohl, Herr Oberst. Sergeant Schultz, Sergeant Langenscheidt."

The guards began marching in neat lines back to the two buildings.

"Captain Witton," Hogan said as the guards entered their quarters. "Dismiss the men."

"Dismissed!"

Then it came. Hogan expected it, as did Klink. But the response was still overwhelming. The former prisoners cheered and clapped and cried and danced and sang in celebration. For them at least it was finally over.

Hogan watched the frenzied assembly for a moment with a faint smile; the celebrations would go on for the rest of the day, maybe longer. Then he turned back to Klink and the others.

"Shall we adjourn inside, gentlemen?" Hogan gestured. There were still some things they had to discuss.

The Germans went into the office, followed by the Allied captains.

Hogan and Klink were left on the porch. Only Hogan and his men noticed

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as Klink walked over to the trashcan standing beside the porch. The lid was lifted. The Nazi flag Klink had received was dropped inside contemptuously. The lid was replaced. And Klink, ignoring Hogan's searching glance, walked into the office. Hogan, after a look at the trashcan, followed.

"Whew!" Newkirk said softly, glancing at the can.

"You got that right," Kinch agreed, looking at the can.

Then the men left to join the celebration.

They were in Klink's quarters, brandy having been passed out.

The rules for now were simple. Klink's men, those who had taken care of the workings of the camp, would continue their tasks, supervised by the former prisoners. In the town, the handful of Nazis still left, a few women and men too infirm to wear uniforms, were to be placed under house arrest. If people behaved themselves, as Hogan knew they would, there would be no problems. The former guards were now subject to the same rules that the former prisoners had followed. The details would be worked out later with the new commanding officer.

"Was?" was Hausner's astonished cry. "Colonel Hogan, we had thought that you —"

Hogan shook his head. "London is sending a man with a complete support staff within a few days."

No one asked him when he had contacted London; they could guess.

Klink's eyes narrowed as he heard the news.

Hogan looked at him, seeing the unspoken reproof in his eyes. "Would it have made a difference?" Hogan asked evenly.

"In the surrender of the camp, no," Klink said just as evenly. "In other matters, perhaps."

"The decision was London's, Colonel," Hogan said, still in the same tone. "And they're the boss."

Klink smiled very faintly and lifted his drink to his lips. Only Hogan could hear, "Well, I suppose I can always talk to London later."

Hogan turned away, hiding his smile.

Hours later, the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen was crossed by troops under the command of General William Hoge after German attempts to destroy the bridge had failed. The Allies were now on the eastern bank of the Rhine. Enraged, Hitler ordered the execution of five officers. One survived only because he had the good fortune to be captured by the Allies before the order could be carried out.

Later that night after the townspeople had left, the former prisoners were still celebrating, and the former guards were in their quarters.

Hogan walked over to Klink's quarters. Klink stood on the porch, his eyes on the darkness outside the camp.

"Care for a drink?" Hogan asked him.

"If it's champagne, not really."

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"I guess it would be bad taste." Hogan put the bottle and glasses on the steps and walked over to Klink. "How are you doing?"

Klink shook his head. "I'm not sure. I'm not regretting the surrender; it had to be done. But, still . . ."

"Yeah, I felt the same way when I was captured," Hogan said.

"But then it was just you. I feel responsible for the guards and the town. It was bad enough handing them over to you. Now there's a stranger coming."

"You're really annoyed about that," Hogan said with a little heat.

Klink looked at him. "Aren't you?"

"Well . . . Yeah," he admitted. "But there's not much we can do about it, is there? Unless you're holding out on me."

A faint smile. "I have rarely interfered in the decisions of Allied High Command. No matter how stupid I thought they were."

Hogan laughed in the darkness.

There was a long companionable silence on the porch.

"When are you moving in?" Klink finally asked.

"I'm not," Hogan said with a faint smile. "As you said, there's a stranger coming to town. And if there weren't, I'd still stay where I am."

"Why?"

Hogan grinned. "I wouldn't know what to do with all that space."

Klink smiled.

"Besides where would you stay?"

"There are two bedrooms. At any rate, that would be your decision or the new commanding officer's," Klink said softly. "I've packed up the items that mean something to me and had them taken down to the tunnels."

"But a lot of the things in there are yours," Hogan objected.

"What's left are just things. Some of them nice, but things that can be replaced."

Hogan suddenly remembered the conversation he'd had with Klink on New Year's Eve. "You expect to be sent to the cooler, don't you?"

Klink shrugged.

"This is nuts," Hogan started. "I'll tell Randall —"

"You will say nothing, Papa Bear!" the Stage ordered. "Neither you nor men! Is that understood?"

Hogan was startled, and chastened. "Yes, sir," he said in a subdued voice.

"No, I'm sorry. That came out harsher than I intended. But I will determine what the new commanding officer does or does not know. London may have informed him. But I doubt it."

"Think he might know about our operation?"

"I don't know. I think that unless he does everyone should keep their mouths shut."

"Agreed," said Hogan. "I'll make sure everyone gets the word. But it would make things easier if he knew."

"He should," Klink said. "His security clearance should be high enough."

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"Tell you what," Hogan said lightly. "If he kicks you out of here, you can bunk with me."

Klink looked at him with amusement. "You probably snore."

"Me? Never! And I know you don't."

Klink smiled. "Yes, you did bug the bedroom a few times, didn't you?"

"Not when you had feminine company," Hogan said hurriedly.

An odd look. "You wouldn't have heard anything. What woman in her right mind would sleep with Kommandant Klink?"

"Oh, I don't know . . ."

A soft, "I do."

Hogan coughed.

"Am I embarrassing you, Colonel Hogan?"

"Well . . ."

Klink smiled. "For a man with such a marked interest in women, I didn't think sex would be an embarrassing subject."

"It's not," Hogan protested. "It's just . . . We've never talked about it before," he finished lamely.

"There are many things we've never talked about," Klink said quietly.

"Maybe we'll finally get the chance," Hogan said in the same tone.

"Maybe," Klink said noncommittally.

There was silence for a while.

"Wilhelm," Hogan began.

"I told you once I don't want your pity, Colonel," Klink said in a low voice.

"It's not pity, Kommandant," Hogan said quietly. A faint smile. "You need it less than any man I know."

A pause. "Then I apologize, Colonel."

"Why are you being so formal?" Hogan asked. "I would think that being relieved of the burdens of command wouldn't be too bad."

"Do you believe it, knowing you'll be relieved as well?" Klink asked. "And I am still concerned about the men who stayed. I don't want them hurt."

"They won't be, Kommandant," Hogan said. "I promise you."

A faint smile. "But you won't be in charge, will you?"

"Damn it, will you stop being such a pessimist?"

"Forgive me, Robert. But I've spent too much of my life being a pessimist as you call it. I call it being a realist."

"Finally, you remembered my name," Hogan said. "I was beginning to wonder if you'd forgotten it."

"I apologize."

"No." Hogan's voice was more subdued. "I'm the one who should apologize. If I were in your shoes, I'd worry too. I worried about my crew for weeks after I was captured, even though I knew they were safe in other camps."

"Yes, I know."

"I kept expecting to be transferred out," Hogan admitted. "Why didn't

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you?”

Klink shrugged. “The camp needed a high ranking officer to restore some order to it. Though you took over more completely than I expected.”

“But you went along with it.”

“By then, I had checked on you, and you did keep the men in line. Even if I didn’t appreciate the how of it, you were useful.”

“I tried.”

Klink laughed unexpectedly. “Yes, you did. And you succeeded. Quite well.”

“We both succeeded. Even if I didn’t have the sense to admit for a long time,” Hogan added dryly.

“And now it’s ending,” Klink said softly. “Perhaps that is what I really regret. That our partnership is over.”

“I’d like to think it’s just entering a new phase,” Hogan matched his tone.

“Perhaps.”

Hogan walked over to the bottle he’d left on the steps. “Then let’s drink to that. By the way, it’s not champagne. It’s fine old Napoleon brandy.” He poured the brandy, handing a glass to Klink. “To new beginnings,” Hogan toasted.

“With old friends,” Klink added.

The glasses clinked and they drank.

“Excellent,” Klink said appreciatively. “Should I ask where it came from?”

Hogan grinned. “I need some secrets, Kommandant.”

“Wilhelm.”

Another smile. “Wilhelm.”

“We haven’t played chess in a while, Robert.”

“No, we haven’t.”

“Feel like losing?”

Hogan grinned. “I’m feeling lucky tonight. Maybe I’ll win.”

Klink matched his smile. “Maybe you will.”

Klink led the way back into his quarters.

Outside, the celebration continued.

Scene Two

Chapter 25

London:

“There you are, Mason,” General Edmondson said. “Have a good dinner?”

“Uh, yes, sir. Thank you,” Mason said mechanically. “Uh, sir.”

“Yes?” Edmondson opened a file.

“Sir, I had dinner with a friend of mine from CI.”

“Criminal Investigations? You seem to have friends all over, Mason.”

“Yes, sir. Well, sir, we ran into a couple of guys . . . That is . . .”

“Mason, is there a point to this?”

“Yes, sir.” Mason took a deep breath. “Sir, Colonel Randall, the one going to Stalag 13. Seems there are rumors circulating about him in CI.”

“Rumors? Like what?”

“Misconduct, sir. They weren’t very specific.”

“CI does more than misconduct, Mason. They’re after bigger fish. There was nothing in his file?”

“No, sir. Seems that the paperwork’s disappeared.”

“More likely buried on someone’s desk. Or it never existed.”

“Sir, they said it’s happened before. Accusations were made and then nothing.”

“Nothing — as in they didn’t find anything?”

“No, sir. I mean, yes, sir. No proof, no witnesses, nothing.”

Edmondson frowned.

“Maybe we should keep Randall here, sir. Until they can check him out more thoroughly.”

Edmondson glanced at the clock. “He’s due to leave in five hours, Mason.”

“I know, sir.”

“Too late to do anything about him now.”

“But — ”

“The camp needs the supplies they’re taking, Mason. I know they’re in much better shape than any other POW camp. But if we want to use that area and those men, they need the supplies, and they need training.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Don’t look so glum, Mason. We’re not going to drop it. Let Randall go. If he does have something to hide, well, let him think he got away with it. He might get careless if he thinks he’s safe. Easier to hang him that way. And we’ll keep digging here.”

“Sir, if the rumors true — ”

“If they are, can you think of any men better able to handle the problem?”

Scene Two

"I guess not, sir." Mason was still less than happy. "Do we tell Hogan about him?"

"Tell him what? Rumors? While we're at it, we can tell Hogan about the rumors that have circulated about him — cooperating with the enemy and making treasonous comments over German radio, among others."

"But those were done as part of his operation."

"And how many people know that? Randall doesn't know about the camp? Security clearance not high enough?"

"No, sir."

"So, as far as he's concerned, there is nothing unusual about Stalag 13. That'll work. If there is a problem with him, the less he knows the better."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't worry, Mason," Edmondson said in a cajoling voice. "Get on CI's back and have them check Randall with a fine-tooth comb, including all the rumors. If there is something on him, we'll know exactly where to find him. And we'll get some use out of him too. Look on the bright side. What could he possibly do in the middle of Germany, surrounded by Panzers, with both Papa Bear and the Stage looking over his shoulder?"

* * * * *

March 10, 1945, the orderly formations were back, both former guards and former prisoners. By now, everyone knew that Colonel Francis Randall and twenty-seven other men were coming to the camp, administering not only the camp but the town as well. Roughly one hundred square miles of town, camp and environs would be under their control.

No one knew what to expect. London had given them very little information on Randall. About the only thing Hogan knew for certain was that Randall was a few years older than he, some years Hogan's junior in rank, and had spent most of his career behind a desk. "A desk jockey," Newkirk had said derisively. And despite the fact that Hogan technically outranked him, Randall would be the commanding officer.

Randall and his men were only minutes away. While the planes carrying Randall, his men and supplies were also carrying a couple of jeeps, no other transports could be flown in. Therefore, Hogan had sent the camp's trucks to the airfield. He had debated going as well but decided against it. This was the command he was turning over to Randall, so this was where he was going to meet Randall. In hindsight, that turned out to be one of the biggest mistakes he'd ever made — the driver of one of the trucks was Sergeant Virgil Yeager.

Hogan's men and the junior officers were at the foot of the stairs; the captains were on the porch along with Gruber, Klink and Hogan. Hilda,

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very nervous, was waiting in the office. Hogan had decided against having the townspeople at this meeting; Randall could decide when and where to meet with them later.

Finally, the jeeps and trucks were at the open gate; the men sprang to attention.

The lead jeep stopped before the building with the "Kommandantur" sign still on it. The driver got out and saluted as the other man in the jeep also got out.

The men in the camp saluted as well, Germans as well as former prisoners.

The man, a couple of inches shorter than Hogan, with an average build and dark features, walked slowly to the stairs. He glanced around before going up the stairs to where the officers were waiting. As he did, other men climbed out of the vehicles to look around at the camp.

Randall walked over to Hogan, returning his salute.

"Colonel Randall," Hogan said, dropping the salute, "I'm Colonel Robert Hogan, the senior officer in the camp."

"Hogan." Randall's voice was cool, as was his touch when he shook Hogan's hand.

"And these are Captain Witton, Captain Martin, Captain Mitchell and Captain Warren," Hogan introduced.

Randall nodded at the men. "This is Major Matthews," he gestured at the stocky officer who came up beside him. "The others you'll meet as we go along."

"Yes, sir," Hogan said and then turned to the man beside him. "This is Colonel Wilhelm Klink, the former kommandant of Stalag 13."

Klink saluted Randall; the salute was not returned. Instead, Randall eyed the tall German like a carnivore examining its prey.

"I haven't seen many high-ranking krauts, Kommandant," Randall said softly, slurring the last word. "Are you a prime example of the 'Master Race'?"

Klink, his eyes flitting over Randall's face, didn't answer.

"Not very polite, Kommandant." Hogan found himself thinking of the way Hochstetter used to say the word. "And it's not smart to annoy the new boss. Or maybe you don't speak English."

"My apologies, Colonel," Klink said. "I didn't realize you expected an answer."

"I always want answers when I ask a question, Klink. I'm a very curious man. And I have a great many questions to ask you."

Randall's eyes swung to a nervous Gruber and a worried Schultz, and past them to the assembled Germans. He dismissed them with a glance, his eyes going back to Klink.

"Not much, are they? Or you."

"Colonel, Kommandant Klink is entitled — " Hogan began.

"He's entitled to nothing. He's just a kraut who didn't have the sense to disappear when he had the chance. Matthews!"

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Matthews saluted. "Sir!"

"Have a detail take the krauts, including those two," indicating Gruber and Schultz, "to one of the buildings. Lock them up."

"Wait a min — " Hogan started.

Klink cut across his objection. "Colonel, I am responsible for my men. I take complete responsibility for their actions while they were under my command."

"Very noble, Klink. Are you equally willing to accept their punishment as well?"

"Yes," was the calm answer, his eyes still on Randall.

Randall smiled mockingly. "Matthews, escort Klink to the cooler. No one is to see him without my express permission. Especially," he added with relish, "Colonel Hogan."

The order startled Hogan; it also generated a few uneasy looks among the other officers and his men.

Klink glanced at Hogan's surprised expression and smiled faintly. Then he walked down the stairs, Matthews at his side.

There was an odd silence as Klink led the way to the cooler. The door shut behind him with a muffled clang.

"Crowley!" Randall shouted.

A captain hurried over and saluted. "Yes, sir!"

"You escort the krauts to the barracks," Randall ordered. "Then post a guard. No one in or out without permission."

"Yes, sir!"

Another salute and Crowley walked down the stairs, gesturing to a couple of men.

Gruber and Schultz followed him. Silently, they and the former guards marched to Schultz's barracks. The door closed behind the men.

Randall turned to Hogan. "I'll need a building for my men. I want one cleared out within the hour. I'll take over the kraut's quarters, of course. And I want to talk to you and the captains now."

Hogan found his voice. A tight, "Yes, sir. Lt. Miller, if you please."

"Yes, sir," Miller said.

Randall smiled at Hogan; despite its surface pleasantness, Hogan decided he didn't like the smile. "Snyder, you go with the lieutenant. You know what we want."

"Yes, sir," said a wiry corporal.

Randall opened the door to the office. Matthews hurried over from the cooler as Randall walked inside.

"Well, hello." Randall grinned at a very skittish Hilda who stood behind her desk. "And who do we have here?"

"This is Hilda Drescher," Hogan said, walking closer to the plainly frightened girl. "She's the camp secretary and knows everything there is to know about the place. She could be a great help."

"Yes, I'll bet," Randall murmured, his eyes slowly undressing her.

Hilda instinctively took a step closer to Hogan.

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Randall grinned at her uneasiness and glanced around the office. Then he walked to the inner office and opened the door. A look around.

"It'll do for now. Gentlemen," he looked at the officers coming in, "we've got some work to do."

Randall listened, Hogan had to give him that, as he and the other officers explained the situation at the camp. As Hogan half expected, the desk officer was not too pleased to hear that the Germans were still running the camp. The moment they finished talking, Randall announced the changes in personnel. His men would take over the running of the camp nearly to the last detail. The others would help wherever Randall needed them, which, at the moment, seemed to be nowhere. The camp would be run like any other military installation but with stricter discipline, stricter rules and a very strict curfew. The town would be off-limits to the former prisoners, but not, Hogan noted, to Randall's men. The former prisoners, as Randall put it, would have to get used to being in the military again. As for the former guards, they would remain confined to the barracks.

"Just a minute, sir," Hogan objected. "Under the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention," he noted the irony, "they are allowed exercise and recreation."

"They'll be granted that when they show they are entitled to it," Randall said coolly. "Perhaps you've forgotten which side you're on, Colonel." There was a thinly disguised slur in his voice.

Hogan kept his temper. "I think, sir, you should explain that."

Randall smiled. "I'd be happy to, Colonel Hogan." Randall stood and faced him with a sneer. "I've read the file on this camp, and I had a very interesting conversation on the way over here with one of the truck drivers. I hear there hasn't been a single successful escape in all the time you've been here. Not one! It seems from your concern about the krauts and the bastard," Hogan stiffened, "who was in charge that you led a privileged life here. Well, Hogan, the free ride is over. It's time that you and this pathetic group got back in the war and remembered who and what you're supposed to be fighting. But you haven't fought, have you? You've just sat on your tail and let that," an obscenity, "walk all over you while others did the fighting for you!"

Hogan stiffened under the verbal assault; it was obvious that Randall hadn't been given the real story of the camp. Part of him wondered why; part of him was furious. But he had to take it for now.

Randall fell silent and sat down, his eyes still on Hogan. "I think I've learned enough for now, gentlemen." His voice was mocking. "You're dismissed. You might as well warn everyone that there are going to be some drastic changes here."

The five men saluted; the captains filed out slowly.

At the door, Hogan turned, his voice low, "Colonel, how long will you keep Klink in the cooler?"

Randall didn't bother looking at him. "He might have some useful

Scene Two

information. I'll personally interrogate him. As for how long, Hogan . . . " Randall's eyes lifted to his. "Until he rots, Hogan. Until he rots."

Hogan didn't say a word and left the office.

And stopped suddenly. Sergeant Virgil Yeager was waiting in the outer office.

"What are you doing here, Yeager?"

"Me?" Yeager grinned at him. "Well, now, sir." Hogan stiffened at his tone. "You see, sir, the Colonel and I have a little business to transact."

Hogan's face darkened. "I don't think so, Yeager. Get out of . . ."

"There you are, Sergeant," Randall said from the door. "I've been expecting you." Randall went back inside.

Yeager tossed off a mocking salute. "Like I said, sir, me and the Colonel have got business." He grinned and swaggered into the office, leaving Hogan staring at the closing door.

Hogan walked into an uproar when he reached his barracks. The captains and other officers were there.

Lt. Miller was giving them an earful. "When I got to 79 that damned Corporal Snyder stopped me. Said that one was off-limits."

Martin stared at him. "Off-limits?"

"Seems Yeager told Randall it was full of guys just eager to do what he wants, unlike the rest of us."

"Quiet!" Hogan ordered over the outrage that arose.

"It's worse than that," came a quiet voice from the door.

Hogan turned to see Private Ken Tiptoe looking at him with unusual gravity. "What is it?"

"I was listening to Yeager a few minutes ago. Seems he offered his services and those of the men in 79 to Colonel Randall. He pretty much told the men that if they cooperated, they'd be — well, he called it living on easy street. A bit disturbing the way it sounded."

"A lot disturbing," Mitchell said.

"Are the men in 79 taking Yeager up on it?" Hogan asked, ignoring the uneasiness in the pit of his stomach.

"I think I can convince a couple of them not to. But I think most of them will," Tiptoe said. "Colonel, most of them aren't troublemakers, not really. They're bored, restless. Some of them have legitimate gripes against the Germans who captured them. For the most part, they want what we all want — decent food, clothing and the like."

"Your training's showing, Reverend," Witton said without a hint of a smile. "We all want that, and hopefully we'll all get it. But Yeager's talking about something a lot more than that. He wants to be in charge. Make that he wants to be pals with the guy who is in charge."

"A normal enough reaction," Tiptoe began.

"Yeah," Hogan said evenly. "As long as it doesn't come at the expense of the rest of the men. If Yeager and his pals start getting privileges that are denied to the rest of the camp, especially the men who have been here a hell

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of a lot longer than he has, there's going to be trouble."

"What do we do, Colonel?" Warren asked.

"We do what we're told. Colonel Randall is in charge, like it or not. He's made it clear he expects to run this place like a regular army camp. Given that we're smack dab in the middle of the Fifth Panzer Army, that's not a bad thing. We said the same thing when Klink surrendered the camp. So, like we did when we first got here, we get the feel of things, see what's going on. And I don't want anyone undermining his authority." He turned to the non-officers. "Pass the word. Everyone behave. If you've got a beef with Randall or his men, keep your mouth shut; don't give them an excuse to jump on you. And bring your complaints to one of us." He gestured at the other officers. "Everyone got that?"

There were murmurs of agreement.

"Okay, that's it. Nothing's going to happen today, so mingle and get the word out."

"Right, sir."

The men began leaving the barracks.

Witton stayed behind as the others left.

"Something on your mind, Captain?" Hogan asked, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

Witton shook his head. "Nothing specific. Except . . . I wonder why London didn't tell him about your operation."

"I've been asking myself the same question," Hogan admitted.

"Will you ask London, sir?"

"I've thought about it. But, like I said to the men, let's get a feel of things first. Maybe Randall's just having a bad day. I've been known to have a few myself."

Witton smiled faintly. "Maybe. I'll go mingle. Might learn something about our new commanding officer."

Hogan nodded as Witton left.

New commanding officer. The last time someone else had been in that position was when Klink decided to bring Crittendon into the camp.⁷⁷ A major disaster from the moment he arrived. *One day I'm going to have to ask Klink why he did it. Did I really get on his nerves that much or was there another reason?* Hogan shook his head. "There are many things we've never talked about," Klink had said. Crittendon was one of them, though hardly the most interesting topic. And with Klink in the cooler, they sure weren't going to talk about anything.

But he had a few things to talk about with Randall. And Klink was one of them.

Go slow, Robert. Go slow. Don't oversell it. Randall's not the enemy; he's

⁷⁷ "Flight of the Valkyrie"

Scene Two

not Hochstetter or Burkhalter. He's one of the good guys. I'll just have to show him that Klink's one of the good guys too. Hell, I've done all but sell the Brooklyn Bridge to some of the bad guys. Proving to Randall that Klink and the other Germans here are good guys shouldn't be hard. A few days should do it.

So why did he have so much trouble believing himself?

Scene Two

Chapter 26

“Hogan!” Randall called from the office porch.

Hogan broke away from the group he was with and walked over. “Yes, sir?” For a moment, it felt odd saying that to someone other than Klink.

“I’ve been looking around. Seems the plan of the camp on the office wall isn’t accurate.”

Hogan managed a small smile. “No, sir. A few things have changed in the past few months. Sergeant Rizzo probably has a better one.”

“Rizzo?”

“The camp architect. When space got tight, Klink asked him to add more buildings and convert all available space into living quarters.⁷⁸ Rizzo and Sergeant Doyle put together several construction teams and did the job.”

“More collaborating.”

Hogan reined in his temper. “Work details. The men got paid with more living space and more electricity in the barracks. Maybe we didn’t make it clear, Colonel, but in November, we had twelve hundred men here. We’ve got more than double that number now.”

Randall scowled. “Where’s this Rizzo?”

“If you’ll follow me, Colonel, I’ll be happy to show you around.”

Hogan took Randall on a quick tour of the camp, pointing out several of the buildings. “That’s the mess hall. Holds three hundred men for meals, more for meetings. Since the assembly hall was converted into a temporary infirmary and then more barracks space, the mess hall is the only sizeable space left in camp.”

Randall eyed the men heading for the mess hall. “Mealtime already?”

“No, sir, not yet. KP detail. The mess hall serves breakfast and a late afternoon meal.”

“Two meals?”

“Standard for most camps. Though for months, the meals have been less than filling.”

“Oh?”

“Problems with budget and supplies. Klink used to be able to supplement the regular supplies with foodstuffs bought from Hammelburg or the surrounding farms. But money got tight, and the outside food supply grew scarcer. Since the fire, Hammelburg hasn’t enough to feed itself. But we got lucky a few weeks ago. Klink picked up a black market supplier and

⁷⁸ *Act One*

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confiscated his stash. The town got seventy-five percent of the stuff; we got the rest. And more — he had an even larger cache of stolen Red Cross packages. Enough to last us through the summer if need be.”

“Black market? Much of that here?”

“Not any more. The fire took care of them. And now we’re cut off from the rest of Germany.”

“What about that supplier?”

“Locked up for stealing the Red Cross packages. He’s lucky he wasn’t shot. And his suppliers were out of business before then.

“That’s the bakery behind the mess hall.” Hogan pointed. “The small brick building.”

“Why is it separate?”

“Fire hazard. Gets too hot in there. That’s why it’s brick.”

“Colonel! Colonel Randall!” A thin, worn-looking lieutenant approached, trailed by Captain Martin.

“What is it, Gayles?” Randall asked as he returned the salute.

“Sir, we’ve got a problem.”

“All ready?” Randall shot a glance at Martin.

“Yes, sir. Since I’m the only mess officer, I’d been assuming that I’d have a full staff here, sir,” Gayles said. “But Captain Martin said the Jerries did the cooking.”

“What?” Randall turned to Hogan.

Hogan managed not to smile. “Normal, sir. The German staff, about twenty-five noncoms and privates, did the cooking; our guys did KP, serving and cleaning”

“You have no cooks?”

“Every barracks has several men who prepare meals from the Red Cross packages. That’s it.”

“And there’s another problem, sir,” Gayles said. “There are no supplies in the mess. At least, nothing worth bothering with.”

“No supplies?” Randall said in a too even voice.

“Not what I’d consider supplies. Tons of potatoes, many of them bruised, some rotting. Most of the vegetables — mainly cabbages, turnips, rutabagas — aren’t fit for pigs. Bread, black, made with sawdust, nearly hard as rock. No meat, margarine, jam — ”

“Welcome to Nazi Germany,” Hogan said quietly.

Randall scowled; Hogan wondered briefly if that was his habitual expression. “I didn’t realize things were so bad here.”

“And this camp is the best in Germany,” Hogan said without a trace of a smile.

“Okay, Gayles. Go to Crowley. He’s at the motor pool with the trucks. Get what supplies you need.”

“Yes, sir. But what about staff?”

“Do what you can. The men will have to rely on their barracks’ cooks for today. I’ll make an announcement tonight and get you volunteers for the mess hall.”

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"Yes, sir."

"Okay, Hogan, where's this Rizzo?"

"This way, sir."

Hogan and Randall walked away.

To Martin's surprise, Gayles gave a loud sigh of relief. "What's wrong?"

"He took it better than I thought."

"Huh?"

"I heard Randall's guys talking on the way here. He likes things nice and orderly. Takes it personal when things don't go well."

"His guys? Aren't you one of them?"

Gayles shook his head. "A week ago, I was on a transport from New Jersey. And yesterday, I was told to show up at the airfield at 3 a.m. And nobody said anything about parachuting out of an airplane. Thought I'd wet my pants on the way down."

Martin smiled faintly. "If it makes you feel better, I've seen pilots do that."

"You're not just saying that?"

Martin shook his head and smiled. "No. So, you know nothing about Randall either."

"Half of us have never heard of him until yesterday. And nobody bothered to tell us where we were going or what conditions were like."

"Sounds like Randall didn't know either."

Gayles blinked. "Yeah, I guess you're right. Weird. Uh, where's this motor pool I'm supposed to go to, sir?"

"Follow me, Gayles."

Captain Neil Crowley, a man who seemed to have a permanent case of sour stomach, glared at them. "I wasn't told about releasing any supplies to anyone."

"Colonel Randall just gave us the orders," Martin said, shooting a glance at a tongue-tied Gayles.

The sourpuss expression grew even more sour. "He did? Where is he?"

"Taking a tour of the camp with Colonel Hogan."

Crowley grunted. "Okay. But there better not be a mistake."

"Mistake?"

"Just take enough for the officers' mess."

"No," Martin said. "We need food for everyone."

Gayles finally found his voice. "There aren't what I'd call edible foodstuffs in the mess kitchen. And there are twenty-seven hundred men to feed."

"Twenty-seven hundred? I heard twenty-five hundred."

"No," Martin said evenly. "Twenty-seven hundred."

Crowley's scowl grew deeper. "Okay. Just take enough for tonight. And then give me a list for tomorrow." He turned to some of the men unloading the trucks. "You guys help Lt. Gayles get his stuff together." After a nod, Crowley walked away.

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Martin looked around curiously. "What's his problem? He's acting more protective toward this stuff than Langenscheidt."

"Who?"

"Corporal, I mean Sergeant Langenscheidt. He's the German who was in charge of supplies. He kept a pretty tight rein on everything. Then again, he had to, given how little there was."

"Maybe I should go see him and whoever was in charge of the kitchen."

"I think it would be a good idea," Martin said. "But what would Randall think?"

Gayles suddenly looked nervous. "Maybe I should let him get used to the place before I ask him."

Martin glanced at Gayles curiously, but said nothing. He looked at the boxes being unloaded from the trucks. And frowned. From the labels on some of the boxes, there seemed to be a lot of luxury goods in this shipment. Luxury was fine. But what they really needed were basic supplies — food, clothing, shoes. Somehow, that box labeled caviar didn't fit that description. He shook his head, taking mental notes. Notes he would compare later with the other officers and Hogan.

Hogan and Randall walked past a few barracks buildings.

"Rizzo's in this one." Hogan gestured at Barracks 37. He led the way inside.

"Hi, Colonel," said one of the men sitting at the table.

"Rizzo in?"

"Yes, sir," said the private, oblivious to Randall's disapproving look.

"Thanks." Hogan walked over to a door in the right wall and knocked.

"Come in," said a loud voice. "Colonel," greeted the sergeant sitting at the table. "Uh, Colonel," he repeated as he saw Randall.

"Sergeant Tony Rizzo, this is Colonel Randall," Hogan introduced.

"Welcome to the camp, Colonel," Rizzo said with a grin. Which faded as Randall looked coldly at him. "Uh, what can I do for you?"

"Have you got an updated map of the camp?" Hogan asked.

Rizzo shot Randall another look and turned to the large rolled charts standing in a wooden barrel. "I've got a couple of draft copies." He pulled out the charts one by one, looking at them. "Here's one you can have." He unrolled the chart and put it on the table. He looked at it briefly and nodded. "Yeah, this has all the latest changes."

Randall looked at the rough map. "Is this the best you've got?" he asked as another man, shorter, bulkier, walked in.

"For now," Rizzo said evenly.

"This is Sergeant Conway Doyle, Colonel," Hogan introduced. "The other half of our building geniuses. They've done wonders."

"So I see," Randall said, a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "We're finished here, Hogan." He turned and left the small room.

"Thanks, Rizzo," Hogan said quietly, following Randall out.

Rizzo nodded as Doyle looked at him curiously.

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"That wasn't the map you've been working on," Doyle said.

Rizzo smiled with an odd grimace. "You mean this one?" He pulled a thick parchment-like roll from the barrel and unrolled it. A beautifully worked color map was laid on the table. "This one and the other one are for Hogan and Klink."

"That's what I thought."

Randall saw the car standing beside the infirmary, and he stopped. "Who ordered that car out of the motor pool?"

"The car belongs to Doctor Ernst Bauer, the only doctor left in town. He comes by every few days to check on the infirmary patients and anyone else who needs to see him."

"A kraut doctor is seeing our soldiers?"

"He's the only doctor in the area," Hogan said evenly. "Sergeant Wilson and his volunteer medics can only do so much."

"There's no doctor in camp?"

Hogan shook his head. "No, sir. Never. We weren't big enough to warrant one."

"So, our soldiers just died."

"No, sir. If needed, a doctor from the hospital in Hammelburg would come out, or a prisoner was taken there. But now," he shrugged, "the hospital's gone, as well as the other clinics. After his place burned down, Bauer took over one of the empty estates near here and turned it into a clinic. The other doctors left during the fire and never came back."

"How come he stayed?"

"He was born and raised in Hammelburg. Never wanted to go anywhere else. Good doctor, good man."

Randall opened the infirmary door. He stopped, blinking at the rows of cots. "Why are these men here?"

"Mainly dysentery and pneumonia. These men are from the last group of prisoners we got — over three hundred — from other camps. They were a mess — malnourished, lice-infested, in rags, and many of them were sick. These men are still in poor shape. It was better to house them here in relative seclusion rather than putting them in the more crowded barracks."

"I see." Randall looked around. He spotted the civilian near the back with a sturdily built sergeant. "Who's that?"

"Sergeant Wilson, our medic."

Randall walked closer.

Doctor Bauer was bent over a man with a bandaged stump of an arm. "The discomfort is small?" he asked as he flexed the remains of the arm.

"Yeah," said the man lying on the cot. "Though once in awhile, I get those funny feelings that Corporal Kaufmann told me about."

"Ja. It is called . . . how it is in Englisch . . . Ah! Phantom limb. As if the arm is still there."

"Yeah. Really weird. Corporal Kaufmann says he still gets it once in awhile, and his arm's been gone a couple of years now."

Scene Two

“Ja, that is what happens. It is healing well.”

“Thanks to you, doc.”

Bauer shook his head. “Sergeant Wilson and Corporal Kaufmann also deserve the thanks.”

The man grinned. “I know. But thanks anyway.”

Bauer straightened up and smiled. “Auf Wiedersehn.” He and Wilson moved away, toward the front. “He is doing well. But I would like him to exercise more.”

“No problem, Doctor.”

“Gut. Are there any more patients?”

“Nope. That’s it.”

“Gut.” He picked up his bag. “I will see you in a few days.”

Bauer and Wilson began walking toward the door.

“Colonel Hogan,” Bauer greeted.

“Hello, Doctor. I’d like you to meet the new commanding officer, Colonel Randall. Colonel, this is Doctor Bauer.”

“Welcome, Colonel,” Bauer said, holding out his hand.

It was ignored. Randall glanced at him briefly before looking at Wilson.

Hogan managed to keep the anger out of his voice. Just. “This is our medic, Sergeant Frank Wilson.”

“Colonel.” Wilson nodded a greeting, hiding his own annoyance.

“You’re the only medic in camp?”

Wilson nodded. “I’ve trained a few of the men to help me here. And some of the guys have taken a crash medics course. Then again, we’ve been a healthy group for a long time. And if anyone needed more than I can do, the Kommandant had them taken to the hospital or one of the clinics. But since the fire, well, Doctor Bauer’s it.”

“So I heard.”

“Sir,” Wilson asked, “is there a medic among the men you brought?”

“No.” Randall turned and looked around at the men lying in the cots. Some were sleeping; the rest, reading or talking. “They don’t look sick to me.”

“They are,” Bauer said quietly, after shooting a glance at Hogan. “Some are recovering from pneumonia, two are recent amputees, and the rest have lingering cases of dysentery. They should all be in hospitals. However, given the conditions, Sergeant Wilson and his assistants are providing excellent care.”

Randall grunted, obviously unimpressed, and walked back to the door. The others followed him. At the door, he almost walked into a private who was coming in.

“Uh, sorry, sir.” The private, Ken Tiptoe, stepped aside.

“I can see that discipline here stinks, Hogan,” Randall said. “What the hell are you doing here, private?”

“This is Ken Tiptoe,” Hogan said evenly. “He’s the unofficial chaplain in the camp.”

“That doesn’t answer the question.”

Scene Two

"I come here often, Colonel. Talking to the men, praying with them, helping wherever I can."

"He also directs the camp's choir," Wilson said, trying to lighten the mood. "Getting ready for an Easter show now. Right, Ken?"

"Yes, sir, we are."

"Shows?" Randall sneered. "I don't think so, private. No shows, no choirs. Not until this camp is whipped into shape." With those less than encouraging words, Randall walked out, leaving behind four concerned men.

"Colonel," Tiptoe started.

"Not now, Tiptoe," Hogan said firmly. "I think it's time Randall and I had a talk." Hogan walked off, following the new commanding officer.

And didn't get far before there was another interruption.

"Colonel Randall!" The stocky Major Matthews, trailed by a lieutenant, puffed his way up.

"What is it, Matthews?"

"We've got a problem."

"What?" Randall snapped.

"Uh, Iverson and I were at the radio room, and there are these two n-Negroes in there. And they're not budging. Said they had orders."

Randall turned to Hogan. "Orders?"

Hogan kept his voice even. "Sergeant Kinchloe and Sergeant Baker. Since the surrender, they've been taking turns listening to the German radio messages."

"What the hell for?"

"We're surrounded by the Fifth Panzer Army, which is part of Field Marshall Model's Army Group B," Hogan said. "As far as the Germans are concerned, if they know we're here, and some of them do, we're still Klink's prisoners. We need to know what they're up to."

Randall frowned. "I was told this area is cut off."

"It is, sir. But . . . It might be better if I showed you."

"It might," Randall said slowly. "Iverson, get a car and one of the jeeps. And some guys for an escort. You know who. Matthews, I want to see this radio room."

"Yes, sir. This way." Matthews led the way. Iverson headed back to the motor pool, and Hogan trailed after Randall.

Matthews nearly banged the door open. Kinch and Baker, with headphones over their ears, stood, startled, but at attention. To Hogan's surprise, Baker even managed a salute, which Randall ignored.

"Sergeant James Kinchloe and Sergeant Richard Baker," Hogan introduced.

"And why are they here?" Randall asked.

"They're listening to the German transmissions," Hogan said patiently.

"They understand German?"

Hogan nodded. "And speak it fluently."

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"I see. Unusual to find ni-Negroes so educated." He glanced at the radio. "Anything interesting?"

"No, sir," Kinch said evenly. "Just routine transmissions so far."

Randall looked around. "Doesn't seem to be room in here for our radio."

"We can make room, sir," Baker said.

Randall shook his head. "We'll put it in my office for now." A tight smile. "And leave you men by yourselves." He turned abruptly. "You were going to show me something, Hogan."

"Yes, sir. If you'll follow me."

Randall followed Hogan out, and Matthews trailed behind.

"What do you think, Kinch?" Baker asked quietly.

"Doesn't like coloreds, does he?"

"Not one bit," Baker agreed.

"Any other German speakers in camp?" Randall asked as he got into the staff car.

Hogan, already in, glanced at him. "A few. Did you bring any with you, sir?"

"Snyder speaks it. I'll have to check with Matthews."

"Speaking may not be enough, sir," Hogan said. "The radio traffic, well, a lot of it is directions to the Panzer units, map coordinates and the like. It takes awhile to get used to the dialogue, and the accents too."

"And your men have?"

Hogan nodded. "We've had plenty of practice."

"Okay, Hogan. Which way do we go?"

Hogan leaned forward to give, he was less than pleased to find out, Chaykin directions.

They had stopped before the bend in the road leading to the remains of the Adolf Hitler Bridge. Hogan led Randall, Chaykin, Matthews and a couple of armed guards up the hillside overlooking the bridge. At the crest of the hill, Hogan handed Randall the field glasses.

"You can just make out the remains of the road on the other side of the ravine."

Randall lifted the glasses to his eyes. The road had been all but obliterated. Huge craters pockmarked its remains and the surrounding woods. Large trees had been splintered into thick pieces of kindling and littered the countryside. His eyes followed the barely visible trail in both directions.

"What a mess!" Matthews remarked. "Not even a tank could get over that."

"That was the idea," Hogan said.

Randall didn't say anything. He turned and went back down the frozen hillside.

An hour later, they were on the lodge's terrace overlooking the plain. Randall and his men could see remains of the tanks and equipment that had

Scene Two

been destroyed just days before. And they could also see the remaining tanks and troops fanning out over the countryside.

Randall lowered the glasses from his eyes. "Any idea how many men are down there?"

Hogan shrugged. "Maybe 80,000. Army Group B has over 300,000."

"We're surrounded by 80,000 krauts?" There was panic in Matthews' voice.

"Roughly," Hogan said.

"And what's going to keep them down there?" Randall asked grimly.

Hogan jerked a thumb toward the pass. "The blocked pass and roads. The only way up here is by some pretty rugged trails. It's an all-day hike down there. Longer getting up here."

Randall was looking at the blocked pass. "Lucky that pass is gone."

"Luck had nothing to do with it," Hogan said. "It was arranged."

"Arranged?" Matthews exclaimed as Randall looked at Hogan.

"Yes, arranged."

"By who?" Randall asked.

Hogan looked at him evenly. "The Stage."

Randall stared at him as Matthews gaped openly. Then he laughed. "You almost had me believing you, Hogan." Randall lifted the glasses to his eyes again.

Hogan could feel a vein throbbing in his skull, and oddly in his wounded forearm. "The Stage arranged the bombing runs that blocked the pass and blew the road on the other side of the bridge."

"The Stage is a myth," Randall said. "A fairytale invented to explain kraut mistakes and our good planning."

"The Stage is real," Hogan said quietly. "No myth."

"And you've met him?" Randall said with a laugh. "Right."

Hogan managed to bite back the reply he wanted to make. Instead, "Since you do have a radio, sir, you might ask London about the Stage. And whether they think he's a myth."

Randall grinned without humor. "I've seen enough." He turned back to the lodge, his eyes sweeping the sturdy building. "Nice place."

"Maybe we should stay here," Matthews suggested.

Randall grinned at him. "Maybe. Keep an eye on the tanks down there."

Matthews also grinned; Hogan decided he didn't like either smile. He shook his head as Randall and Matthews walked into the lodge. Hogan followed.

"Guten Tag, Herr Oberst," Frau Engel said nervously. "Und . . ." Her voice trailed off as she looked at Randall, Matthews and the others.

"Guten Tag, Frau Engel," Hogan said. "Darf ich vorstellen Oberst Randall und Major Matthews. Herr Oberst ist der neue Kommandant von Stalag 13." He turned to Randall. "I told her you're the new commandant at the camp, Colonel. This is Frau Engel; she's the owner."

"She doesn't speak English?"

"No. Though many folks do, especially the ones who were in the

Scene Two

Resistance.”

Chaykin tried to hide a snicker and earned a look from Hogan, and oddly Matthews.

Randall's eyes swept the large lounge room. “Cozy place. Tell her we'll be back later, Hogan. To keep an eye on those tanks.”

Hogan turned to the puzzled woman and added a reassuring smile as he relayed the message. He was a bit surprised when she bobbed her head nervously, shooting a glance at Chaykin and the others. He wanted to ask her what was wrong, but Randall and the others were already out the door. “Auf Wiedersehn,” he said with a smile and followed the others out.

“Auf Wiedersehn, Herr Oberst,” she whispered.

“Mama? Was ist los?” asked her twelve-year-old son.

“Nothing, Liebchen.” She smiled at him, hiding her worry. “Stefan, I need to go to town now.” She pulled a worn coat from a closet and put it on. “Watch Gottfried and Susanne while I am gone. That's a good boy.” She kissed him quickly and hurried out the door.

“Jawohl, Mama.” The thin boy walked into the kitchen where his seven-year-old brother and three-year-old sister were sitting at the table, eating a meager lunch.

It was dusk when Hogan and the others returned to camp. To his surprise, Randall ordered a formation of all the men. Not expecting the order and used to falling out more or less at their own speed, it took awhile before the former prisoners were lined up. Hogan sighed silently. He could see that Randall was less than pleased. But to his mild surprise, Randall didn't say anything. He merely introduced Lt. Brian Gayles who nervously asked for sixty volunteer cooks to take over the duties of the locked up Germans. They were to meet him in the mess hall at 2000.

And that was it. Well almost. Randall announced a curfew for 2100. Then the men were dismissed and Randall, followed by Matthews, disappeared into the office.

Hogan's men and the captains gathered around him as he looked impassively at the office building. As they stood there, the others talked softly about what had been going on.

“There's about fifteen of them,” Martin said evenly. “Including Colonel Randall and Major Matthews.”

“The ‘special’ ones,” Warren said with an edge to his voice. “They've been together before. And they're the ones in charge of supplies — ”

“That's Crowley,” Martin said.

“Weapons and Operations is Matthews. Communications and Transportation is Lt. Iverson,” Warren continued. “Personnel is Lt. Tiller. Security is Lt. Akins The rest are noncoms.”

“What about the others, the nonspecial ones?” Hogan asked.

“Gayles is the only officer, picked up at the last minute,” Martin said. “The others are all privates, clerical types, drivers, and the like.”

“Then there are the MPs,” Mitchell said grimly.

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Hogan looked at him in surprise.

"Yes, sir, MPs. Thirty-eight of them, most recruited from Barracks 79, including Chaykin and Yeager."

Hogan nodded. "What about the former guards?"

"Still locked in a barracks, the one used by Schultz and Gruber," Witton said.

Hogan raised a brow. "Kind of crowded with all of them in there."

"Kind of," Witton agreed.

"They'll be okay, Colonel," Newkirk said. "They've got water and we managed to sneak in some Red Cross packages when their guards weren't looking."

Hogan smiled briefly. "Well, it's just the first day. Randall and the others will loosen up." *I hope!* "Thanks, men. Let me know if anything unusual happens."

"Will do, Colonel," Witton said.

Hogan nodded. "Good night then." He started for his barracks, followed by his team. "Who's on the radio tonight?" he asked Kinch.

"Lt. Miller and Sergeant Schubert. Oh, that Corporal Snyder came by. He listened to some of the messages."

"And?"

Kinch shook his head. "Most went right over his head. And the ones he did get, he didn't understand."

"Figures. Is he the only German speaker among them?"

"Seems to be."

Not very good planning on Randall's part, he found himself thinking. And wondering what Randall had been told about the camp. At the door to the barracks, he glanced around the now dark compound. There were still searchlights combing the grounds and the woods outside. He'd forgotten to ask who was manning the lights. The men Mitchell had assigned or had they been replaced? He shook his head. Not his job now or his responsibility. So, why did he still feel responsible? "I have a responsibility to these men," he'd told Klink a couple of weeks ago. And having someone else in charge didn't change that, not in his mind. Or did he just not want it to change? He was giving himself a headache now. Too much excitement. Too much thinking. He shook his head irritably. Far too much thinking. He turned to go in.

And caught sight of the cooler. "Damn!" he whispered.

"Sir?" came Newkirk's voice from inside the barracks.

"What? Nothing. Just clearing my throat." But his eyes lingered on the cooler. *At least it's not as cold as it has been. He's fine; stop mothering him.*

Hogan walked into the barracks and closed the door.

* * * * *

Scene Two

Colonel Wilhelm Klink, former kommandant of Stalag Luft 13, sat on the floor of his cell. He had been placed in one of the cells furthest from the entrance. It was, unlike some of the others, an open cell with bars for walls, except for the rear wall. It was also a bare cell with only a slop bucket in it. No blanket, no cot, no table, no chair, no washbasin, no water.

He'd been here since ten this morning, about twelve hours he guessed. The major who locked him in had taken his watch and other effects, including his monocle and riding crop, putting them on a small table in the corridor. In all this time, no one had come in; in all this time, he had been given no food or water. Definitely not in accordance with the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention.

A faint smile. How often had Hogan quoted the Geneva Convention to him over the past few years? But never had Hogan needed to quote it because a prisoner was denied food and water or because a prisoner was put into such a barren cell. A glance around. This cell had always been used for storage, never for prisoners. In fact, there had been very few prisoners in the cooler over the past few months. Overall, few in the lifetime of the camp, and most of those had been Hogan's men.

A sound came from the entrance. Finally, someone remembered he was here.

Randall, some of the men who had come with him and a man he recognized as one of the former prisoners came into view. They'd obviously been drinking.

Klink stood and waited for them

Randall walked to the cell and smiled at him. "Comfortable, kraut?"

"Not really," Klink said.

Randall snarled. "Forgetting military courtesy, kraut? You're supposed to stand at attention when addressing a superior officer."

Klink silently did as he was told, his body a rigid line.

Randall, Matthews and the prisoner he'd recognized, Yeager, walked into the cell; the other two men stayed outside.

"We've been hearing some interesting stories about you, Klink," Randall said. "Seems some people think you're a real dummy. Too bad. I was hoping to have a talk with you."

"We can still talk, Colonel," Klink said slowly. "Of 'graves, of worms, and epitaphs make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes write sorrow on the bosom of the earth . . .'"

"What?" Matthews said, shooting a surprised glance at Randall.

"Shakespeare, Major," Klink said, hiding his dismay at Randall's indifference. "Richard II, Act three, Scene two, verse one hundred and forty four."

Randall was silent for a moment. Then he laughed. "A kraut who quotes Shakespeare!" He stepped closer to Klink. "I'd rather talk of other things, Klink. Such as troop movements, artillery deployment and other things."

"I don't know too much about those things, Colonel," Klink said. "But I will tell you what I do know."

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“Good. Start talking, Klink,” Randall said with a cold smile. “Snyder, take notes.”

“Yes, sir,” said the corporal.

Klink, still standing at attention, began talking. The information he gave them was accurate. As far as it went. He told them only what had been told to Kommandant Klink by his superiors. Whatever else he knew, he kept to himself. He still felt that thread of surprise that Randall didn't recognize the quote. Or did Randall not want to recognize it? Klink wasn't certain. At any rate, that avenue was closed to him. Now he would have to rely on Hogan for help. He wasn't too worried. A man who could lie through his teeth to the Gestapo and get away with it should be able to deal with Randall. He would be breaking one of his own rules by having Hogan appeal to London, but he had no intention of allowing Randall to stay in charge.

He finished giving all the information he intended to give to Randall.

Randall nodded with seeming appreciation. “Very good, Colonel. You're learning. What about other stuff? Like who are the Nazis in town.”

“I had very little to do with the town,” Klink said slowly. “But most of the Nazis have left. The few remaining are women or infirm. Colonel Hogan can give you the details.”

“Yeah, Hogan. At least, he seemed to know what he was doing there.”

“He is a very able man,” Klink said.

Randall snorted. “And a privileged one as well. I guess he cooperated with you.”

“For the sake of the prisoners, yes,” Klink said cautiously. “If you mean he provided military information, the answer is no.”

Randall laughed unpleasantly. “I bet. You two seemed to have a nice thing going. I've heard this called the toughest POW camp in Germany.”

Klink almost smiled, but Randall's look chilled him.

“You know what I think when I hear a phrase like that, kraut?” Randall stepped closer to him.

“No one has ever been mistreated here, Colonel,” Klink said. “You can ask any man in camp.”

“Oh, I have asked. Most aren't saying much of anything. Seems to me that they're scared. Of Hogan. And of you.”

“That's ridicu — ” Klink started, unconsciously slipping into his kommandant voice.

Randall hit him.

Startled, Klink fell back against the bars of the cell, the side of his lip bleeding.

A fist slammed into his midsection. Another followed. His last coherent thought was that Randall would never let Hogan near him.

Scene Two

Chapter 27

A noise intruded on Hogan's sleep. Loud, incessant and familiar. He knew that sound. But where . . .

Oh good God, reveille! Some idiot's blowing reveille at, he squinted at his watch, 5:30 in the morning!

He snapped awake. And sat up in the bed, hearing the sounds of grumbling men in the main room. Hogan got out of bed and hastily pulled on his clothes.

He walked into the common room just as the door blasted open, sending a wave of freezing air into the barracks.

"Rise and shine, boys!" Yeager said with a relish and a wide grin. "Speed it up; you're holding up the war."

And he left hurriedly after he looked at the faces of the disgruntled men.

Randall and Matthews came out on the porch. Before them, the men shivered in front of their barracks in the darkness. The searchlights had been turned inside the camp, increasing the eerie feel to the pre-dawn morning.

"Attention!" Matthews snapped.

Surprised, the men in the immediate vicinity slowly settled themselves into some semblance of attention, falling silent. But that order wasn't heard in the farthest areas of the camp. There, the men shivered and talked and moved about in an effort to get warm.

And Randall wasn't pleased. "I have never seen a more sorry excuse for a formation in my life." His voice was now carried by the camp's public address system. "You are pathetic! You're slovenly, unkempt! Poor excuses for men, never mind soldiers! Well, your free ride is over. From now on, you're going to be drilled and drilled and drilled until you remember that you're supposed to be soldiers! So, let's try it again. In fifteen minutes, you will be clean-shaven, dressed in uniform and assembled in formation. Or I will know the reason why! Dismissed."

He turned and stalked into the office.

And Hogan, a dark look on his face, followed him.

"Colonel," Matthews began.

Hogan walked into the inner office without bothering to knock, surprising Randall. And he didn't bother waiting for Randall to acknowledge him. "I think we need to have a talk, Colonel Randall. And we're going to have one, whether you like it or not!

"London saw fit to put you in command. Fine. I'm sure they had their reasons. You also think we need to get the camp into shape. Fine, we do. But there are a few things you need to keep in mind. You seem to be under the impression that we've had a cakewalk here. That we've been loafing or

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goofing off. Let me remind you, sir, that up until four days ago, this was a prisoner of war camp!

"It might interest you to know that your order wasn't understood by a couple of hundred men. You see, sir, they don't happen to speak English. We've got men from all over — France, Belgium, Britain, the Commonwealth, and a few other places. Nearly half of the men here aren't from the U.S. And those men don't have a clue how the U.S. Army operates. All they know is *their* army.

"Half of the men here arrived since November. But the rest have been here a hell of a long time. Some of them over five years. And it hasn't been easy for them. Klink honored the Geneva Convention as far as he was able. But circumstances and his superiors didn't always make that easy. We've had Gestapo, SS, Abwehr and God knows who else waltzing in here at one time or another, threatening not only Klink but us as well with harsher conditions, torture or death. Clothing, food, medical care, heat — everything we needed, never mind wanted — were provided only if there was money or supplies available. And since the beginning of the year, money and supplies disappeared faster than the number of prisoners increased.

"Morale at times wasn't too great. No matter what Klink gave us, no matter what we could get from the outside, no matter how many Christmas or Easter shows or whatever Tiptoe and the others put on, no matter how many jokes we told, the plain truth was that we were still in a prison, with barbed wire, electrified fences, and guns with real bullets pointed at us. Not to mention that for a long time, the war news wasn't exactly the greatest from our point of view.

"And then you and your men waltz in, with your perfectly tailored uniforms and well-groomed appearance. From the looks of you, I doubt you've ever been really sick or cold or hungry or scared during this war. Well, most of the men in here have. They're survivors, and I think, sir, you'd better remember that before you start treating them as malingerers!"

"Are you finished, Hogan?" Randall said tightly.

"No, not quite. You ordered the men to be clean-shaven. Did you happen to bring any razors with you? Most of the barracks have one razor for twenty men, so many of the men don't bother shaving. Did you bring uniforms for the men? Some of us do have more than one uniform. Those of us who have been here awhile were lucky enough to get spare uniforms and clothing from home or the Red Cross. But the newer guys, well, they were lucky to get a letter from home, never mind a package of clothing, since they've been here. And things got a lot worse when over three hundred men arrived a few weeks ago in lice-infested rags. Those rags were burned. Which meant that the other guys had to share the little they had. I'm sorry they offend your sensibilities, Colonel, but — "

"Enough!" Randall stood, anger darkening his face. But he made a visible effort to control himself. "I wasn't aware that things were so . . . tough here. Perhaps I was a bit overzealous." He smiled agreeably. "Have a

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seat, Hogan. Major, rescind my order, will you? Tell the men we'll have a muster at 0800. Maybe by then they'll be a bit more presentable."

"Uh, yes, sir." Matthews saluted and left.

"Have a seat, Hogan," Randall said again; this time, Hogan did. Randall also sat. "We seem to have started out on the wrong foot, Hogan."

"Have we?"

The smile dimmed at his tone, but the voice was still pleasant. "Care for a cigar, Hogan?" Randall opened the cigar box.

Klink's cigar box. "No, thank you, sir."

Randall took out a cigar, bit off the end and lit it. He blew a perfect circle of smoke. "Good cigar."

"Yes, sir. Klink appreciates the finer things in life," Hogan said less coolly.

"At least in cigars. And wine."

"Yes, sir. And music."

"A rare bird for a military man. How did he get here?"

"You'll have to ask him, sir. But," he smiled faintly, "his military reputation is less than stellar."

"So they put him here."

"Which was good for all of us."

Randall swiveled around in his chair. "Oh?"

"Someone more gung-ho, more military . . . Well, we've had those types show up when Klink went on leave or the higher-ups were thinking of sending him somewhere else. They tended to do things like confiscate the Red Cross packages, cut back on the food, increase security. In other words, they made life more miserable than it already was."

"And Klink didn't?"

"Klink followed the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention as much as he was able. And as long as we didn't threaten his command or his reputation, he ignored minor infractions of the rules. Sometimes, not so minor infractions. Made life a lot more tolerable for the men."

Randall leaned back in the chair and blew smoke at the ceiling. "The men? Or you?"

"The men."

Another smoke circle rose. "That's not what I heard."

"What you heard, sir, is wrong," Hogan said evenly.

Randall's smile was mocking. "That remains to be seen, Hogan. Dismissed."

His expression composed, Hogan stood; Randall stayed seated. Keeping his voice even, Hogan asked, "Do I have your permission to see Colonel Klink?"

A plume of smoke wafted gently to the ceiling. "No."

His voice became more detached. "Why not, sir?"

"Because I said so, Hogan," Randall said with mock pleasantness.

Hogan's "Yes, sir," was forced and he saluted.

Randall tossed off a salute. "One more thing, Hogan. You've used up

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your quota of goodwill from me for the duration.” Ashes from the cigar fell on the floor. “From now on, you’d better do everything by the book. Or else.” And he smiled.

Hogan’s face was a frozen mask as he left the office. Behind the closing door, he could hear Randall’s mocking laughter.

* * * * *

Bürgermeister Scheinfeld, the Town Council, Doctor Bauer and Monsignor Geisler had listened with dismay to the new commanding officer of the camp and the town. The area would be under martial law; they had expected that. It was no surprise when all the weapons, what few there were, were confiscated. What they had not expected were the tight restrictions placed on the townspeople’s movement and activities in and around the area. And the new commanding officer made it clear that every infraction of his rules, no matter how slight, would be severely punished.

Their dismay grew as they realized that there would be no contact with the camp, especially the man they had thought would be in charge, Colonel Hogan. As for Kommandant Klink, apparently he had been locked in the cooler and no one was allowed to see him.

Their dismay turned to hatred all too quickly. Many of Randall’s men and the men they’d recruited from Barracks 79 had the manners the townspeople had come to expect from the Gestapo and SS. When they came to town in the evening, it was to get drunk. Since the fire, the town was struggling to stay alive. The new men didn’t care. They took what they wanted when they wanted it. Food, drink, goods in the few remaining shops, people’s possessions.

And more.

“I’m coming!” Doctor Bauer said groggily as he stumbled down the stairs to the back door.

He opened the door. What he saw brought him instantly awake. He stepped out to help the old man. “Herr Mannheim!” He led the old man to a chair. “What happened?”

Then he looked at the girl with the elderly man and drew his breath in sharply. “Mein Gott!”

The weeping girl collapsed into his arms.

Bauer’s eyes narrowed as he held the battered girl close. He didn’t need to ask what happened. Her torn clothing, the bruises and the blood on the remains of her slip told it all. As for the old man, he must have come upon the men as they were raping his granddaughter. These new Allies had a great deal to answer for.

Monsignor Geisler wasn’t surprised to see some unexpected faces in the

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back pew when he said the early morning Mass. The church was one of the few places where people were allowed to gather.

"We must do something!" Hausner whispered to Krueger.

"What can we do? We are helpless!" Scheinfeld groaned. "Those men have taken over. We should never have surrendered!"

"We are treated worse than dirt," Hausner began.

"We know that," Bauer said. "The question is, what do we do?"

"We must let Hogan know," Oskar Schnitzer, one of the new members of the Town Council, said softly. "His superiors must be told."

"What good would that do?" demanded Krueger. "They sent Randall here."

"I cannot believe they would condone Randall's actions," Schnitzer said.

"Perhaps they do condone it," Otto Metzger, the other newly appointed member of the Council, said glumly. "Have we fought one group of masters to be saddled with another?"

"Don't talk like that, Otto," Schnitzer said. "You helped Hogan as well."

"I thought I knew what we were fighting for, Oskar," Otto said with discouragement. "Now, I do not know any more."

"Otto, you do not mean that," Schnitzer said in a troubled voice.

"It was not your sister who was raped!"

Doctor Bauer looked startled. "There has been another rape?"

Otto nodded.

"Why did you not call me?" Bauer asked.

"It was past curfew. Mama is looking after Ketti."

"Is she otherwise hurt?"

Otto shook his head.

"That make three rapes," Scheinfeld said gloomily, "in two days. And how many beatings? And thefts?"

"We must protect ourselves, especially our women," Krueger said. "It is too early for us to gauge their strength or support. Keep the women away from them, and the children. As for the men, for now we cannot afford to defy them."

A harsh laugh from Otto. "It is like living with the Nazis again."

"We defeated the Nazis," Schnitzer said with determination. "We can defeat them."

"What about Colonel Hogan?" Bauer asked.

"Hogan." Krueger's tone was derisive.

"He is a good man," Schnitzer said. "He can help us."

"We cannot get near him," Hausner said. "Those guards have blocked the roads to the camp."

"Perhaps we can," Schnitzer said. "At least we can try."

"Yes," Bauer agreed. "We can try."

Scene Two

Chapter 28

The former prison camp was not a happy place. The men who had been there the longest had trouble adjusting to the severe regime Randall had placed on them. Hogan and the other officers complained about the excessive restrictions; it was worse than the restrictions they had faced under Klink. But Randall refused to listen; his orders, he'd said, were to whip the former prisoners into fighting shape. And that was exactly what he would do.

Randall had made his contempt of Hogan obvious. Most of the others, officers and men, wondered how long it would be before Hogan stopped taking it. Some of them were sorely tempted to tell Randall the real story of the camp. But Hogan, saying that London had to have a good reason for not informing Randall, put a stop to the impending mutiny. Overall, Hogan made the best he could out of Randall's orders, modifying them when he could, bearing with them when he couldn't. But there were some things he wouldn't tolerate.

Hogan had his hand on the office door when he heard the muffled scream inside. He banged the door open.

Inside, he saw Hilda, her blouse ripped, struggling with Matthews. Hogan didn't stop to think as he grabbed Matthews and pulled him off the weeping girl. Matthews fell into the filing cabinet with a curse as Randall opened the inner door.

Hogan stood protectively in front of the crying Hilda.

"What's going on here?" Randall demanded.

Hogan's furious eyes swung to him. "I think you know! Don't tell me you didn't hear her scream!"

Randall shrugged. "Matthews was just having some fun."

"Fun?!" Hogan's eyes blazed as he looked at Randall. "You call this fun?"

Randall smiled.

Hogan's anger boiled over. "You can do whatever you damn well want with this camp, Randall. Whether I like it or not, you are in charge. But Hilda is off limits. For you and your men! Is that clear?!"

Randall stiffened. "Do you know who you're talking to, Hogan?"

"I don't give a damn if you're a five star general!" Hogan said tightly. "You and your goons stay away from her! Is that understood?"

"Sure, Hogan, sure," Randall said placatingly, his eyes narrowing. "I didn't realize she was your property."

"She's no one's property." Hogan fought to keep his temper. "Especially not yours!"

"Okay, Hogan." Randall smiled coldly. "Point taken. Get out of here,

Scene Two

Jimmy. And remember what Colonel Hogan said.”

Matthews rose to his feet, shooting a glance at Randall. Mumbling under his breath, he left the office.

“No harm done,” Randall said smoothly and turned to go back to his office.

“Randall,” Hogan said; Randall’s back stiffened. “I want to see Klink. And I want to see him now!”

Randall turned back to Hogan with a deadly smile. “Denied, Hogan. And it will stay denied. No one is going to see him until the High Command decides what to do with the bastard.”

“Why?”

“That, Hogan, is none of your damn business! Anything else, Hogan?”

“No.” He managed to force the word through tight lips.

“Good.” Again, that smile. “And, Hogan, if you forget my rank one more time, I’ll have you locked up and held for court martial. Understood?”

Hogan stiffened. “Yes, sir.”

“Good.” Randall returned to his office.

Hogan turned to Hilda. “Are you all right?” he asked gently.

Hilda nodded, struggling to control her tears, holding her torn blouse with a hand.

Hogan went to get her coat. “Here.” He held it for her.

“Danke, Colonel Hogan.”

“Come on,” Hogan said. “I’m getting you out of here.”

Retrieving her purse, Hilda left with him.

“Hilda, I don’t want you going anywhere alone,” Hogan said quietly as they walked across the compound. “And I don’t want you being alone.”

Hilda nodded. “My roommate and her uncle will be coming by in an hour.”

“Okay. You can stay with us in the barracks until then.”

Hilda nodded. “Colonel Hogan,” she started hesitantly.

“I don’t know, Hilda,” Hogan answered her unspoken question. “Yet.”

They reached the barracks and entered.

The men inside were surprised and pleased to see her, until they saw the tears still in her eyes.

“Why don’t you rest in my office?” Hogan suggested.

The girl nodded and went into the next room.

“What happened?” Kinch asked quietly.

“Matthews!” Hogan spat the name.

“Did you get permission to see Klink, sir?” Baker asked.

“No!” Hogan said. “And I’ve stopped asking! I want you down in the tunnel, clearing out the one that leads to the cooler.”

“The way it collapsed, it’ll take all night, Colonel,” Newkirk said.

“Then you’d better get started on it now, hadn’t you?” Hogan snapped.

“Uh, right, sir.”

The men stood.

“Are you going to call London, Colonel?” Carter asked.

Scene Two

“What’s the point? Every time I do, I get that idiot Wembley.”⁷⁹ He thinks it’s about time someone put me in my place. I need to talk to Klink; he might know someone we can talk to.”

* * * * *

Wilhelm Klink, barely conscious, groaned as he fell against the bars and bit back the cry as the riding crop cut into his bare back once again.

“That’s enough for now,” Randall’s voice penetrated the haze of pain.

“Aw, Colonel, I was just getting warmed up,” complained Snyder.

“He’s losing it,” Matthews said. “It’s no fun with him passing out all the time.”

“We’ll let him rest until morning,” Randall said.

“I’ll say this,” chewed Yeager. “He’s a tough old bird. Nary a peep out of him.”

Matthews grinned. “Wonder what it’ll take to get him to squawk.”

Randall smiled. “You’ve got all night to think about it. Crowley, you and Yeager, cut him down and stick the jacket back on him. Then put him back, same position. Let him piss first, if he has to.”

“Hell,” Crowley drawled, “you’d think he’d already have done it in his pants.”

“Like Virgil said, he’s a tough old bird.”

“Well,” Snyder said, “I’m glad he didn’t. I don’t mind blood, but I don’t like the other stuff.”

The men laughed and left the cell.

Klink’s bonds were cut, the ropes unwound from his bruised wrists. He slumped to the floor of the cell. Yeager held him as Crowley, heedless of his back, pushed the jacket on him.

“Hey, kraut.” Crowley slapped his face to revive him. “You’d better piss now or hold it till morning.”

Consciousness returned painfully. And awareness. The pain he was in colored the humiliation he felt as he used the slop bucket to the accompaniment of obscene remarks from the two men. When he finished, he was dragged to the back of the cell and pulled up. He cried out as his wrists were wrenched up and tied to the bars of the cell again. He slumped back to his knees with a groan. A gasp as Yeager ground a cigarette into his chest.

Laughing, the two men left the cell.

He was alone again. Alone with his pain, his fatigue, his hunger and his

⁷⁹ “Monkey Business”

Scene Two

thirst.

Since that first night, he'd endured kicks and punches and slaps from Randall and the other men. Last night, they had used their belts; tonight, it had been his riding crop. Occasionally they used his body as an ashtray. He was continually tied in that painfully numbing position when they left him alone. He had not been given food since they locked him up. Barely given any water. Thus far, he had been able to control his bodily functions and had been released from time to time to use the slop bucket. Not from any sense of humanity on the part of his captors, but simply because they didn't want to dirty themselves as they were beating him. He'd lost track of time, scarcely knowing if it was night or day.

Not that he cared. His exhaustion was the worst he'd ever felt. Sometimes not even the pain was able to bring him out of the perpetual fog he was in. He had stopped feeling any emotion since that first night. Even fear seemed beyond him. Except for the horror that gripped him whenever Randall or his men alluded to some kind of sexual humiliation or abuse. And he knew he couldn't hide the fear he then felt.

Dear God, he felt the fear now. A shudder shook his body and a tear slipped down his cheek.

He caught himself. He couldn't afford to give in to the self-pity, or the horror, or the exhaustion. In his more coherent moments, he realized that it wasn't the ill treatment that was so debilitating. Instead, it was the culmination of the prior torture he'd endured and the strain of living three lives for so many years. If he had been stronger before Randall arrived, he would not be in such bad shape now. But his fatigue and Randall's indifferent treatment of him contributed to his weakness. Randall, unlike his past tormentors, wasn't interested in keeping him alive. Despite asking questions that Klink had no intention of answering, Randall really didn't care if he died. The questions and his failure to answer were merely an excuse for the abuse.

That numbing fatigue gripped him again, overriding everything including the pain. *Dear God, I'm so tired.*

He couldn't fight it any more. His eyes closed and his head slumped as he gave in to the exhaustion.

* * * * *

Cautiously, Robert Hogan peered out of the hole in the cooler wall. No one seemed to be around. If Randall's pals kept to their usual schedule, he should have a few minutes before any of them showed up. It would be close but he didn't want to wait any longer to see Klink.

"You keep an eye open," Hogan said back into the tunnel. "Let me know if anyone shows up."

"Oui, mon colonel," LeBeau promised.

Scene Two

Hogan emerged from the tunnel and straightened up. A quick glance around. Nothing. Klink must be in one of the back cells.

Cautiously, he walked toward the back corner of the cooler. A glance back toward the front.

All quiet. He . . .

Hogan stopped in mid-stride, his heart pounding uncomfortably hard. That couldn't be. Randall wouldn't . . .

He ran to the back cell.

Klink was there, slumped on his knees, unable to sit or stand, tied by his wrists to a crossbar on the bars of the cell, his arms stretched uncomfortably high above his head. He looked as if he hadn't slept or washed since he'd been locked in here. And, to Hogan's surprise, Klink's shirt was gone.

Hogan walked into the cell. Klink's eyes opened as he heard Hogan approach. Surprise flickered in his bloodshot eyes. Hogan reached Klink and knelt beside him.

"What . . . ?" Klink tried speaking through cracked, bruised lips. And couldn't. Water, he mouthed.

Hogan looked around. In the far corner, he found a jug of liquid. The water in it was dirty but a quick glance showed nothing else around. Hogan retrieved the jug and held it to Klink's lips.

Klink choked on the first swallow and did a little better on the second.

"When did you last get water?" Hogan asked fiercely.

Klink shook his head tiredly. "Yesterday, the day before," he whispered. "I do not remember."

Hogan gave Klink more water, his hands shaking from the anger that swept over him. "That damn . . ." he began angrily. He looked at Klink more closely. This time, he noticed the bruises on Klink's abdomen. "They've been beating you," he said flatly. "And," he broke off, noticing some small burns on Klink's body as well. Cigarette burns. Rage blazed through him. "I'm getting you . . ."

His hands accidentally brushed Klink's back and, to Hogan's surprise, Klink shrunk away from him. Startled, Hogan carefully lifted the back of Klink's jacket. There were still bleeding welts on Klink's back from a thin rod of some kind.

Hogan shook from suppressed fury, his hands lifting to the rough rope securing Klink's bruised wrists to the bars.

"No!" Klink stopped him with a faint whisper as he heard a distant clanging.

"I'm getting you out of here!" Hogan said furiously.

"There isn't time!" Klink said hoarsely, painfully. "They'll be here any minute. If they catch you, don't think your rank or uniform will protect you. They'll kill you."

"I'm not leaving you here with them!"

"You have no choice," Klink gasped. "Go!"

"I . . ."

Scene Two

A loud noise from the front of the cooler, and LeBeau's frantic, "Colonel!" sounded.

"Go!" Klink repeated.

"All right!" Hogan whispered reluctantly. "But I'm coming back for you! Hold on a little longer."

Klink nodded wearily, his eyes closing.

After returning the water to where he'd found it, Hogan hurriedly left the cell and ran back to the tunnel.

Hogan threw the tin cup he held against the tunnel wall. It clattered noisily. "They're torturing him!"

His men couldn't remember him being this angry before.

"They're supposed to be the good guys and they're torturing him!"

"Nobody ever said Germans have a monopoly on sadists," Kinch said quietly.

"How could London put someone like Randall in charge?" Carter asked.

"Maybe they don't know," LeBeau suggested.

"Well, they will," Hogan said grimly. He looked at his men. "I'm not leaving Klink in their hands. They'll kill him to cover up what they've done."

"What do you have in mind, Colonel?" Baker asked.

Hogan hesitated. "I'm not sure I should tell you."

"What!" Newkirk was outraged. "You can't mean that, Colonel!"

"What I'm thinking of could get me into a lot of trouble."

"It doesn't matter, sir," Baker said. "Like you said, we can't leave him in their hands."

Hogan looked at each of them; they nodded agreement.

"Okay. I'm planning a mutiny. Round up Randall and his goons and take back the camp," Hogan said. "Most of them go into town every night. Including Randall, that leaves another five or six to take care of in the cooler. Since they won't expect it, we shouldn't have too much trouble with them. Then we round up the others as they come back."

Kinch nodded. "Should work."

"I hate to be a party pooper," Carter said slowly. "But what about the rest of the camp? I mean, while most of the camp doesn't like Randall and his group, they are officially in charge. Some of the camp might object to what we're planning."

"That's right, sir," Newkirk agreed. "Half of the men haven't been here more than a few months, and they don't know or believe what's been happenin' here. If they decide to side with Randall, there's gonna be fightin'."

"I know." Hogan thought a minute. "I've got an idea that might take care of that."

"What, sir?" Baker asked.

"It's crazy, but it should work. First, can we put a radio in each barracks or wire them for sound?"

Scene Two

“Maybe half of them, if that,” Kinch said after a moment.

“Good enough. The guys can double up; we’ll use the tunnels to move the men around. Can you do it by 2100 tonight?”

“Yeah, I guess so. We’ll pull in everybody with radio and electrical experience.”

“Do it,” Hogan ordered. “At 2100, this camp is going to hear the tale of a lifetime.”

Scene Two

Chapter 29

It was nearly nine o'clock. And the camp was unusually quiet, quieter than it had been since Randall and his men arrived. Nearly half of the barracks had a radio, and buildings that normally housed an overcrowded thirty or more men now held double that. For most of the newer prisoners, it was their first glimpse of the world that the long-time prisoners knew about — the tunnels, the radios, the secrecy. As one man put it, "Blimey, it's a ruddy Underground down there!"

But not all the men were there. Randall's men, nine of the select fifteen had gone to town again, along with a dozen who'd been recruited from Barracks 79 such as Chaykin and Stinky. The rest were on duty or in their quarters, along with another twenty or so men from Barracks 79. As for Randall and his clique, they'd just disappeared into the cooler.

In Barracks 2, Hogan sat at the table in the common room, a microphone in front of him. The other barracks had reported in; the men would have no trouble hearing him. Also waiting patiently in Barracks 2 were the officers of the camp — Captain Witton, Captain Martin, Captain Mitchell and Captain Warren, Lt. Miller and the other half dozen lieutenants — the men displaced by Randall's people, men who weren't too happy with many of the newcomers who had replaced them.

Hogan sat quietly waiting for the moment. Only a close look would have revealed his tension; his knuckles were white as he gripped the microphone.

Minutes earlier, a message had been sent to London; it didn't request an answer. It read: "Wilhelm Klink, former kommandant Stalag 13, tortured by Randall. Am relieving Randall of command. Responsibility mine as ranking senior POW officer. Will contact you after it is done." It was signed "Papa Bear".

Now, the roughly twenty-five hundred former prisoners waited for Hogan to start.

At 2100, Hogan began.

"I'm going to tell you all a story," he said in a low voice, surprising most of the listening men.

A story?

There were some groans among the listening men, especially the newcomers. Now what was Hogan up to?

"Once upon a time, in a land far away, a man with funny tastes in mustaches and uniforms became king."

After a moment, there were surprised chuckles as his listeners realized

Scene Two

whom he meant.

“He was a ruthless, mad king, and he managed to attract a lot of people to his cause who were just as ruthless and just as mad. And because he attracted so many bad people, the good people were too scared to do anything but obey their mad king. Except for a very brave few.

“This is the story of one man who was very brave and maybe just a little crazy too. We’ll call him ‘Zorro’.”

Grins flashed among many of the listening men as well as a few disbelieving looks.

“Oh, brother,” said one man who had not been there long.

Others more acquainted with Hogan’s sometimes offbeat ideas shushed him.

“Who?” asked a Frenchman.

“Zorro,” his American friend said. “Just listen. It’ll make sense.”

“Zorro?” Mitchell whispered to Witton.

“Alias the Stage,” Witton said softly, very softly. An idea started to grow in his mind, one he didn’t want to believe.

“Yeah, but why Zorro?”

Witton shook his head, almost frightened by his thought.

“Zorro didn’t like what was happening to his country under the mad king and decided to do something about it. He gathered together men and women who felt as he did and organized them into very efficient groups. Zorro and his people attacked military targets, blew up factories and bridges, and stole secrets from the mad king. The mad king’s men tried everything they could to catch Zorro. But he was far too smart to be caught.

“Eventually, people in other countries got together to fight the mad king. Sometimes, they didn’t do so well and some of their men got caught. One of the captured men was called ‘Roberto’.”

There were a few laughs among his listeners as they realized whom he meant.

“Who?” asked a bewildered man.

His friend sighed and whispered in his ear.

“Oh.”

“When Roberto was caught by the mad king’s soldiers, he was sent to a ‘hacienda’ in a quiet part of the mad king’s country. There he was put in charge of other captured workers.

“The hacienda was run by a man named ‘Don Diego’. Don Diego was a high-ranking and generally well-meaning soldier for the mad king. Not too bright, he couldn’t run the hacienda properly without Roberto’s help.”

Scene Two

There were laughs from some of the listeners as they identified the incompetent Don Diego.

“Now that I get,” said a Welshman.

Some frowned as they remembered the story of Zorro and Don Diego. What on earth was Hogan getting at?

Witton’s expression grew more somber as he listened. Martin, across from him, looked equally sober. Miller who already knew the story turned away

“Roberto was a charming . . . ”

Grins from the listeners.

“ . . . intelligent man who had a crazy idea. He would use the hacienda to fight the mad king without anyone being aware of it. Especially the foolish man who thought he was in charge. Roberto and some of the other workers would sneak out of the hacienda, helping workers from other haciendas escape and causing all kinds of mischief. And Don Diego was Roberto’s unwitting patsy, doing whatever Roberto wanted him to do.”

“Oh, come on,” Liebowitz said. “Is he still playin’ that song?”

“Shut your mouth!” roared Thom Mulchay.

“It ain’t true!”

“It is, mate,” said a nasally accented Australian. “Every word.”

“But it can’t be!”

“Of course, Roberto had heard of Zorro and admired him tremendously. After all, Zorro was everything a hero should be — fearless, intelligent, always successful. But Roberto, like most people, had no idea who Zorro was.

“For years, Roberto and his men went on causing trouble around the countryside, trouble that sometimes hurt the unwitting Don Diego. I’m not going to say much about that, except that Roberto wasn’t real proud of some of the things he did. Later, there were other incidents which finally ended the contempt that Roberto had thought he felt for Don Diego.”

“Wondered if he’d bring those up,” murmured a listener.

His friend nodded grimly.

“What things?” complained a recent arrival to the camp.

Hurried whispers told him what Hogan had skimmed over.

“Hogan did that!” was the appalled whisper.

Nods from the men around him.

“Not long after those incidents, Roberto received a message from Zorro; Zorro wanted to meet him. And Roberto was thrilled. Maybe he would finally discover who Zorro was.

Scene Two

“But it wasn’t to be. It had been a trap set by the authorities to catch both Roberto and Zorro. But Zorro knew better. He knew it was a trap and he sprung it, saving Roberto’s life. In return for his trouble, Zorro was shot. That night, Roberto found himself having to remove a bullet from Zorro’s shoulder without any painkillers.”

There were grim looks among the men in the camp. One of them, holding a crippled arm that had been sliced by shrapnel, turned away with a shudder.

“Zorro reacted exactly as Roberto thought the larger than life hero would react; he bore his pain in silence. As Roberto worked on his shoulder, Zorro talked to him about what had been going on at the hacienda and about the shabby way Roberto had treated Don Diego in the past.”

“He deserved it,” said an unforgiving voice in a loud whisper.

The man received disgusted looks from several of his neighbors who had long since revised their own unfavorable opinion of “Don Diego”.

“But by then, Roberto had learned to be more understanding towards Don Diego.”

“I guess understanding would be one word,” murmured a sergeant to his friend.

“Friendship might be another,” whispered the corporal.

“With a bloody kraut?” was the amused retort.

“Roberto went back to the hacienda and Zorro disappeared. And things went on pretty much as they had before. Except . . .

“Except, Roberto was starting to notice things, things he had never bothered to see before. And he was remembering things — seemingly unimportant bits and pieces he’d just shrugged off in the past. One cold winter day, it all made awful sense.” Hogan leaned forward, his expression intense. “You’re bright boys,” he said quietly. “I think you know who Roberto is, and Zorro, and Don Diego.”

“Yeah,” said a card in one of the other barracks. “You’d have to be ‘Don Diego’ not to.”

A few laughs agreed with the wit.

“If you do, then maybe you can appreciate the horror,” Hogan’s voice was deathly quiet, “Roberto felt when he realized that Zorro, the man he admired so tremendously, and Don Diego, the man he had once openly despised, were the same man.”

There was stunned silence in the barracks from most of the listening

Scene Two

men. Others nodded knowingly, Hogan's words confirming their own guesses.

The card hid his face in his hands, shaking as he realized the truth.

Witton sighed. He should have guessed — a thought reflected on the faces of the other captains.

“And maybe you can appreciate the terrible fear Roberto felt when he realized that Don Diego had been taken away by the authorities and no one knew where he was.”

Astonishment turned to shock among the listeners.

Witton's eyes stayed on Hogan, seeing behind the control some of the still lingering fear.

“To make a long story short, Roberto couldn't leave Don Diego to his fate. So he and his men set out to find Don Diego and rescue him.”

“So that's where they went,” Warren whispered to Martin.
Martin nodded grimly.

“With some help, they finally found Don Diego. Found him after he'd been tortured by the military for nearly three days. Found him and were caught.

“But for Don Diego's courage, Roberto and his men almost suffered the same fate.” Hogan had to suppress a shudder as he remembered what had happened. “Knowing that he was inviting even more brutal treatment, Don Diego intervened on their behalf and defied his captors. His reward was more pain, and Roberto and his men were forced to listen to his screams.”

Horror succeeded horror on the faces of the listening men.

“Despite that, the rescue did ultimately succeed, and Don Diego was taken away from that hell-hole to a safe location where he was faced with an impossible choice. He could leave his war-torn country, recover from his pain and exhaustion, and for the first time in years live in peace. Or he could go back to the hacienda. Back to a life filled with fear and ridicule and hatred. He chose to go back.”

“I couldn't,” whispered an ashen man to his friend.

“Me neither,” his friend agreed shakily.

“I hope you all now appreciate the courage and strength of the man known as Don Diego.”

There were nods of grim agreement from most of the listening men.

Scene Two

“There was peace at the hacienda for a short time. Then one of Zorro’s men went to see him, begging him to start up again. The man who had known so little peace for years agreed, and soon the exploits of Zorro were heard throughout the land once again.

“But there was also a change going on at the hacienda. The incompetent Don Diego was slowly being laid to rest. So skillfully was it done that few noticed the transformation of Don Diego from bungling incompetent to a man in complete control. Until one night during a disastrous fire when Don Diego and Zorro openly merged into one man.”

There were knowing nods from those who had fought the Hammelburg fire. They had been surprised at what had happened and most found themselves, albeit reluctantly, admiring the Kommandant.

Hogan gripped the microphone harder. “I could go on for hours telling you of his activities. How he overcame more danger and pain. How he was given chance after chance to escape to safety. And how he rejected those chances, preferring to continue his work for the good of his country and the hacienda.

“Then finally, after ensuring that the workers were safe from the war around them, Don Diego surrendered the hacienda to Roberto. And together they waited for those fighting the mad king to arrive.

“Unfortunately for Don Diego,” rare bitterness sounded in Hogan’s voice, “the only difference between the monsters who’d tortured him in the past and the men who were put in charge of the hacienda was the color of their uniforms.”

Startled looks on the faces of the listeners.

“I can’t tell you the end of the story,” Hogan said harshly, “because I don’t know it. I’d like to say that it ends happily with Don Diego receiving the honors and praise he deserves.

“Instead, he has been starved, beaten and tortured by men who owed him so much!”

There were surprised looks on the faces of the listening men. Then angry murmurs sounded among the listeners.

“So that’s what has been going on in that cooler,” muttered a Frenchman.

“So let’s drop the fairy tale.” Anger still sounded in Hogan’s voice. “Even if Wilhelm Klink were the man everyone thought he was, you know that no man in this camp has ever been starved or abused. Klink’s only crime has been wearing the wrong uniform. The Kommandant most of you knew doesn’t deserve the treatment he’s getting. The man I’ve just told you about deserves it even less.

Scene Two

“And I will not let that abuse continue. So, I’ve decided to take a drastic step, one which some of you may not agree with. I’m going to relieve Randall of command. London has been informed, but we’re not waiting for their approval.”

“What do want us to do, Colonel?” Witton asked quietly.

A grim smile. “Nothing. This is our operation. All I’m asking is that nobody interfere.”

Witton looked at the men in the barracks and answered for them. “It’s your show, Colonel.”

“What about the rest of you?” Hogan asked the listeners in the other barracks.

Soon, there were messages of assent from every barracks.

Hogan managed a faint smile. “Thanks. From both Roberto and Don Diego.” He rose. “Let’s go,” he told his men grimly.

Scene Two

Chapter 30

Wilhelm Klink was kneeling, facing the bars of his cell. His bleeding wrists were bound uncomfortably high above his head. He had been stripped to the waist, but despite the cool air, he was drenched with sweat. They had grown tired of beating him. Now, they were after new entertainment.

His wet forehead rested against his left arm as he waited. God, he was the weakest he'd ever been in his life. It was ironic that his first official contact with the Allies was with men who would have made Hochstetter proud.

Something struck his bare back, sending him falling into the bars. He almost cried out from the shock.

The thing struck again. It was different from yesterday when they had hit him with his riding crop. Whatever they were using now tore into his flesh and ripped his back.

It struck him again.

Oh, God, the pain . . . His white fingers wound around the bars of the cell, grasping it tightly.

The whip struck again. He could feel the blood flowing down his back as the whip snagged and caught his flesh.

Why? What have I done?

Nothing was the bitter answer. These men were not immune to the insanity he had fought against for so many years.

His back was torn once more.

There was a sob in his throat now; his face pressed against the bars of the cell. He didn't know how much more he could take.

Yet another blow.

No food, little water. The abuse of the past few months and his fatigue had finally taken their toll. He had no reserves left to call upon.

The thing struck his back again. A cry was finally forced from him. Dimly, he heard laughter in the background.

Another fainter cry as the lash again struck his back.

His vision was failing. Sweat, tears, obscured his sight. The cell was growing dimmer; it was difficult to breathe. He barely felt the next blow.

Was this what it felt like to die?

Newkirk approached the private standing by the cooler fence.

"Nice night, eh?" Newkirk asked in a friendly voice.

"It's okay." The man sounded bored.

"Out here long?"

The man shrugged. "About an hour." Then, "Say, shouldn't you be in the barracks?"

Scene Two

Newkirk laughed with fake heartiness. "I won't tell if you don't."

"Huh?"

Newkirk leaned closer to him. "Say, what goes on in there? I mean, Randall and his pals go in a couple of times a day."

"Don't know. I guess they're questioning that kraut about everything he knows."

"That shouldn't take long; Klink's not too bright." Behind the guard, he could see Carter approaching. "Say, how's 'bout a cigarette, mate?"

The guard looked longingly at the one in Newkirk's hand. "I can't. Randall will kill me."

"Well, I won't tell him." Newkirk lit the cigarette and gave it to him.

Reluctantly, the man took it.

"Sure you don't know what's going on in there?"

The man snorted. "You don't know Randall, do you? Unless you're one of his pals, he says nothing."

"Well, mate," Newkirk said grimly. "That's good for you. Because from what we heard about that place, Colonel Hogan may just kill whoever's in there."

"Huh?"

Carter jammed a gun into his back. Astonishment crossed the guard's face.

"Now, mate," Newkirk said. "Let's take a little walk."

"You can't do this!" the guard objected.

"We just did."

Witton walked over to the men. "Everything all right?" he asked quietly.

"Just fine, Captain," Carter said.

"If you like, I can have a little chat with the private here," Witton offered.

Carter and Newkirk glanced at each other in surprise.

Finally, Carter asked, "Are you sure, sir?"

"Very."

"Well, sir," Newkirk said with a grin, "if you insist."

"I do. Now, private." Witton put his arm around the man's shoulders and led him away. "There are a couple of things you need to know . . ."

Carter glanced at his watch. "They should be there now."

"Right, Andrew. Let's go."

Together, guns drawn, the two headed for the cooler door.

Outside, men started coming out of the barracks and gathering around the cooler.

Hogan heard laughter as they emerged from the tunnel. Then a faint cry. More laughter sounded during the short walk to the rear of the cooler. A few more steps and they'd be there.

His blood froze as he came upon the scene. There were five men there, including Randall. They were drinking and laughing at the man kneeling before them. One of them, Yeager, took something from Randall and

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staggered toward the rear of the cell.

Beside Hogan, LeBeau gasped in horror. Klink, stripped to the waist, was on his knees, bound to the bars of the cell, his back bleeding and torn. He looked barely alive.

Yeager raised the thing in his hand; Hogan fired without thinking. The bullet nicked Yeager's side, drawing blood. Yeager cried out and dropped the lash. Randall and the others turned with astonished expressions toward Hogan and his three men.

Guns pointing unwaveringly at them, the men were prodded out of the cell none too kindly.

"Hogan!" Randall yelled, "I'll have your head for this!" as he was herded into an empty cell.

Hogan left them to his men; he cared only about getting to Klink.

Klink was slumped against the bars when Hogan reached him. Hogan cut the ropes binding Klink's wrists with a penknife. Then carefully, trying to avoid Klink's lacerated back, he turned Klink over in his arms.

"Wilhelm," Hogan said softly. The tearing blue eyes opened. Hogan grasped Klink's right hand in his own, willing strength into the tortured man.

Klink could barely feel the pressure of his hand. "Robert," he whispered.

There were tears in Hogan's eyes. "It's over, Wilhelm."

"Over . . ." Klink's gasping voice could barely be heard. "The end . . . you and . . . Thank . . ." His voice faded. "Tell . . ."

Klink's limp hand slipped from Hogan's grasp as his eyes closed.

"Wilhelm?" Hogan whispered. "No . . . NO!" His scream echoed through the cells.

Kinch hastily knelt beside the two men, his fingers reaching for a pulse on Klink's neck. "Colonel," he said urgently. "He's still alive, Colonel."

Hogan lifted his stricken face to the sergeant. Kinch smiled reassuringly at him.

Hogan found his voice; it was choked with tears. "Get a stretcher!" he ordered. "And call Doctor Bauer!"

Baker ran toward the stairs.

Hogan carefully relinquished his burden to Kinch and stood. Then he turned. Before LeBeau could stop him, assuming he could, Hogan was in the next cell, his hands around Randall's throat, squeezing.

Newkirk and Carter arrived, carrying a stretcher. Dropping it, they ran to Hogan, trying to pry his hands from Randall's neck.

Carter was openly crying. "Colonel, you can't!"

Kinch's voice shouted over theirs as Randall started gasping. "Robert! Stop it! He wouldn't like it!"

His name, the tone, startled Hogan enough so that Newkirk and Carter were able to loosen his hold. Hogan spun around furiously, his eyes staring daggers at Kinch who still held Klink.

"Colonel," Kinch said softly, "he wouldn't like it. He'd tell you Randall isn't worth your life. You know that. You know that," Kinch repeated

Scene Two

quietly, his eyes boring into Hogan's.

The rage slowly faded from Hogan's eyes.

Carefully, Newkirk and Carter released his arms and stepped away from him. Still keeping their eyes on Hogan, they backed out of the cell and picked up the stretcher.

Hogan turned back to Randall.

Randall shrank away from Hogan, his hand at his discoloring throat. Hogan's eyes met his, and Randall shuddered at what he saw.

"You'd better pray he lives," Hogan said in a nearly inaudible voice. "Because if he dies, so do you."

Randall slumped to the floor of the cell.

Hogan went back to Kinch. Kinch handed the unconscious kommandant back to Hogan. Gently, Hogan, with Carter's help, laid Klink face down on the stretcher.

Kinch went over to the object that had fallen from Yeager's hand. He picked it up gingerly and walked over to Newkirk. Newkirk looked at it and shuddered. It was a thick piece of rope; twisted around it were strands of barbed wire stained with blood.

"Bloody bastards," Newkirk murmured.

Kinch nodded and dropped the thing to the floor. Then he walked over to the stretcher. Together, Kinch and Carter carefully lifted their burden and slowly started for the stairs.

Outside, Witton and the officers were waiting at the cooler entrance. Groups of men were standing in the open areas around the cooler. The searchlights that had been turned into the compound cast a harsh glare over the entire area.

LeBeau, white as a sheet, was the first one out of the cooler door, followed by a gloomy looking Newkirk. Then came Carter and Kinchloe, carrying their burden. Hogan walked behind them; in the stark light, grotesque stains were visible on his clothes.

The men nearest them moved back as the group approached.

"My God!" Samuelson swore.

Many of the men paled as they saw Klink's bloody back. Some gagged and hurried away; a couple became ill as they stood there.

The funeral-like procession walked to Klink's quarters, trailed by the shaken, silent men of the camp.

At the yard, Hogan turned to LeBeau. "Get Schultz and Gruber. Release the other guards also."

"Oui, mon colonel." LeBeau hurried off.

Baker waited in the doorway. "The doctor's on his way," Baker told Hogan as he walked up the stairs. "He wasn't going to come until I told him it was for the Kommandant." A pause. "If the rest of the town feels as he does, we're not the most popular folks in the area."

The group entered Klink's quarters.

The camp's officers, Samuelson and some of the barracks leaders

Scene Two

assembled in the small yard in front of Klink's quarters, with Miller and Samuelson talking in hushed voices about what had happened in the tunnels just a couple of weeks before.

Private Ken Tiptoe turned to the dozen or so men standing behind him just outside the picket fence. "For the past few weeks, you've been offering prayers for an unnamed person. Tonight you learned his name. And he needs your prayers, our prayers, more than ever. So, let us pray . . . Lord, we stand before you, humbly asking that you save the life of Wilhelm Klink, a good man who has been grievously wronged. We ask that you touch his tortured body with your healing hand. Be with those who care for him. Give them the knowledge they need to help him. And give him the strength to survive the evil that has been done to him. In Christ's name, amen."

And around him, in a variety of accents, far more than a dozen men echoed his amen.

Hogan grimaced with disgust at the condition of the room. Klink's quarters had never been much to write home about, but they had been neat and clean. Now, dirt had accumulated, especially empty bottles from Klink's cellar. Some of furnishings had been damaged.

Hogan checked Klink's bedroom. It was a mess.

Baker returned from the guest room. "It's in decent shape," he reported.

Hogan nodded. "Okay, take him there."

He followed Kinch and Carter into the room. Gently, they laid the unconscious man face down on the bed.

Schultz and Gruber appeared at the door.

The big sergeant had aged in the past few days. He had been consumed with worry ever since Klink had been led away by Matthews. He turned white as he saw his Kommandant's bleeding body on the bed.

Gruber took a look and hastily backed out of the room.

Schultz continued to stare. Then he exploded in rage, lashing out verbally at the Allied soldiers standing there. Hogan and his men let him get it out of his system. Finally, Schultz stopped and sank into a chair, sobbing loudly.

LeBeau went over to him and awkwardly patted his shoulder.

Then, Hogan and his men quietly left the room.

Sergeant Wilson was waiting for them when they returned to the living room. "May I help, Colonel?"

"I don't . . . No. Better wait for Bauer," Hogan said shakily. "We might do more harm than good. He should be here soon. Thanks."

Wilson nodded.

Newkirk looked around the mess. "Bloody pigs," he spat. "Take a while to clean this mess up."

"Make them do it," Carter murmured.

"Schultz'll tear them to pieces," Kinch said soberly.

Hogan nodded. "Schultz can decide what to do in here." He looked at Gruber who was sitting, ashen and shaking, in a chair.

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Gruber noticed Hogan's eyes on him and slowly stood. "Why did you let it go on so long?" the normally bland Captain asked in an outraged voice.

"I didn't know," Hogan said. "I didn't think Randall was a sadist."

Gruber studied his face for a long moment and then said quietly, "I hope you remember your answer, Colonel, when you ask the same question of a German."

Hogan looked at him but didn't say anything.

After a few minutes, a car pulled up outside.

Carter looked out the window. "It's Doctor Bauer," he said and went to open the door.

Bauer walked into the disorganized room. "Colonel," he greeted Hogan abruptly, "your man said Kommandant Klink requires medical attention."

Hogan nodded and led the doctor into the guest room; Wilson followed them. The doctor's face twisted with revulsion as he saw Klink's back.

"Do you need anything?" Hogan asked quietly.

Bauer shook his head. "I am certain that Sergeant Schultz and Sergeant Wilson will provide anything I need," he said tightly. His expression softened as he saw Hogan glance at Klink. He had forgotten about the unusual bond the two men had. "Please, leave. I will let you know how he is."

Hogan nodded at him and left the room.

"Now, gentlemen," Bauer said quietly, "we have work to do."

Hogan paced restlessly in the front room.

LeBeau came in from the kitchen, carrying a tray with cups and a coffeepot on it, muttering angrily.

"What's wrong, Louis?" Newkirk asked.

"Those pigs!" LeBeau spat. "You should see what they did to that kitchen."

"I'd rather not," Newkirk said as he picked up a cup.

"Colonel?" Kinch carried over a cup of coffee.

Hogan shook his head and walked away.

His men exchanged worried looks.

"He wasn't kidding, you know," Carter whispered to Newkirk. "I think he will kill Randall if the Kommandant dies."

"I think you're right, Andrew," Newkirk agreed sadly. "Weird, isn't it? A few months ago, I don't think he would have cared."

Kinch shook his head. "You're wrong about that, Peter. He's cared about Klink for a long time; that cave-in proved it. He was just afraid of admitting it."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Newkirk sighed. "Bloody strange war, isn't it?"

The others nodded in agreement.

After a while, the guest room door opened and closed quietly. Doctor Bauer walked into the room; Wilson followed.

Hogan stopped pacing and waited in the middle of the room. Bauer

Scene Two

walked over to him and smiled faintly; Hogan visibly relaxed.

"The Kommandant will recover," the doctor said. "But Sergeant Schultz has told me briefly what has happened to him over the past months. To put it bluntly, Colonel Hogan, he is exhausted, mentally and physically. He needs rest, a great deal of it."

"He'll get it," Hogan vowed.

The doctor smiled faintly. "I believe you, Colonel. I have left instructions with Sergeants Schultz and Wilson for his care. He will sleep for a long time. If he wakes, give him liquids. Water, soup, if he will take it; he is dehydrated. I will be back tomorrow morning. If his condition changes for the worse, call me immediately. But I do not think that will happen."

Hogan walked him to the door. "Thank you for coming."

A thin smile. "You were told I did not want to?"

"Yes." Hogan accompanied him out on the porch. "I don't know what went on in town. But . . ."

The doctor's voice took on a hard edge. "They seem to think they owned the town. People have been beaten, robbed. There have even been rapes."

Hogan looked soberly at him. "I give you my word, they will be punished."

"Forgive me, Colonel Hogan, but my people are frightened. Even those who were in the resistance are wondering what it was they were fighting for."

"You can tell them there will be changes; I promise you."

Bauer looked at him. "All right, Colonel Hogan. I will tell them. Perhaps they will believe you. After all, you have helped us before."

They walked to the car. Witton and the other officers were within earshot.

"Colonel, I did not wish to alarm you or your men about the Kommandant's condition."

"He will be fine?" There was a touch of panic in Hogan's voice.

"Yes. But I do not wish to minimize his condition either," Bauer said. "As I said, Colonel, he is exhausted. The life he has been living has taken its toll. If that torture had continued, he may not have lived through the night."

Hogan suppressed a shudder.

Bauer sighed. "What made them think they could get away with it?"

"Easy," Hogan said harshly. "Shot while escaping. Simple and neat. No questions asked."

The doctor glanced at him. "Somehow, Colonel, I think there would have been questions. I think if the Kommandant had died, his death would not be the only unexplained one in this camp."

Hogan refused to meet his eyes.

Bauer nodded. "I understand. What has happened here is not my concern. Keep the Kommandant as comfortable as you can. Let him rest. I will be back in the morning to check on him."

"Thank you. Good night, doctor."

"Good night, Colonel."

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Chapter 31

Captain John Witton walked over as Hogan watched Bauer's car leave.

Slowly, the others in the area dispersed. Hogan knew that the rest of the camp would soon know what they had heard. He glanced at Witton.

The American in the RAF uniform looked at him soberly. "I'm glad he'll make it. We all are."

"I wonder if he'll forgive us," Hogan said pessimistically.

A small smile. "I think he'll forgive us long before you forgive yourself. It wasn't your fault, Colonel. It wasn't anybody's fault."

"I should have seen . . ."

"How?" Witton asked simply. "Randall didn't really act any differently than other men you've seen. Including me. Remember, you thought I was going to do something to him."

"Yeah," Hogan admitted. "I did."

"So don't blame yourself. None of us could have known what would happen."

"I wonder if he did," Hogan said softly. "The look in his eyes as he was led to the cooler. I wonder if he suspected. I didn't want to believe anything was wrong because they were Americans." An angry scowl. "That's why I let it go on so long. Because I couldn't believe it."

"Maybe it's what makes us civilized," Witton said. "We can't see anyone acting like that."

"It also makes us blind," Hogan retorted. "We don't want to believe it; therefore, it doesn't happen."

"Maybe." Witton looked at Hogan's set face. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"What?"

"You, Klink. You've had it bottled up inside you for a long time. Sometimes talking helps."

Hogan looked at him for a long moment. "Yeah," he finally admitted. "I do."

Witton smiled. "Let's take a walk."

Together, they walked to the open gate and the road outside the camp.

"So, who got here first?" Witton asked after a couple of minutes.

Hogan smiled faintly. "Schultz, then Klink, then me. The camp was still new at that point. Escapes were being made all the time, but the men were getting caught. Both sides were playing a game of cat and mouse. After I showed up, I took over. Got the prisoners more organized and more settled."

"And started your little undercover system."

"Yup. Got the whole camp involved and convinced them to go along. It wasn't easy; I was asking men to put aside their own feelings and help

Scene Two

others go home.”

“But you pulled it off,” Witton reminded.

“Yeah, I did.” Hogan smiled. “And, boy, it felt good to put one over on the dumb kraut who ran the camp.”

“Only it turned out he was putting one over on you.”

“Yeah, he was.” A reluctant smile. “In fact, he had the final okay on our operation,” he added to Witton’s surprise. “Well, things went along pretty much as I told the rest of the camp. We got pretty good at what we did.”

“And you and Klink?”

“For a long time, there was an unspoken truce between us. Most of the time, I protected him and he protected me. But for me, it wasn’t anything personal. At least, that’s what I wanted to think,” he added softly. “He wasn’t a person to me. He was just a tool. One I could get rid of when I wanted to; a few times, I almost did. I almost never thought of him as a man. And if I did, he was a man I despised. And a lot of the time, it showed. In the way I looked at him, talked to him and allowed the men in this camp to treat him.

“When did it change?” Witton asked quietly. “Or did it, really?”

A faint smile. “You’re an observant man, Captain.” Hogan leaned against one of the legs of a watchtower. “What it boiled down to was that I didn’t want to think of Klink as anything other than a tool. If I did, I might have to take a good look at myself. And I might not like what I saw.

“And so it went on for years. Until Martinelli.” He glanced at Witton. “You’ve heard about Martinelli?”

“Martin told me the story.”

“Martinelli was crazy and none of us saw it. Not even Klink. Maybe if we had . . .” He shook his head. “Anyway, he wanted out. So, he picked on the one person he thought could get him out.”

“Klink.”

Hogan nodded. “When I walked into that room and saw Klink lying on the floor, beaten, hurt . . . I got scared. Scared because I’d never seen anything like that before. And scared because it was Klink.”

“And you cared?”

Another nod. “That scared me even more. I didn’t want to care. So, I shut it off as soon as I could. When Klink tried to get the gun away from Martinelli, I froze.” His voice was tight, angry. “I should have helped him. We could have protected Martinelli. Between the two of us, we could have done something.”

“Maybe. Or maybe not,” Witton said quietly. “Don’t harp on that. It can drive you nuts.”

“I know.” A sad sigh. “As Schultz said, Martinelli was already a dead man. If not then, probably later.

“So, I just stood there and watched, not really believing that Klink was trying to disarm him. Klink tripped over a log buried in the snow and Martinelli aimed the gun at him. Then the machine guns fired. I fell to the ground when they started and got up when it was over. Martinelli was

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dead. And Klink was there, kneeling in that snow, looking at him. Not with anger or hate, just a kind of sadness.

“And I,” a deep breath, “turned on him. Every bit of hate and anger I could muster, I aimed at him.” Hogan shook his head. “Here was a man who been beaten most of the night, half naked in a foot of snow.” His voice was shaking now. “Cold, exhausted, bleeding. Not a stranger, but a man I’d known for years. That alone should have counted for something. And all I could do was blame him for something that wasn’t his fault and hate him. I, uh, called him a bastard.” A catch on the last word. “There was such disbelief in his eyes; he didn’t expect that from me. Then even that disappeared, and there was nothing alive left in his eyes.

“He almost collapsed while I was looking at him. And you know what I would have done if he had? Nothing! I would have walked away and left him lying in the snow.” His voice was bitterly reproachful.

“You don’t mean that,” Witton said softly.

“Oh, yes, I do. And for the three days he stayed in bed, I kept feeding my hate any way I could. Telling myself of all of the supposedly evil things he’d done, blaming him for every act of terror committed by the Nazis. He became the embodiment of everything I hated in Germany. It was the only way to stop what I really felt. And his first day back in the office, I wished him dead in front of the whole camp,” he said bitterly.

Witton stayed silent, letting him work out the pain.

Finally, he spoke again in a more controlled voice. “I, uh, started dreaming. Nightmares. All about Klink. He’d be hurt and I’d hold him. Sometimes I would let him go and walk away. Other times, he’d just look at me with those empty eyes. Or he’d die while I was holding him.” His voice was shaking. “And I’d wake up in a cold sweat. Sometimes I found myself crying. And that made me angrier.”

“So you got even,” Witton said softly. “By calling the Gestapo.”

A subdued, “Yes. I was proving once and for all that he meant nothing to me. That I could do whatever I wanted with him.”

“Didn’t work, did it?”

A shaky, “No. The nightmares got worse. And the whole thing made Klink furious. I’d never seen him like that before. He would put up with my hate, but not that betrayal. He barely talked to me, barely looked at me, after that.

“But despite his anger and despite the dreams, I was still denying everything. Until it all came to a head in that cave-in.”

“I’ve heard bits and pieces of it. What happened?”

A lopsided smile. “The top of the mine collapsed and they had to dig us out.”

“Right,” Witton said dryly. “Even I’ve heard a bit more than that.”

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Hogan pushed away from the tower, his eyes on the hill outside the camp. "When I came to, I was trapped in total darkness. When I was a kid, I accidentally locked myself in a refrigerator and nearly died.⁸⁰ The cave-in resurrected all the fear and I started to panic. Klink kept me from going nuts. Just by talking and never letting me think about what happened or where I was. And he never told me that he was hurt and nearly buried alive. After they dug me out, I ran out of there; I was so glad to be away from that darkness and dirt."

"Then you found out he was still trapped."

Hogan nodded. "I nearly ran out on him again. I mean, what difference did it make? Right before the cave-in, I was even thinking that he'd be gone soon the way the war was going."

"What changed your mind?"

"I realized how alone he was in there. After what he'd done for me, I couldn't leave without seeing how he was doing. I owed him that much human consideration. I'm not even sure I was thinking it was Klink when I said I'd go in."

A quiet, "But it was."

"Yeah, it was. Yet even when I saw him like that, I was still thinking he was expendable. Even when he was talking to me, I kept pretending it was just words. I kept denying that it was a man saying them. Until he was hurting too much to ignore.

"Somehow, I found myself gripping his hand. Or he was gripping mine. I almost let go. I didn't want to touch him. I didn't want to think of him as anything other than a tool. But he was in such pain. Just like the nightmares. And finally, I saw the man behind the uniform, the man I'd ignored all those years . . . And I held on to him, held on with everything I had, still afraid to admit the real reason.

"One of the beams slid . . . he screamed. The pain in his eyes, his face . . . And in the middle of that, he demanded to know what I was doing there. He knew what I thought about him. Why didn't I leave?"

"And why didn't you?" was the soft question.

"Because I finally stopped lying to myself, to him. I didn't hate him or despise him. Instead, he was a man, yeah, a foolish, naive and vain man, but still a man I'd been afraid to admit I cared for. A man I had needlessly, deliberately, hurt badly and hurt often.

"I made him a promise then. Whatever happened, we were going to see it through together. To the end. Him and me."

He turned away from Witton, resting his head against the leg of the tower, his eyes closed.

After a while, Witton said quietly, "But he still didn't tell you about

⁸⁰ M. Hughes: *Dress Rehearsal*

Scene Two

himself.”

Hogan pushed himself away from the tower and started walking again. “No. And I can’t blame him.

“Later, after he saved my neck as the Stage, when I dug that bullet out of his shoulder, we were talking. I think he was still unsure about me. Yeah, I made him a promise in that cave. But did I mean it? Or was it just another line from the glib American?”

“Was he convinced?”

Hogan nodded. “That time, yes.”

“But he still kept quiet?”

Hogan shrugged. “Things got too busy. Hochstetter was prowling around. The population of the camp mushroomed and the budget was cut. We suddenly had a lot of other things to worry about. We spoke to each other more than normal during the day, but it was always about camp business. And at night I was gone some of the time, and so was he, though I didn’t know it. I found out later that he was planning something special for us.”

“Instead, he was arrested.”

“Yeah. I didn’t catch on until it was too late. If I had . . . ”

“If you had,” Witton said, “he would still have been arrested.”

“Maybe. Maybe we could have found him quicker. Maybe — ”

“That’s too many ‘maybes’, Colonel,” Witton interrupted. “What happened, happened. Neither of you had any control over it. Just be glad you found him.”

“I know. We found him. After three days, we found him,” Hogan whispered. “It was worse than the nightmares. I can’t begin to imagine the hell he went through. And when Hochstetter walked in on us and started on him while we watched . . . ” His voice broke.

“It wasn’t more than half an hour, but he couldn’t stop screaming,” Hogan finally whispered. “Even now, I can still hear him. Still see him.” He shuddered.

Witton barely controlled his own shudder. “But you got him out of there.”

A nod.

“And he came back here.”

Again, Hogan nodded.

“Why?”

A very faint smile. “I’m not sure he knows. He said something about finishing what he started. Once he said something about satisfying his ego.” A slightly bigger smile. “I called him on that. Asked him whose ego — the Stage’s or the Kommandant’s or Wilhelm Klink’s.”

“What did he say?”

“He never really answered. But it got through to him. I convinced him it was time to bury Kommandant Klink. Time for him to be the man he really is. That’s when everything finally got out into the open between us. And we finally stopped playing games with each other.”

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“Took you long enough,” Witton said dryly.

“Old habits die hard, Captain,” Hogan admitted with a faint smile.

They walked on in silence for a while.

“Did things get better?” Witton asked as they rounded a corner of the camp.

“Yes and no,” Hogan said. “Between us, yes, even before then. The camp saw it and most of the men accepted it because it did make life easier for everyone. No, because of the overcrowded conditions and the cuts in the budget. For the first time, we got a taste of life as it was in the other camps.”

Witton smiled. “Then I dropped in. Literally.”

Hogan returned his smile. “Yes. You really didn’t guess who he was until tonight, did you?”

A wry smile. “No. I thought he was one of your people.”

“No, we were one of his, though we didn’t know it until this year.”

“What happened last month when he left? The escape that didn’t happen?” Witton asked.

Hogan shuddered. “SS major named Reiner. A murdering sadist. He was a friend of Hochstetter’s. And Hochstetter was always talking about the two men he hated most — Klink and the Stage. Reiner, after quite a bit of research, put it together.

“Reiner,” a shaky breath, “Reiner had a hobby. Finding men and women who were resistance fighters, criminals, military leaders. People who had evaded death or capture. He invited them to a hunt with them as the game.”

“And he ‘invited’ the Stage.”

Hogan nodded. “He had a unique way of sending the invitation. Poison. Exotic, deadly. With him holding the antidote. But that was just the beginning.”

“Torture,” Witton said bluntly.

A nod and a shudder. “He, uh, had his own personal torture chamber waiting for his victims. Every obscene horror he could think of, he would have done. Death would have been as slow, as ugly, as he could make it.”

“Did Klink guess?”

“Not completely. He guessed enough so that he had no intention of being taken alive. When he left that night, it was as if he never expected to return. Even Gruber realized it.”

“And it tore you to pieces,” Witton said softly. “The whole camp saw it but didn’t know why.”

A shaky hand across his brow. “The nightmares were back. Worse. Much worse because of what had happened before. Even awake, I was having them. I could see him bleeding, hear him screaming. And that promise I made him — the words kept going around in my head.” His voice broke.

After a while, he spoke again. “I, uh, never told anyone, but after he came back, I left the camp. I ran away and cried like a baby.”

A sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

Scene Two

After a while, Hogan cleared his throat. "After that, things settled down. Well, almost. The Wagner incident, then learning about the death camps — it wasn't one of our better times. But he still made sure we'd be safe, made sure no one could force us to leave, by having the access roads destroyed. And he kept the guards together, kept them from panicking. I think almost everyone was relieved when he surrendered the camp.

"Then Randall shows up." The bitterness was back. "Tonight, when I went in and saw what they'd done to him . . ." There were tears in his voice. "All of the nightmares came true. I held him, just like in the dreams. Held him and watched him die . . ."

"He didn't," Witton said quietly.

There were tears on Hogan's face as he whispered, "I thought he did. Until Kinch said something, I was sure he did." He wiped the tears away awkwardly.

They walked in silence for a long time.

Finally, Hogan cleared his throat, his voice sounding almost normal. "That's about all of it," he said.

They were by the front gate again, near the Kommandant's quarters. Hogan watched as the men at the gate challenged every man who walked in. With surprise, he saw them lead away one of the men who had come in with Randall.

Witton smiled. "There's no sense in you being the only one in trouble. What's London going to do? Arrest all of us?"

Hogan managed a small smile. "They could."

A shrug. "We'll take the chance. You and your men have taken enough risks in the past. It's time the rest of us did more than watch."

A faint smile; Hogan's eyes stayed on the gate.

"With your permission, we'll lock them up in their barracks," Witton said. "You can decide what to do about them later."

A nod. Then the smile disappeared. "I shot Yeager," Hogan said.

"Couldn't happen to a nicer guy. I'll get Wilson to see him; I'm sure he'll live."

Another nod. "You seem to have everything under control, Captain."

A grin. "I try."

His eyes met Witton's. "I'm beginning to think I should have told you earlier."

"I should have guessed earlier," Witton said soberly. "It might have made things easier for both of you."

"Well, it's over now. Maybe, it's finally over."

They were in front of Klink's quarters. Hogan turned into the yard; Witton wasn't surprised.

"Good night, Colonel," Witton said. "Try and get some sleep."

"Sleep," Hogan murmured.

"It wasn't your fault," Witton said persuasively.

"Maybe not this," Hogan said. "But . . ."

"Colonel, his back's not the only thing that needs to be healed. I think

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you need it too. The past is the past. Let it go.”

“Let it go,” Hogan murmured. “I’m not sure I can. Right now, I know I can’t.”

“Then give it time,” Witton said. “But stop punishing yourself for what’s happened.”

Hogan nodded and walked toward the building.

Witton’s eyes followed Hogan up the stairs. Then he sighed. No one could help Hogan with his burden. No one except the injured man who was lying in there.

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Chapter 32

Followed by the officers and Tiptoe, Hogan's team finally returned to the barracks. Hammond silently poured them cups of coffee as they sat down at the table.

"Gawd, I hope I never see anything like that again," Newkirk murmured after a long silence.

"It was even worse than when we found him with Hochstetter," Carter said shakily. "And that was horrible."

"What he'd look like then?" Martin asked hesitantly.

It was awhile before Newkirk said softly, "Like a scene out of hell."

"And the smell," LeBeau said shakily. "At least this time, there wasn't that smell."

The others looked puzzled.

"Well, you know the Kommandant," Newkirk said diffidently. "Lived up to his German blood in that respect. Always impeccably groomed, always clean." The others nodded. Newkirk's voice dropped. "He was filthy. He'd been chained to the wall by his wrist in a dirty cell, a bucket for a toilet. He later told the Colonel that after the first day, he, uh, couldn't keep any food down. The cell stank worse than any latrine ever did from vomit and, uh, other things."

"He'd been beaten, kicked," LeBeau murmured. "His body was a mass of bruises; his right wrist was bleeding, infected." He shuddered. "And his eyes . . . I'll never forget the pain in his eyes."

"What made you leave?" Warren asked curiously. "Did you know who he was?"

"Colonel Hogan finally guessed," Kinch said. "The cave-in, the Stage getting hurt, Hochstetter's threats against Klink, their friendship — it all got to him. I guess subconsciously he started to connect it all. Then, like he said, the day we left, it all made horrible sense."

"We didn't believe it," Baker said. "Pretty much told him he was crazy."

"Until Schultz came in, looking for the Kommandant," Kinch said. "It scared Schultz when the Colonel said that Klink had left with Hochstetter the day before. Schultz knew that Hochstetter was just looking for an excuse to arrest Klink. And when Schultz learned that Hochstetter had arrested one of the few people who knew who the Kommandant was, that's when he told us who Klink was."

"We still didn't want to believe it," Baker said. "It was too horrible to believe. After everything we've thought about Klink, said to him, done to him, to realize who he was . . ." Baker shook his head.

"But it was true," Newkirk whispered uncharacteristically. "All of it. Though I don't think I really believed it until we walked into that cell and saw what Hochstetter had done to him." A shudder. "And it would have

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happened to us if Klink hadn't interfered."

"It drove Hochstetter crazy," LeBeau murmured. "He . . . He hit Klink, kicked him. Then Hochstetter put him on that rack and," a gulp, "tortured him as we watched."

"He lost control of everything . . . He couldn't stop screaming," Carter mumbled. "He tried not to scream; you could see him trying. But he couldn't stop . . ." A long pause. "I wanted to cry. I was so scared and ashamed."

"For him?" Tiptoe asked softly.

A miserable nod. Then, "But he had nothing to be ashamed of," Carter said with sudden fierceness. "Nothing! What he went through for days, none of us could have stood. None of us!"

"And after all that, he comes back here," Kinch said softly after a long pause. "He could have left. That's what Schultz wanted, and his brother-in-law."

"Brother-in-law?" from Mitchell.

"Yeah. Remember Doctor Müller, that Wehrmacht captain last year?" Some of the men nodded. "He was in the area. LeBeau and Newkirk contacted the underground for a doctor after we rescued Klink and were sent to Müller."

"Must have shaken him up a bit," Martin said.

A nod. "It did, but he wasn't surprised about who the Kommandant was. I guess something happened on his visit that let him guess what the Kommandant was up to. But he was shook when he found out what had happened to the Kommandant." A shudder. "We were all shook." A deep breath. "We knew what the Gestapo was capable of doing; we'd heard what they'd done to others. Hell, we even joked about it. But to see it . . . to hear it." He shuddered. "And I walked in on the tail end of it."

"But you stopped it," LeBeau said. "You and Schultz."

"Schultz?" Surprised cries from the others.

"Yeah, Schultz," Kinch said. His eyes lifted to their faces. "He's the one who killed Hochstetter," he said softly. "Killed him as he was torturing the Kommandant. For years, he's been taking care of the Kommandant. Good old Schultz. A fat bowl of jelly we thought. And all along, he knew." His head shook with admiration. "He knew everything."

"What about Gruber?" Martin asked. "Was he in on it?"

"Only since the hunt," Baker said. "He became suspicious after the fire, but when the Kommandant called him on it, he couldn't bring himself to turn Klink in."

"Hunt? What hunt?" Mitchell asked.

"An SS guy, Reiner," Baker said. "Reiner wanted to hunt Klink like he was an animal. Gruber, he walked into the office with the rest of us and learned that Reiner had poisoned," startled looks on the listeners' faces, "the Kommandant. Hogan told him what had happened and Gruber was with us when the Kommandant said goodbye." A pause. "I didn't think he'd come back alive. None of us did."

"Including Hogan," Mitchell said. He looked at the other men in the

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barracks. "It must have been rough on the rest of you not knowing what was going on."

The men nodded.

"By then," Hammond said soberly, "we all knew that the Colonel and the Kommandant were friends. But we didn't know about the hunt. We thought that Klink had been called away for questioning or something, and that's what was wrong. But," he looked at the five men, "Klink was dying when he left here?"

The team nodded as Witton came in.

"He would have died too," Carter whispered. "But he managed to pull off one more miracle. He," a shudder, "told us the story after he came back. Gruber was with us. That's when he learned who the Kommandant was."

"And he swore loyalty to the Kommandant," Martin guessed, remembering how Gruber had been after that incident.

They nodded.

"Then Randall shows up." LeBeau spat the words. "That filthy bastard! Shows up and tortured him like Hochstetter did; like Reiner would have!" Then, in a subdued voice, "I thought I was going to faint."

"You weren't the only one," Baker agreed with a shudder. He looked at Kinch. "Back in the cooler, I thought the Kommandant had died. What made you think he hadn't?"

A very faint smile. "I didn't. I was praying I'd find a pulse."

"So was I," murmured LeBeau. A sigh and a shake of the head. "And just a few months ago, I wouldn't have cared if he died. I even joked about it," he admitted with some shame. "And now?" Another shake of his head.

"I always kind of liked him," Carter admitted slowly, getting stares from the others. "I did! I know he was supposed to be dumb, but it was a nice kind of dumb. Sort of," he finished lamely.

Kinch laughed. "I think I know what you mean. I guess we always exaggerated how stupid he was. And how we couldn't stand him."

Witton smiled. "True confessions?"

"As long as we're being honest," Newkirk said slowly. "If anything, I under-exaggerated how I felt about him."

"You really hated him, didn't you?" Tiptoe said quietly.

He nodded. "Yeah, I did. If I saw him then like he was tonight, I'd have laughed in his face."

"Why?" Tiptoe asked softly.

"Because . . . Because my kid brother was killed by the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain," Newkirk finally said. "And every time I saw Klink, every time I saw the uniform, that's what I remembered. That's why I couldn't accept how the Colonel felt about him."

"You were pretty vehement," Kinch said, "when they started getting along better."

"Yeah. I acted like a bloody idiot."

"We all did," LeBeau said. "Not just you."

"But he doesn't hold it against us," Carter said. "He never has. And

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sometimes we really treated him rotten. Especially when we were pretending to be Germans.” A low, “I even hit him once.⁸¹”

“Yeah,” Kinch said. “We did go way overboard sometimes.” Then, “You know, sometimes I’d see something in his eyes,” Kinch said thoughtfully. “Looking back on it, I think sometimes he was laughing at us.”

“Well, we were laughing at him,” Baker said. “It wouldn’t surprise me if he did laugh at us once in awhile.” A sudden grin. “Remember that time we made the record of that secret meeting? When he walked in and found us with Schultz?”⁸²

“Yeah,” from Carter. “Boy, was I sweating!”

“You?” Newkirk managed a smile. “I was the one with the nonexistent impresario uncle.”

“He did have us going for a few minutes,” Baker said. “

“Do you mind telling the rest of us the story?” Witton asked dryly.

Baker grinned. “It was last year when the krauts let us use a recording device to send messages home. Remember?” Some of the men nodded. “Then they decided to have a top secret meeting in the rec hall. So, Hogan came up with the idea of having us record the meeting. But we needed to get into the building first. So, the colonel conned Schultz into thinking that we thought he had a great voice and we were going to send a recording of him to Newkirk’s impresario uncle.”

“And Schultz fell for it?” Martin said. And looked confused when the others laughed. Then he laughed. “Or pretended to fall for it.”

Baker grinned. “Guess so. Anyway, Schultz took us inside the building. Then Klink showed up.”

Newkirk laughed shortly. “And started going on about how he didn’t believe us. Gawd, he had me sweating, I don’t mind telling you.”

“He had us all sweating,” Baker said. “Including Colonel Hogan.” He smiled. “Then, to our relief, Klink told us he wanted us to record him and his string quartet. So, the colonel and I went to Klink’s office with an empty box, pretending to record the music. In the meantime, the machine was really recording the meeting. Given what we know about him, Klink had to know what we were up to.”

“And he decided to pull your legs a bit for a change,” Mitchell said with a grin.

Witton also smiled. “Sounds like you guys had some interesting times. And, in hindsight, some funny times as well.”

“Yeah, I guess we did,” Newkirk admitted reluctantly. Then a heartfelt, “But it’s over, thank God.”

⁸¹ “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”

⁸² “The Big Record”

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“Yes, over. Well,” Witton said, “I’ve got a couple of errands to run. Ed,” he addressed Martin, “I’d like you to come as well.”

“Right.”

“Good night, men.”

Goodnights echoed after the two officers.

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Chapter 33

Doctor Ernst Bauer stopped his car in front of Bürgermeister Scheinfeld's house. The family of Kurt Hausner also lived here, as they had since the fire. Bauer got out of the car, walked to the door and rang the bell.

After a few minutes, Scheinfeld, clad in a voluminous red robe, opened the door. "Ernst! What are you doing here? It is long past curfew."

Bauer smiled as he walked into the hall. "I am a doctor, am I not? Doctors have no curfew. Get Kurt, bitte. I must talk to both of you."

"All right. Wait in the library."

Scheinfeld left as Bauer walked into the book-lined room and waited.

"Ernst," Hausner, belting a dark green robe around his waist, greeted a few minutes later. "Was ist los?"

A very faint smile. "Now, nothing."

The two men looked puzzled as they sat.

"I have just left Stalag 13," Bauer said.

Distaste crossed the faces of the two men.

"So, one of the drunks needed medical attention," Hausner said sarcastically.

Bauer shook his head. "Nein. For that, I would have refused to go. The patient was Kommandant Klink." He looked at the startled men. "He has been tortured by Randall."

Scheinfeld rose to his feet. "Was!"

"He could have died."

"And that Schweinehund," Hausner spat, "called you!"

"Nein." Bauer's eyes met theirs. "One of Colonel Hogan's men called me. Colonel Hogan has taken back the camp. Hogan learned what happened to the Kommandant, rescued him and arrested Randall."

"So, it is over," Hausner said with a heavy sigh.

Bauer nodded. "Colonel Hogan was unaware of what has taken place here. I have told him briefly of the outrages committed against us. He gave me his word that the guilty will be punished."

"Will he keep it?" Hausner asked.

Bauer nodded. "I believe so. He has given us no cause to doubt him. And after what has happened to the Kommandant, he wants justice done."

"Will his superiors?" Scheinfeld asked. "They may not approve."

"I suspect," Bauer said slowly, "that Colonel Hogan and Kommandant Klink have a great deal more influence than anyone suspected."

The two men looked at him in surprise.

"Since the surrender," Hausner said finally, "stories have been circulating about Colonel Hogan's activities in the resistance. Stories with a great deal of truth to them. And we know that the Kommandant and he have become friendly. But the Kommandant . . . ?"

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"However," Bauer said soberly, "since the fire, we have discovered there is more to the Kommandant than we ever dreamed. And now . . ." Bauer broke off.

Hausner's eyes narrowed. "Now?"

Bauer shook his head. "I have said all I am going to say. Except for one thing." He looked closely at them. "Do not be surprised by anything the Kommandant does in the future."

Scheinfeld looked at him and nodded. "All right, Ernst. I suppose we will hear about it eventually. But," a smile, "at least that Hund Randall and his men are gone."

"Ja," Bauer agreed. "And for that, we can thank Colonel Hogan. And Kommandant Klink."

* * * * *

Captain John Witton, accompanied by Captain Edward Martin, Sergeant Frank Wilson, and a dozen volunteers entered the cooler. The men walked to the back cells.

"Finally!" Randall's tone was derisive. "Let us out of here, Witton!"

Witton shook his head. "Forget it, Randall."

"That was an order, Captain!" Randall shouted. "From a superior officer."

Witton looked at him with contempt. "You've forfeited the right to give orders, Randall."

Randall laughed harshly. "Why? Because of Klink? He's nothing but a," an obscenity, "kraut."

Witton barely held on to his temper. "I'm afraid, Randall, you picked the wrong 'kraut' to torture and the wrong place to do it."

"Oh, yeah, this perfect little camp," Randall said. "Collaborated with the enemy! Every stinking one of you! Wait until the brass hears about this!"

"No," Witton said evenly. "Not collaborated. And as for the brass hearing about this, they already know."

There was apprehension on Randall's face for the first time. "What do you mean they already know?"

"Colonel Hogan contacted them when he decided to throw you out."

"That's ridiculous! Hogan was nowhere near my radio."

"He didn't use your radio," Witton said dryly. "He used his."

A guarded look on Randall's face. "His?"

"Yes, his. The radio he's been using to contact London for the past three years. You see, Randall, London forgot to tell you a few things about this camp. One of the things they forgot to mention was that every prisoner in this camp had orders never to escape. And the reason is that Hogan and his men have operated a band of saboteurs from inside the camp for years."

"You're nuts!"

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"Afraid not, Randall." Witton's eyes met Randall's. "You blew it. You really blew it."

"The next thing you'll say is that bastard Klink knew all about it!"

"He knew all right," Witton said lazily. "From what I understand, he had the final okay on the operation."

"What do you mean okay?" Randall said uneasily.

"Just what I said, Randall — okay. As in whether he'd permit another Underground cell to operate out of his camp." Witton's voice was disinterested now. "We're putting you guys in separate cells. I warn you, don't try anything. These men have seen what you did to Klink and they're not too happy. I suggest you behave yourselves."

"Hogan shot me!" Yeager whined. "It hurts!"

"Too bad. But since we're softhearted, Sergeant Wilson's going to look at you. But try anything, and you can forget it."

"I won't!" Yeager promised.

"Captain," Witton told Martin, "take over."

"Yes, sir," Martin said as Witton walked toward the empty cell in the back. "All right, you guys. One by one. Randall, you get to keep your cell."

Witton wasn't listening as he looked at the back cell. There was blood on the floor by the back bars. The stained ropes that had been around Klink's wrists still hung from the bars. There on the floor, he shuddered, was the bloodied rope with the barbed wire around it. Klink's jacket had been thrown in a corner. Witton walked over and retrieved it. The jacket was dirty, smelled and smeared with blood. Was it even worth keeping? Yeah, it was evidence, he reminded himself.

Witton walked out of the cell, carrying the jacket. There, on a small table, were Klink's effects. He dropped the monocle, watch and the few odds and ends from Klink's pockets into the cap. Klink's riding crop. Witton smiled. The Kommandant was rarely without it; Witton wondered why. He picked it up and nearly dropped it. It had dried blood on it.

Why? He found himself thinking. Why? Even when he'd thought he hated not just Klink but all Germans, he couldn't have imagined torturing them. Baines had tried to kill Klink, yes. But Baines had been a sick man, a man pushed over the edge by too many missions and the death of his family.⁸³ But Randall? And the other men? They were normal. All too normal. Witton shuddered. That's what shook him the most. How normal Randall and the others were.

Witton, reluctantly, took the riding crop and walked toward the front.

All of the men had been put into separate cells, cells unlike the one Klink had been in. These cells had cots, blankets and water.

Wilson had finished bandaging Yeager's side.

⁸³ *Act Three*

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"It hurts!" Yeager was whining.

"Sorry." The medic's tone belied his words. "I'll be back in the morning to change the bandage."

"What about the pain?"

"I've got some aspirin, if you want it." He handed Yeager a couple of tablets. "That's it."

"I want a doctor!"

"We'll think about it," Martin said coldly. "Tomorrow."

Wilson left the cell; the door clanged shut behind him.

"What about some food?" Matthews shouted after the departing men.

"Breakfast is tomorrow at 8:30," Martin said, already up the stairs.

The men, ignoring the outraged noises behind them, left the cooler. Two men were posted outside as guards.

The officers and Wilson walked toward the front gate. As they approached, they saw more men being stopped and ordered to their barracks.

"How many do we have?" Witton asked Mitchell who'd been supervising the proceedings.

"Most of them. Maybe another two or three left."

Witton nodded and turned to Sergeant Wilson. "How badly is Yeager hurt?"

Wilson snorted. "Not as badly as he wants us to believe. He'll be uncomfortable for a while; the aspirin should help."

"Thanks, Sergeant. Good night."

"Good night, sirs," Wilson said, and walked toward the infirmary.

Witton and Martin turned toward the Kommandant's quarters.

"What a mess," Martin said as they entered the living room.

Witton nodded and put Klink's things on the dining table as Schultz came out of the kitchen carrying a tray with a coffeepot on it.

"Is Colonel Hogan with him?" Witton asked.

Schultz nodded.

"We, uh," Witton was uncomfortable, "brought over the Kommandant's things."

Another nod from Schultz.

"They sure made a mess," Martin said.

"Tomorrow," Schultz's voice was heavy, "I will have some of the men clean in here. If no one objects."

The two men shook their heads.

"Schultz," Witton said soberly, "I'm sorry. We're all sorry."

Schultz was silent for awhile and then lifted his head to look at the two men. "I am sorry too. What happened was not your fault, not Colonel Hogan's fault. It is only the fault of that Schweinehund. HE blames no one else; neither will I."

"He's a remarkable man, Schultz," Witton said softly. "Tonight, we found out how remarkable."

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Schultz blinked suddenly and then slowly, very slowly, smiled. "You know?"

"We all know, Schultz," Martin said.

"You all . . . He will be very angry with Colonel Hogan," Schultz said, not at all unhappy about the news.

Witton smiled faintly. "What will he do?"

"The Kommandant will tell Colonel Hogan exactly what he thinks of the Colonel for saying anything," Schultz said in his normal Schultz voice. "And Colonel Hogan will ignore him."

The two men smiled.

"It is good for the Kommandant to be ignored once in a while," Schultz continued.

The men laughed.

"You know them well, don't you, Schultz?" Witton said.

A sigh. "I do now. But for a long time," Schultz shook his head sadly, "for a long time, no.

"But," Schultz said briskly, "that is in the past. Now they are friends. And now," a sadness crossed his face, "the Kommandant is safe. Not well. But safe."

"He'll get well, Schultz," Witton said. "We'll make certain he does."

Schultz nodded. Again the faint smile. "He will be very angry."

The two men smiled at him and left him alone.

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Chapter 34

London:

The radio operator winced as he finished transcribing the message. Silently, he handed it to the night commander, Colonel Alistair Wembley.

Wembley looked at the message. And looked again. "You've made a mistake, Lt. Keyes"

"No, sir," Keyes said evenly. "No mistake."

"But this says . . . No, this must be a mistake. Or Hogan's planning something. Get them back, Keyes."

Suppressing a sigh, Keyes turned back to the radio. "Goldilocks calling Papa Bear. Goldilocks calling . . ." There was only silence in response to his calls. "Nothing, sir."

"Damn Hogan and his tricks!"

"Tricks, sir?"

"Of course, tricks. Hogan's been complaining about Randall since he got there. This is just an excuse to —"

"Sir," Keyes cut in, "we need to route the message upstairs."

"Balderdash! General Forbes can't be bothered with —"

"Sir," Keyes said again, managing not to scowl. "My orders are to route all nonroutine messages to General Forbes. Are you asking me to ignore my orders? Sir?"

"What?" Wembley turned red. "Of course, I'm not —"

"If this is, as you say, balderdash, sir, General Forbes will deal firmly with Hogan."

"Never thought of that. Of course. Too bad for Hogan to get into trouble. But it would teach him a lesson."

There was only one response Keyes could make and he made it. "Yes, sir."

Wembley glanced at the clock. "Of course, it's too late now. Better wait until morning."

"Sir, General Forbes is in his office," said the long-suffering Keyes.

"He is? Oh, well . . ."

"Would you like me to deliver the message, sir?"

"No, I'll do it. And inform General Forbes of what's been going on."

"Yes, sir." *And maybe he'll hand you your head afterwards*, Keyes thought as Wembley left. He glanced at the copy of the message. This time, he shuddered.

"I'm sure Hogan is exaggerating, as usual, sir," Wembley told General Forbes as he read the message.

Forbes looked at him. "Exaggerating? How do you exaggerate an

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accusation of torture?"

"Sir, I am certain that Colonel Randall is an exemplary officer. As such, the first thing he would do is what I would do — put the former commandant in the cooler. Well, from what I've been hearing, sir, Hogan seems to have become rather friendly with Klink."

"And you think Hogan would object to Randall locking Klink up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Colonel, there is a vast difference between putting Klink in the cooler and torturing him."

"Well, ordinarily, yes, sir. But with Hogan — "

"I find your animosity toward Hogan rather interesting, Colonel," Forbes said dryly. "Perhaps we should talk about it. But not now," he added to Wembley's relief. "Dismissed, Colonel."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir. Uh, sir, you don't really believe that Hogan meant torture as in . . . torture?"

"Unlike you, Colonel, I have no reason to think that Hogan meant anything other than what he said. Good night, Colonel."

"Good night, sir." Wembley saluted and turned on his heel.

Forbes shook his head as the door closed behind Wembley. "Wonder what got him so mad at Hogan?" he muttered. "But this . . ."

He read the message again. Frowning, he picked up his telephone. "Lt. Cottrell, do you know where General Gaines is? . . . France? . . . That's right. He went with General Edmondson to see Ike; I'd forgotten. Ring him there, please . . . Yes, it's urgent . . . All right. Keep trying. Call me back as soon as you've found him."

After an hour, his telephone rang. "General? . . . Oh." Forbes glanced at the clock. "All right. It's a done deal now anyway . . . What? . . . No. Just leave a message that I need to talk to him first thing in the morning."

Forbes hung up the telephone slowly, and glanced at the message again. This time, he suppressed a shiver.

* * * * *

Versailles, France — SHAEF HQ:

At 0800, General Forbes reached General J.J. Gaines at breakfast and read him the message.

Gaines stifled a curse. "I'll get back to you later, Forbes."

After apologizing to the other officers with him, Gaines left the table. He didn't have far to go. General Edmondson was giving a breakfast briefing

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upstairs in a private room. But it was a briefing Gaines was loath to interrupt. It was common knowledge that the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces was wound tighter than a spring lately, and nobody wanted to incur his justly famous temper.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Gaines's standing orders were to notify Edmondson immediately if there was something wrong at Stalag 13, and this was about as wrong as it could get.

Gaines knocked on the door and entered. Edmondson was there, along with a very familiar figure. And neither man looked happy at the interruption.

"Sorry to interrupt, sir," Gaines said somewhat nervously. He gave Edmondson the brief message from Stalag 13. To his surprise, Edmondson paled at the news.

Stars glistened in the harsh morning light as the SHAEF commander asked Gaines a bit tetchily to explain what was going on.

Gaines glanced at Edmondson who remained silent. "Stalag Luft 13, a small POW camp east of Dusseldorf, sir. It surrendered, along with the nearest town, to the senior officer, a Colonel Robert Hogan."

"A POW camp inside Germany?"

Gaines nodded.

"And it just surrendered? That's highly unusual."

"It's an unusual camp, sir," Gaines said, shooting another glance at Edmondson. "Hogan's been operating an escape service and sabotage group for some years with the help of many of the residents of the town. Thanks to some recent bombing runs, the entire area is now cut off from the war, which is probably why they surrendered. Since Hogan was a flyer with little staff experience, we sent in an administrator."

"This Randall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sounds like you made a mistake."

"I made the mistake," Edmondson said softly.

"You, Ted? Explain."

"A few hours before Randall was due to leave, I'd heard he was being investigated by CI. And I decided to let him go anyway. Partly because there wasn't any proof and partly because it was too late to get a replacement." Edmondson smiled grimly. "A calculated risk."

"Well, it's too bad Randall is a bad apple. But it's easily rectified. What I don't understand is why someone with your rank in Intelligence is interested in a POW camp, even one so unusual."

"Because of who he is."

⁸⁴ During this time frame, Eisenhower was under tremendous physical and mental strain, bordering on exhaustion. A well-earned vacation near the end of March did much to improve his health and disposition.

Scene Two

“Hogan?”

“No, sir. The man Randall tortured,” Edmondson said evenly. “He’s the Stage.”

Gaines stared at Edmondson as the SHAEF commander scowled. “The Stage? There’s no mistake?”

“No, sir. The commandant of that camp is the Stage.” A twisted smile. “It was a perfect cover. Until now.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, looked at Edmondson for a long moment before saying evenly, “Send a message, General Edmondson, approving the action. Use my name.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then get back here and finish this blasted briefing!”

Gaines and Edmondson saluted and left.

In the hall, Gaines turned to Edmondson. “You owe me an explanation, Ted.”

Edmondson nodded. “I know, Jay. Meet me for lunch at one. I should be finished with Ike by then.”

“All right.”

“See you later.”

Gaines nodded and left.

Edmondson looked around for his aide. Not seeing him, Edmondson went down to the dining room. His aide was there with several other officers. Edmondson pulled him away and explained what had happened.

Mason kept silent, but Edmondson could see the quiet reproof in his eyes. “I know; I fouled up. I need you to send a message to Stalag 13.”

“Yes, sir. What message?”

Edmondson told him.

“Yes, sir!” was Mason’s enthusiastic response.

“Mason, no one else is to know where the order came from.”

“Not even General Forbes?”

“Not yet.”

“General, what do you think will happen?”

A sigh. “Well, Randall’s finally going to get what he deserves.”

“You did say they could handle him, sir.”

A pessimistic, “Yes. But what a price. I didn’t know, didn’t think, Randall would go that far. And as for Hogan and Klink,” Edmondson shook his head, “I’m not sure. But I won’t be too surprised at anything that happens from now on.”

Scene Two

Chapter 35

It was the dead of night. Colonel Robert Hogan sat slumped in a chair, dozing uneasily. Kommandant Wilhelm Klink lay face down on the bed, his back lightly bandaged.

Kraut!

His head jerked toward the speaker. Something slammed into his stomach, doubling him over with a groan . . .

Klink! I can see you!

He ran blindly. The pain, the sweat, obscuring his vision. A cry as he stumbled and fell, something cutting into his ankle.

Panic clouded his mind as he desperately tried to free himself. Then HE was there. The rifle aimed.

NO!!!!!!

Pictures. They fell out of a drawer.

He picked one up. He nearly screamed. The bleeding mutilated thing that stared at him with those hopeless eyes couldn't have been human. But it was.

He couldn't stop it. Vomit spewed onto the desk . . .

His entire body was trembling as he walked down the steep stone stairs. The stench gagged him. Halfway down, his hand found a light switch. Shaking, he flicked it on.

Horror and fear lit his eyes. Oh God!

He was sick on the stairs, scarcely aware of his retching, his mind still reeling, trying to cope with the horror . . .

Kraut!

Klink!

Voices, harsh, laughing voices calling at him, shouting at him.

Hands, grabbing him, punching him.

A knife in his side.

Something tore his back.

Pictures.

Something was coming for him. That room . . .

He was in it. Tied to the bars.

Randall . . .

Reiner . . .

Hochstetter . . .

Laughing.

Scene Two

*Something was coming for him. Something . . .
He screamed!*

The scream tore from his throat as he jerked awake. Then he was crying. He couldn't stop crying.

Something, someone was there. His hand, something had his hand. Desperate, tears on his face, he tried to pull it away.

"It's all right," someone said softly. "It's over."

Over? It'll never be over. Never! He had sobbed the words into the pillow.

Someone was holding his head against a shoulder. "It's over," the voice murmured. "You're with me. I won't let anyone hurt you. Never."

A broken whisper, "Robert?"

"Yes," still the comforting voice. "Shhh."

"Robert," he breathed the name, his sobs quieting. He let himself be held against that comforting shoulder, let himself hear the soothing words.

The tears slowly stopped; his eyes closed. And it was quiet once more in the dark room.

* * * * *

Doctor Ernst Bauer entered the camp just after dawn, getting a friendly greeting from the guards at the gate. Yawning, he got out of the car and walked up the stairs into the Kommandant's quarters.

Schultz was snoring loudly on the sofa. The doctor smiled at him, letting him sleep.

Bauer walked to the guest bedroom, quietly opened the door and looked inside. He went no further.

Light was just filtering into the shuttered room. Colonel Hogan was getting up from beside the bed, his hand still holding the sleeping Kommandant's. There was an unexpectedly gentle expression on Hogan's face.

Soundlessly, Bauer closed the door. He walked back to the living room, back to the front door. With an apologetic glance at Schultz, Bauer slammed the door loudly.

With a start, Schultz awoke. "Who goes there?!"

"It is all right, Sergeant Schultz," Bauer said in a normal speaking voice. "I am sorry I awakened you."

Schultz glanced at his watch. "You are early, Herr Doktor."

The doctor smiled tiredly. "One of my patients decided to arrive a little earlier than anticipated, Sergeant. I thought I would check on the Kommandant before going home for some sleep."

Schultz smiled. "Is the patient a little boy or a little girl?"

"A boy, Sergeant. A fine healthy boy."

Scene Two

"His papa will be pleased."

Sadness on the doctor's face. "His papa was reported missing three months ago."

Schultz sighed heavily. "Missing." And shook his head sadly.

"Has the Kommandant awakened, Sergeant?" Bauer asked.

"For a few minutes, Herr Doktor. And he has had a little soup, not much."

Bauer nodded and walked back to the bedroom.

Hogan, his unshaven face drawn, opened the door. "Morning, Doctor."

"Guten Morgen, Colonel," Bauer said in a low voice. "Is he awake?"

Hogan shook his head. "He woke up a few times during the night."

"And how was he?"

"He had some water, some soup. Not long ago, he had a nightmare but he fell asleep again."

Bauer nodded, not surprised. "He will have dreams for awhile. I suspect he has had such dreams for months."

Hogan nodded, his eyes going to the sleeping man.

Bauer walked over to the bed. Klink appeared to be deeply asleep. It did not matter; Bauer could examine him just as easily. And sleep was what the Kommandant needed.

Bauer placed his bag on the table beside the bed. His gentle hands carefully lifted the bandage covering Klink's back. He took it off completely.

"Colonel Hogan," he said softly, "I would like hot water and small clean towels."

Hogan nodded and left. He returned a few minutes later; Schultz came with him.

"Do you need any help, Herr Doktor?" Schultz asked.

"Nein, danke," Bauer answered as he set to work.

Schultz and Hogan watched silently as the doctor cleansed Klink's ripped back with the water first and then with alcohol. Klink stirred. The doctor reached into his bag and pulled out a small bottle and a syringe. An injection. Klink stopped moving; Bauer finished his examination.

"He will sleep for several hours," the doctor said as he packed his bag. "I will be back then."

"It's bad, isn't it?" Hogan asked.

Bauer shrugged. "The flesh has been torn. It makes it more difficult to heal. We can hope there will be no infection."

"If there is, we can have some penicillin flown in."

"Penicillin? Was ist . . . What is penicillin?"⁸⁵

"A miracle drug from the States. Clears up infections in no time."

⁸⁵ As a German, Bauer would have no knowledge of penicillin, nor any access to it. See Appendix.

Scene Two

"Such a drug exists?"

Hogan nodded.

"Wunderbar." A glow lit Bauer's eyes. "To see such a drug . . . For a doctor, it would be truly a miracle, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan smiled faintly. "Would you like some coffee, Doctor?"

"Danke, Colonel Hogan."

Bauer followed Hogan into the kitchen; Schultz had tidied it up. Hogan poured a couple of cups of coffee and carried it over to the small table.

Bauer sat down and sipped his coffee gratefully. Then he looked at Hogan. "Colonel, from the little I have been told, have seen, I would say the Kommandant is a strong man, is he not?"

Hogan nodded. "Yeah, the strongest I've known."

"Has he," Bauer asked hesitantly, "has he let himself be less than strong?"

Hogan was taken aback. "What do you mean?"

"What I mean, Colonel," Bauer said softly, "is that even strong men must admit to human weakness. For their own sakes. Otherwise, when they least expect it, they may be . . . overcome."

Bauer had given up expecting an answer when Hogan said, "Yes," in a low voice.

Bauer waited patiently.

"After the cave-in," Hogan said in a barely audible voice, "in the hospital, he was dreaming when I walked in. Then later, when he, uh, left for a few days." Bauer's eyes stayed on him, guessing at the time. "And not that long ago, he admitted that he panicked and ran."

"But he came back," Bauer said.

Hogan nodded. "I didn't think he'd come back alive," he whispered.

"But he did," Bauer said.

A bitter, "And look what happened to him!"

"He is alive, Colonel," Bauer said softly. "Thanks to you. And with your help, he will recover. Perhaps, with his help, you will too," Bauer added gently.

A startled look at the doctor.

Bauer rose. "I must go. I have other patients to see. I will come back later, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan also stood. "I would appreciate it if you would ask Herr Hausner, the Bürgermeister, Chief Krueger and Monsignor Geisler to come back with you this afternoon. I think we have some things to talk about."

Bauer nodded. "I will ask them. I would also suggest, Colonel, that you get some sleep. Tired, you will be of little use to yourself or the men in your command. If you would like something to help you sleep . . . ?"

Hogan shook his head. "Thanks." A wan smile. "I don't think I'll have trouble falling asleep."

"As you wish. Until later, Colonel Hogan." Bauer bowed slightly and left.

A few minutes later, Hogan also left Klink's quarters, leaving Schultz to watch his Kommandant.

Scene Two

"Colonel Hogan!" Witton hailed him.

Hogan stopped and waited for Witton and Mitchell to reach him. Both men looked concerned.

"Is there a problem, gentlemen?"

"We're not sure, Colonel," Witton said. "We seem to be missing a man and a jeep."

"Who?"

"Sergeant Chaykin," Mitchell said. "He and some of his friends got drunk in town last night. About half a mile from here, Chaykin got sick in the jeep. His pals left him with the jeep and walked back. But Chaykin never showed up."

Hogan frowned as Mitchell continued, "We've backtracked the road nearly to Hammelburg. No sign of him or the jeep."

"We'd like your permission to inform Chief Krueger and ask for his help," Witton said.

Hogan nodded. "You've got it. But I don't want any civilians confronting Chaykin. If they find him, they're to call you immediately. Then send some men to get him."

"Agreed, sir."

Hogan nodded and went to his barracks for a nap.

Hogan awakened, feeling refreshed, from a dreamless sleep. He walked into the common room. Witton, Mitchell and Martin were there.

"It wasn't your fault, Kinch," Newkirk was saying. He stopped as he saw Hogan.

Hogan greeted them and sat at the table as LeBeau served him a late lunch.

"Anything wrong?" Hogan asked, looking from one man to the other as he picked up a fork.

"We found Chaykin, Colonel," Witton said.

Hogan looked at him expectantly.

"He's dead."

"And it's my fault," Kinch said softly.

"No, it's not," Witton said firmly. "It could have happened to any of us."

"What happened?" Hogan asked.

Kinch opened his mouth and shut it as Witton shook his head.

"We got a call a little after ten," Witton said. "One of Krueger's men found the jeep. It was stuck in the mud more than halfway up the drive leading to the River View Lodge. I took some men, including Sergeant Kinchloe and Corporal Newkirk, and we went to take a look. At the lodge door, Frau Engel greeted us."

"She'd been beaten, Colonel," Newkirk said. "Tried to hide it with some makeup."

"Tried lying to us too," Witton said. "Turned out Chaykin had a gun on her kids."

"We played along. And then snuck back through the woods. We found

Scene Two

Chaykin on the terrace, stinking drunk — he'd been in the liquor supply. When he saw us, he grabbed Frau Engel, using her as a hostage. That's when it happened."

"What?" asked Hogan, shooting a glance at Kinch who looked sick and withdrawn as he sat on the bench.

"Her eldest, a boy of twelve," Witton said evenly. "He grabbed Chaykin from behind. Chaykin backhanded him with the gun. Sent him head first into the wall. But that let Frau Engel get away from him and let us move in on Chaykin.

"Chaykin managed to take off into the trees. He didn't listen when I ordered him to stop. And he didn't pay attention to where he was going. He slipped and slid off the edge of the cliff."

"I got to him first, Colonel," Kinch said in a low voice. "He was hanging over the drop, caught on some roots. I reached for him. Tried to get him to take my hand . . ."

"But Chaykin panicked," Witton said. "He was screaming and thrashing around."

"I lunged at him," Kinch said. "Managed to grab his sleeve. Tried to pull him up. But he fell."

"And nearly took you with him," Newkirk said. "If I hadn't piled on your legs, you'd have slipped over too. And that's the God's honest truth, Colonel."

"I agree," Witton said.

Hogan nodded. "You said Chaykin hit a boy?"

"Frau Engel's eldest, Stefan."

"How is he?"

"We don't know, Colonel. The boy hit the wall hard. He was bleeding and unconscious. We used a walkie-talkie to notify Olsen in town. He called Doctor Bauer. Bauer was there when we left; the boy was still unconscious."

Hogan shook his head. "We're not exactly making friends in town."

"It was worse than that, Colonel," Mitchell said. "It seems Chaykin found out what we were doing to Randall's men when they got back to camp. He was mean, drunk and scared when he decided to hide at the lodge. He took it out on Frau Engel; raped her too. And she knew he'd hurt the kids if she said anything."

Hogan nodded. But he was looking at Kinch. Kinch had withdrawn into himself. Chaykin's death, a death Kinch felt responsible for, was hitting him hard.

"You didn't kill him, Kinch," Hogan said quietly.

"If I'd just held on — !"

"Don't, Ivan," Hogan said even more quietly. "Remember what you told me at the cabin before we found Klink? Don't blame yourself for something that wasn't your fault." His eyes met Kinch's. "Follow your own good advice, my friend."

Kinch looked at him for a long time before nodding slowly. "I'll try,

Scene Two

Colonel.”

Hogan smiled faintly. “Good.”

The bunk to the tunnel rattled loudly.

Baker came up from the tunnel, holding a piece of paper. “London, Colonel.”

The men exchanged worried looks. There could still be hell to pay for what had happened.

Hogan took the sheet and read it silently. And he reread it. Then he looked at Baker.

Baker smiled. “I kept asking them to repeat the last part. By the third time, they were a little annoyed.”

“What’s it say, Colonel?” Martin asked.

Hogan read, ““Action approved. You are in command until new commanding officer appointed.”” He passed the note to Witton.

Witton whistled as he saw who it was from — Dwight D. Eisenhower, SHAEF. “You have friends in high places, Colonel.”

A rueful grin. “I don’t think I’m the one with the friends.”

Mitchell stared at the note. “We knew he was important, but he’s that important?”

“Must be.” Hogan smiled, his good humor returning. “When he gets out of bed, he’s gonna have some explaining to do.”

Doctor Bauer returned later in the day with the four men. By then, the living quarters were in much better shape than they had been earlier.

Hogan, looking more rested, greeted the men. They waited patiently while Bauer checked on his patient.

Bauer came back, pleased with the Kommandant’s condition. “He is coming along nicely. There appears to be no infection and the tissues are beginning to heal.”

Hogan visibly relaxed. “Shall we get started, gentlemen?”

The men sat at the table; Hilda sat on the sofa, ready to take notes. Gruber was there, as well as Witton and Martin.

Hogan listened as the men, often emotionally, recounted what had happened in town since Randall’s arrival.

Hogan formally apologized to the men for the Allied soldiers’ behavior. An apology that was accepted by the four men for the town.

“And they will be punished,” Hogan added. “When your people feel up to it, I would like descriptions of the men who committed the crimes so we can deal with them. I will also need statements from the injured people and any witnesses.”

“We will be able to provide those shortly, Colonel Hogan,” Scheinfeld promised. “But our people are very nervous, Colonel. And,” he hesitated, “we have a request.”

“What is it?”

“That your men stay away from the town,” Hausner said bluntly.

“That’s kind of harsh, isn’t it?” Hogan said slowly.

Scene Two

"Perhaps." Geisler's tone was placating. "But for now our people are badly frightened. And not very trusting. If you insist on sending your men to town, their reception will be, to put it mildly, cool."

"All right," Hogan said. "I admit I don't like it, but I'll abide by your wishes."

"Danke schön, Colonel," Scheinfeld said gratefully; he hadn't expected Hogan to agree.

"Now I have a request," Hogan said. The men looked at him. "I think it would be best for everyone if we go back to the routine we had established before Randall," they could hear the hate in his voice, "showed up. Captain Gruber and his men keep on doing what they were doing." A glance at Gruber, who nodded. "Does everyone agree?"

There were nods from the townspeople.

"Any other questions or problems?" Hogan asked. The others shook their heads. "Okay. Then I suggest we put everything else on hold until the Kommandant is well enough to join us."

"Agreed," Scheinfeld said promptly and stood. "Guten Tag, Colonel Hogan, meine Herren."

The others stood as well and said goodbye.

"Doctor," Hogan said, escorting Bauer to the door, "how's the Engel boy?"

Bauer shook his head. "He has regained consciousness. But it is too soon to tell what injuries he has."

"He hit his head?"

Bauer nodded. "But he was hit with a gun first. Here." He touched his upper forehead at the hairline. "Then he hit the back of his head on the wall. Either injury could have caused a skull fracture and internal bleeding. Without an X-ray, there is no way to tell. All I can do is observe him for the next few days."

"I hope he'll be okay. Sounds like a brave kid, tackling Chaykin that way."

Bauer nodded. "He is. And with his father gone, he had been a great help to his mother. And a great comfort. Now . . ." Bauer shook his head. "I will be back tomorrow morning, Colonel."

"Thanks, Doctor."

"Auf Wiedersehen, Colonel."

"Auf Wiedersehen."

Now only Hogan and Schultz remained.

Hogan glanced around. "It's looking better, Schultz."

"Danke, Colonel Hogan. There is soup on the stove. Would you like to take it to the Kommandant?"

Hogan nodded and waited until Schultz returned with a tray.

Hogan took the tray into the darkened room and placed it on the nightstand. Klink stirred as he did so. Hogan knelt beside the bed.

Klink's eyes opened; Hogan smiled at him. "Hi."

A wan smile in return.

Scene Two

"How about some soup? LeBeau just made it."

A nod.

Hogan smiled and stood. Carefully, he eased Klink on his side, his head bolstered by several pillows. Then Hogan knelt again and picked up the bowl of soup. He dipped the spoon into the soup and held it to Klink's lips.

"There's some meat in here," Hogan said after awhile. "Think you're ready for it?"

A faint whisper, "Later."

"Whenever you're ready," Hogan said, continuing to give him the soup.

After a few more spoonfuls, Klink's eyes closed. Hogan put the soup bowl back on the tray. Then the blue eyes opened for a moment.

"Want me to leave?" Hogan asked.

A shake of the head; a faint, "No."

"I can't stay all night," Hogan said in a light voice. "I need my beauty sleep."

A smile fluttered on Klink's lips. "Just a little . . ." His voice faded as his eyes closed again.

Hogan sat down in the easy chair beside the bed.

When Schultz walked in later, both men were fast asleep. With a smile, Schultz left the room.

The next couple of days passed uneventfully.

Doctor Bauer came over a couple of times a day to check on his patient. Schultz continued to keep jealous watch over his Kommandant, letting no one save for Hogan and Doctor Bauer near him. After that first day, Hogan spent less time with Klink, though visiting him frequently to assure himself that Klink was getting better. He now had other things to worry about.

Randall's men, including the MPs from Barracks 79, had been rounded up and were either in the barracks or in the cooler. Most of them, once the depositions from the town had been taken and the guilty identified, would probably be freed. But for now, Hogan was too angry to pay them any attention.

Gruber and the former guards, helped by Captains Witton and Martin, along with some of the former prisoners, took care of the day-to-day operations in the camp.

During those days, Schultz, along with a couple of German privates, restored order to the Kommandant's quarters. During those days, Klink slept.

It was morning, an unexpectedly clear, sunny morning, and for the first time Klink made an appearance. It wasn't much of an appearance. He was dressed in loose gym clothes, sitting on the railing of the porch with a cup of coffee in his hands, looking over the compound.

As Hogan walked over, a couple of British soldiers saluted as they walked by. Klink absently returned the salute, looking puzzled after he did so.

Scene Two

“Should you be out of bed?” Hogan demanded in greeting.

A very faint smile. “Schultz is airing it out,” he explained. “As soon as it’s done, I’m going back.”

“Good.”

Klink looked at the cup in his hand. “I don’t think I’ve thanked you yet.”

“Don’t mention it.” A smile. “Are we even yet?”

Klink smiled faintly. “I think after this we are. Even if we weren’t,” he added to Hogan’s annoyance. “How much trouble are you in?”

A wide grin. “I’m glad you asked.”

Klink looked at him.

“This came a couple of days ago.” Hogan handed him the note.

Klink read it silently, feeling Hogan’s eyes on him. “I, uh, I’ve never met him. I don’t know why he should get involved.”

“Uh, huh.”

“I’ve just had some dealings with his staff.”

“Right.”

Klink started to hand the note back.

“Keep it. For your scrapbook.”

“I do not have a scrapbook.”

Hogan grinned. “I’ll bet Schultz does. See you later, Kommandant.”

With a smile in his eyes, Klink watched him leave. Then he looked puzzled as another group of former prisoners saluted him when they walked by.

Scene Two

Chapter 36

A couple of days later, Klink, in uniform and away from his quarters for the first time, was walking across the compound.

“Good morning, sir,” greeted an American lieutenant as he saluted.

“Good morning,” Klink said, automatically returning the salute as he continued on his way. Then he stopped, looking back at the lieutenant with a bemused expression.

“Good day, sir,” from a trio of Englishmen, along with snappy salutes

“Good day . . .” His voice faded as he registered the salutes. Baffled, he glanced back at them.

“Bonjour, Kommandant.” A group of Frenchman marched in formation, and also saluted.

“Bon . . .”

By the time he located Hogan in the recreation hall, Klink was extremely confused.

In the recreation hall, Hogan was sitting with Witton and Martin, nursing a cup of coffee. Around them, several dozen men played darts, checkers, pool, cards and other games or just talked. In the background, the radio played lively music.

Klink appeared at the door.

“Attention!” Then almost immediately, “At ease.”

It happened in seconds, but it stopped Klink in his tracks.

Hogan stood and walked over to him. “What can I do for you, Kommandant?”

Klink looked uncertain, rather like his old persona, as all eyes in the room seemed to be on him. “I’d like to talk to you, Colonel Hogan. Alone.”

“Of course, Kommandant.”

The two men stepped outside and out of the way of the men going into the hall. They stopped near a window. Neither noticed that it was partially open.

“All right, Hogan.” The men inside could hear Klink’s voice. “What is going on?”

Without the least bit of shame, the men inside listened.

“What are you talking about?” Hogan asked.

A couple of men walked by, saluted and kept on walking.

“That is what I am talking about!”

“Huh?”

“In the past hour,” Klink managed to lower his voice, “I have seen more salutes than I had seen in a month. In one day, more than I saw in a whole year. What is going on?”

“Just military courtesy, sir,” Hogan said innocently.

“Military cour . . . Hah!” The old Klink voice reasserted itself. “What did

Scene Two

you do?”

“Me? I didn’t do anything.”

“Hogan.” Klink’s voice was filled with warning.

“All I did was tell a story.”

“Story? What story?”

“You wouldn’t know it, sir. It’s about an American hero.”

“American hero?”

“Yes, sir. A guy named Zorro. You see this guy, Zorro — ”

“I know the story!” Klink snapped. “What has . . . ?” He broke off. He sounded aghast when they heard him again. “You didn’t?”

“It’s only a story, sir,” Hogan said innocently.

“And . . . ” Klink’s voice cracked. He cleared it. “And to whom did you tell this story?”

“The entire camp. You see, we were getting bored so we put on a radio show and — ”

“The entire . . . ” Klink’s voice faded as the listening men’s grins grew.

Then, after a long silence . . .

“Colonel Hogan.” A stern, military tone. “You are the most exasperating, irritating . . . infuriating man I have ever met. You have no concept of military discipline, even less of military security. And any general unlucky enough to have you around will regret it for the rest of his life!”

Hogan grinned. “You’re absolutely right, sir.” He leaned against the building and looked at Klink.

Klink stared at him.

Finally . . .

“I do not know why I bother.” The irritation, the old Klink voice, was gone. Just the quiet tone with a touch of humor in it that few of the others had ever heard remained.

Hogan smiled. “I don’t know why you do either. Just enjoy it. It’s long overdue. Think you’re up to a game of chess?”

“My place?”

“What’s wrong with here?” Hogan said. “There’s a chess set somewhere.”

Klink sighed. “Why not?”

By the time the two men returned, the others in the hall were busily occupied. A chess set had mysteriously appeared on a table near the door.

There was a replay of Klink’s prior entrance as they entered the hall.

Klink sighed as they walked over to the table with the chess set. As they sat, Klink said, “Do you think you could not do that? It is very disconcerting.”

Hogan smiled. “Oh, I think we could manage that.”

“Good.” Klink removed his cap and placed it beside the set. “You may have the first move.”

“You’re all heart, Kommandant.”

Scene Two

A small smile. "I believe that title is now properly yours, Colonel," said the quiet voice.

"Let's just keep the titles as they were, shall we? Your move."

Their game attracted a small audience. This was the first time that most of them had seen the two play. In the old days, most of the men knew that Hogan had let the Kommandant win. But now they realized Hogan had to work at not losing too quickly.

The radio continued to play in the background. Whenever the music stopped, the sound was turned up in case there were any important announcements. Now it was time for a kind of gossipy good news about the war.

After a few minutes, the voice said: "And in the world of daring raids, this was just declassified. When the Allies made their advance on Germany's borders, they got welcome help from the resistance. In one of the most brilliantly timed operations of the war, nineteen units of a mysterious resistance leader," eyes swung to the chess players, "stopped the Nazis from destroying vital bridges and roads. They also blew up several munitions dumps and fuel depots. It is rumored that the leader of the organization personally led one of the units. And in other news . . ."

Hogan leaned closer to Klink. "Should I even bother asking?"

A smile played on Klink's lips. "You're a bright boy, Colonel. You should be able to figure it out."

Hogan thought a minute. "The last staff meeting."

Klink nodded and moved a piece.

Hogan smiled. "Busy meeting."

"The meeting was dull; the night was busy."

Hogan was surprised by his candor. "Congratulations. Nice job."

"Not as nice as it should have been," was the rejoinder.

Hogan looked at him.

"No one talks about the failures," Klink said quietly. "There were supposed to be twenty-five units involved. Three couldn't reach their targets; another three were caught. Five men were killed immediately and the rest were taken to concentration camps. Six others died that night." He looked at Hogan. "One of them should have been me."

Around them, the listening men exchanged somber looks.

"What happened?" Hogan asked.

"A patrol where one was not supposed to be. I was pushed out of the way; someone else died."

"I'm sorry," Hogan said.

A sober smile. "As I said, no one ever hears about the failures. When people die, I do not consider it a success."

Play continued silently for a while.

"By the way," Hogan asked, "you never said what happened at the meeting."

A faint smile. "We were planning the evacuations of our camps."

"Including this one?"

Scene Two

"Of course."

"I think you blew it, Kommandant."

"I am certain that is what General Burkhalter thinks," Klink said dryly.

"It's a good thing he didn't decide to come and help things along," Hogan said with a smile.

A fleeting smile. "If he had, he would have gotten the shock of his life. But I think he had more important things to worry about."

"Like his neck?"

"I am certain that crossed his mind."

"You never really considered evacuating the camp, did you?" Hogan asked.

"Of course not. But Burkhalter had to think I did." He looked at Hogan. "Instead, I evacuated, so to speak, some of the guards."

"But most stayed."

"Most stayed."

"I hope none are regretting it," Hogan said softly.

"Now, no," Klink said just as softly.

Play continued silently for a few minutes.

"Did you ever think about leaving?" Hogan finally asked.

A pause and then a nod. "Yes," was the quiet reply.

The others exchanged surprised looks.

"After all, the war is not over. There is more than enough to do."

"Why didn't you?" Hogan asked.

"A few years ago, even a few months ago, I probably would have," Klink admitted. "Now, I'm too tired to run around the countryside. And that's what it would have meant if I left the camp. I reasoned here I would have access to your radio, even if I were restricted to the camp. I didn't think I would be completely cut off from the rest of the camp."

"Or nearly killed." The bitterness was back in Hogan's voice.

"Or nearly killed," Klink said evenly. "Do remind me to complain to London."

Hogan managed a small smile.

A few more moves.

"By the way, Colonel," Klink asked in his kommandant voice. "When are you going to get to all those papers piling up in the office?"

"I was going to ask you the same question," Hogan said as Witton and Martin grimaced.

"Me?" Klink sounded shocked. "They are not my papers. Every single piece of quadruplicate is in English. And all to the attention of the commanding officer." His eyes glowed with amusement as he looked at Hogan. "I believe that is now you."

"Well, I'm delegating it to you."

"Surely you're joking. Under the Geneva Prisoner of War — "

"You're quoting the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention!"

"Of course, I am," Klink retorted as the others grinned. "You've quoted it to me often enough. I am now a prisoner of war. And I am not going to do

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your paperwork, Colonel. I've done more than my share of it over the years, thank you. Besides, I'd like to see you try to explain to Allied High Command that a German colonel is doing your paperwork."

"Well, they can do it." Hogan waved at Witton and Martin.

They wanted to protest, but Klink was doing it for them. "You cannot give it to them until you've looked at it yourself. By the way, who is the duty officer for the day?"

"Uh," Hogan floundered.

A smile played on Klink's lips. "I wondered how far you thought out your little mutiny. There is more to running a camp than deciding you are in charge. Food must ordered, supplies requisitioned, transportation and communications arranged, work details assigned. In short, everything."

"Gruber's doing all of that."

An exaggerated sigh. "Captain Gruber is also covered by the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention. It is high time you started doing something around here besides playing chess." Klink stood. "Come along, Colonel. We'll manage to make a staff officer out of you yet."

"But," Hogan protested, wanting to delay the inevitable, "we haven't finished the game."

"Oh." Klink looked at the board and moved his knight. "Checkmate."

Hogan stared in disbelief at the pieces as the men around him stifled laughs.

Klink picked up his cap. "Coming, Colonel?"

Hogan slowly pushed back his chair and stood.

Klink was almost at the door; he waited for Hogan.

"You're enjoying this," Hogan accused.

Klink opened the door and considered. "Yes, I am," he admitted with a smile. "Coming?"

"Coming," Hogan sighed and walked over to Klink. "How do I get myself into these things?" he muttered.

"You don't think things through. You rarely have . . ."

Klink's voice faded as they walked away from the building.

Inside, the men laughed. It looked like things were going to remain as interesting as ever.

* * * *

Around the island that was Hammelburg and the camp, the war raged on. All along the Rhine, Allied armies continued their assault on German positions. There were no longer any German armies west of the river. Among the cities taken by the Allies on the Western Front were Bonn, Cologne, Wesel, Koblenz, Saarbrücken, and Worms; most of them were in ruins. Patton's Third Army was nearing Frankfurt; Hodges' First Army was heading south from Cologne to meet up with them. In the north, the

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Canadian First Army, the British Second Army and the US Ninth Army were putting pressure on the Ruhr valley north of Dusseldorf.

In the east, Pomerania and western Prussia were under attack by General Zhukov's forces. Though Himmler's refusal to evacuate civilians had trapped over a million people behind Soviet lines, the German navy continued to evacuate troops and refugees all along the Baltic coast.

Thousands of bombing missions continued to rain death on cities and soldiers throughout Germany. Each day brought news of thousands of men surrendering, thousands of lives lost, countless towns and villages destroyed, hundreds of thousands of civilians forced from the remains of their homes, and even more fleeing from the fighting. But the worst was the news of the atrocities inflicted on civilians and soldiers by many of the Soviet troops.

Still the war continued as Hitler, now buried in his bunker in Berlin, refused to admit defeat while Germany hemorrhaged to death. Instead, he ordered a "scorched Earth" policy, demanding the destruction of German industry, transportation and utilities. Knowing the end was coming, the order was quietly sabotaged by Hitler's trusted minister Albert Speer and the soon-to-be-replaced Chief of Staff Guderian, along with most local commanders.

At Stalag Luft 13, the days passed peacefully. Klink was coaching Hogan in the art of running the camp. And Hogan, to his surprise, was actually starting to like it. Slowly, the duties of Klink's men were being taken over by the former prisoners, though not without some mild complaining. But, as Hogan was forced to admit, Randall had been right about one thing — it was time they started remembering they were soldiers.

A couple of days after Klink's appearance in the recreation hall, the townspeople came to the camp. In small groups, they went into Klink's quarters and told their stories.

Hogan stayed in the background, letting Klink take over the questioning. The torture he'd suffered at Randall's hands gave Klink a kinship with the townspeople who had been hurt. They responded to him with openness whereas with Hogan they might have been belligerent. With the raped women, Klink showed a sensitivity, a gentleness that had surprised Hogan. His quiet questions and sympathy drew out details that the women might not have otherwise told. When the townspeople left that day, any lingering doubts they may have had about the former Kommandant of the camp had vanished.

And any doubts they may have had about the guilty going unpunished were dispelled as Hogan ordered the arrest of the dozen men who had committed the rapes and the beatings. Another two were arrested for the severe damage they had caused. The rest, some four or five men, would make restitution for the damage they'd caused while drunk.

The twenty-eight men from Barracks 79 who had served as MPs under Randall were moved out of the barracks and scattered throughout the rest

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of the camp. It soon became clear to them that their behavior while part of Yeager's gang had created a great deal of ill-will among the rest of the men. And it became even clearer that any missteps on their part would land them in cells adjacent to the nine of their former bunkmates awaiting trial in the cooler.

The other men who had come in with Randall were freed from the barracks they had been locked in since the night Hogan took over. Captain Witton took charge of the men and told them what had happened and what was expected of them. There was some grumbling about the treatment they'd received, grumbling which was silenced as Hogan unexpectedly walked in and apologized to them for lumping them in with the rest of Randall's men. His apology, along with the story they'd heard, served to defuse their animosity. Now they looked with curiosity at the man who had led that secret escape and sabotage group from the camp. Even more curious glances were directed at the unassuming former Kommandant of the camp who had approved that secret resistance group. And slowly those men were absorbed into the life of the camp, their skills coming in very handy.

Doctor Bauer had stopped going to the camp. Instead, Klink, driven by Schultz, went to see him. There were no murmurings as the doctor saw Klink ahead of other waiting patients. Nor did Hogan complain when Klink's excursions took a lot longer than the trip to the doctor should have taken. Nor was Hogan surprised to see additional mileage being added to the speedometer.

"Cabin still there?" he asked with a grin after Klink's first such excursion.

A silent smile was his reply.

Appendix

Acknowledgements

Many, many thanks to Mel Hughes and LaVerne Cash who graciously let me borrow characters and situations from their **HH** stories. They also allowed me to bounce ideas off them and helped in the editing and proofing of *Act Four*.

Special thanks to Reverend Ken Tipton who is the real life counterpart of LaVerne's Ken Tiptoe for allowing me to "borrow" him.

Thanks also to Barbara Musser and Malisa Myers for their comments and suggestions.

A "danke schön" to Susanne Hassler who proofed the German speakers' speech patterns and language.

And finally, many thanks to the wonderfully creative people who were responsible for **Hogan's Heroes**. Especially the late Werner Klemperer whose brilliant portrayal of Wilhelm Klink led to the creation of the Stage.

A Word or Two

Any story dealing with **Hogan's Heroes** must of necessity include fiction and an element or two of fantasy. However, I have tried to incorporate real history where possible. The details about the war, battles, occupied cities, etc. have been culled from a variety of sources, including the readings and websites shown below.

The behavior of Randall and his men, sad to say, emulated the behavior of some real life Americans and Allied soldiers. And their behavior was mild compared to the atrocities that were committed against soldiers and civilians, particularly against women, by numerous Soviet soldiers. In fairness, it must be said that the Germans' behavior, particularly SS behavior, as they advanced east was often horrific. However, as various sources pointed out, the Soviets from Stalin down actively abetted the brutality committed by many in the Soviet armed forces. And such brutality was not committed solely against the enemy; the Soviet people and soldiers also suffered from it.

Klink's summation of Stalin's attitude toward Soviet POWs is unfortunately very true. Regardless of how they were captured, Stalin's view was that Soviet POWs failed in their duty to him by remaining alive. Despite their imprisonment, they were thought to be contaminated by the West, and so their loyalty to the state, to Stalin, was suspect. After the Soviet POWs were "liberated" from the German camps, some were executed outright. Many were sent to the front lines as "cannon fodder" (Beever's *The Fall of Berlin 1945*). The rest were exiled to gulags — the Soviet concentration camps. Very few Soviet POWs returned home. And those that did had numerous restrictions put on them. Even now, the Soviets are

reluctant to acknowledge the terrible lot that befell their POWs at the hands of their own government.

Those civilians who weren't personally brutalized by the soldiers of the Allied armies still suffered horribly from the bombings, the loss of their homes and possessions, deprivation (including starvation), and being forced from their homes in one of the most brutal winters of the century. Beevor's *The Fall of Berlin 1945* and Botting's *From the Ruins of the Reich, Germany 1945 – 1949*, among others, give vivid descriptions of the fate of the civilians caught up in the war and its aftermath. They are not easy reading.

The history of the Holocaust as given by Klink was drawn mainly from the *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust*. The *Atlas* gives an overall history of the Holocaust and the countries involved and then gives a description (including maps) and brief history of each concentration camp.

The Area of the Camp – “The Ruhr Pocket”

The fictional Stalag Luft 13 was located, as noted in numerous episodes, near a town not far from Dusseldorf in northwestern Germany. That area was one of the last holdouts of the German forces in the West during WWII. The Ruhr industrial area, which included Dusseldorf, was vital to the German war effort and economy, and it was not easily given up. Field Marshall Walter Model's Army Group B and its 300,000 men held the Ruhr long after the Allies had overrun other western areas. Eventually surrounded by Allied forces in early April, the area continued to be bitterly contested.

The Bible

I used the *New International Version* translation of the *King James Bible*. It wasn't available in 1945 and Tiptoe would have used the *King James Version*. However, since I have non-native English speakers among my readers, I decided to use the modern translation, as the *King James Version* may not be completely understandable to them.

The Bridge at Remagen:

The failure of the Germans to destroy the Bridge at Remagen is one of the mysteries of the war; the web site calls it the “miracle” of Remagen. The bridge had been mined both above and below the water. But the explosives failed to destroy the bridge. The Germans then tried to destroy it by artillery fire and bombing runs, which weakened the bridge. But it was still passable, as the Americans discovered on March 7, 1945. On March 17, 1945, the weakened bridge collapsed, killing 28 Americans. But by then, pontoon bridges had been built across the Rhine and losing the bridge had no effect on the Allies ability to cross the Rhine. A further consequence of the bridge crossing was that the Germans concentrated many of their forces there in an effort to contain the Allies. By doing so, the southern portions of the Rhine were underdefended, allowing Patton’s Third Army to cross with relative ease. The web site, www.bruecke-remagen.de, is in English and German.

The *Meditation* from the opera *Thais* by Jules Massenet

There are a number of current recordings of this piece by various violinists. My favorite, and the way I envision Klink playing it, is by Nadia Salerno-Sonnenberg, Angel Records, 1988. It is available from www.Amazon.com and other vendors.

There is a recording of Jascha Heifetz playing the *Meditation* in the 1940s. It’s on “Jascha Heifetz, Never-Before-Released and Rare Live Recordings”, Cembal d’amour, available through www.Amazon.com. I don’t know if there were earlier recordings of Heifetz performing the *Meditation*. But given its popularity, it is likely that there was a recording of it available in the thirties. If not, then this is a case of literary license.

Heifetz did give a concert in Berlin in 1912.

Penicillin

We’re so used to penicillin and other antibiotics that we can’t fully appreciate what penicillin meant to doctors, and patients, during WWII. Before 1944, sulfa was the only effective way to treat infections. However, its use back then was still fairly limited and not very efficient. And people would die from something as minor as a scratch from a rose bush.

The first true antibiotic, penicillin, was indeed a miracle drug in 1945. Though discovered by Alexander Fleming in 1928, years of

experimentation by scientists produced only enough penicillin for limited laboratory testing. It wasn't until Dr. Howard Florey and Dr. Ernst Chain of Oxford University in England began experimenting with it before the war that its potential for treating and curing infections came to be appreciated.

Since facilities to produce amounts that could be tested on patients were hampered by the war in Europe, Dr. Florey contacted the U.S. Committee on Medical Research for help in 1940. But it wasn't until 1942 when a new method of producing penicillin was found that amounts large enough to test on human patients became available.

By 1943, enough was produced to test the drug on 100 injured soldiers. The results were so favorable that they convinced the U.S. government to invest the money to produce massive amounts of the drug. Eventually, enough penicillin was produced to send with medics and doctors on D-day in June 1944. However, there were still storage and production problems. Except for a few isolated instances, its use was restricted to the military as penicillin was very sensitive, difficult to produce, had to be given in a series of injections, and would only keep a couple of weeks under refrigeration. (One tedious way of producing it involved extracting it from the urine of soldiers who'd been given it.)

In short, Dr. Bauer and other German doctors would have had no knowledge of penicillin or other antibiotics. Other antibiotics didn't exist, and penicillin was available only for Allied military personnel. It wasn't until after the war that it became available for civilian use.

Fanzines

Dress Rehearsal:

The prequel to the *Theater of War* series can be ordered from Mel Hughes; it is \$9.00 U.S. To order, send check or money order to:

Mel Hughes
2664 Sam Hardwick Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32246
Email: mlktrout@attbi.com;
after March, 2003, try mlktrout@comcast.net

Mel is currently working on the sequel, *Dress Rehearsal 2: Encore*.

New Beginnings:

Not quite a prequel to *Dress Rehearsal*, but borrows from it. It is \$9.00 U.S. To order, send check or money order to:

LaVerne Cash
100 Drexel Drive
Bel Air, MD 21014
Email: lavernecash@yahoo.com

Fan fiction is also available online. One site with hundreds of fandoms is www.fanfiction.net. A search will bring up other online sites. Also see **HH** web sites below.

And, yes, there will be an *Act Five*, and ultimately an *Act Six*.

Recommended Reading

Some of these are now out of print. A library or used books store may have them, or they might be found through Bibliofind.com or other used books search engines.

Beevor, Antony. *The Fall of Berlin 1945*. Viking Penguin, 2002.

Botting, Douglas. *From the Ruins of the Reich, Germany 1945 – 1949*. Crown Publishing, Inc., 1985.

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Goralski, Robert. *World War II Almanac, 1931-1945, A Political and Military Record*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981.

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Read, Anthony and Fisher, David. *The Fall of Berlin*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1992.

Shoemaker, Lloyd. *The Escape Factory: The Story of Mis-X*. St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Yechiam, Halevy. *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Macmillan Publishing USA, 1996.

Zink, Harold. *The United States in Germany 1944 – 1955*. D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1957.

The History Book Club offers many books on WWII. The web site is www.historybookclub.com. There is a military book club; their web site is www.militarybookclub.com; it also has books published exclusively for them.

There is a magazine devoted to WWII, called, as you might guess, *World War II*. The web site is www.TheHistoryNet.com.

World War II Web Sites

A search on World War II will bring up millions of hits, some useful, some not. Some of the more informative ones are, in no particular order:

<http://www.teacheroz.com/wwii.htm>

Links to hundreds of sites on WWII.

http://connections.smsd.org/veterans/wwii_sites.htm

Links to hundreds of sites on WWII

<http://www.onwar.com/>

Maps of various campaigns.

<http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/history/wwii/wwii.htm>

USAF Museum site with photos and information on the USAF from its beginnings in the Army to the present. You can tour the museum online.

<http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/>

US Army Center of Military History with publications, etc. online and to order.

<http://www.moosburg.org/info/stalag/laglinks.html>

Information on POW camps with numerous links to English and German sites. Includes personal histories.

<http://www.reichinruins.simonides.org/reichruins.htm>

Numerous photos of prewar, war and postwar Germany, plus links.

<http://www.feldgrau.com>

A German site in English. Includes a day-by-day history of the war, and detailed information on German forces.

http://history.acusd.edu/gen/ww2_links.html

Links to hundreds of WWII sites.

<http://www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/index.htm>

Articles on the Air Force, including a daily chronology of WWII bombings

***Hogan's Heroes* Web Sites**

There are a number of web sites devoted to ***Hogan's Heroes*** and several e-mail groups. Some of the sites are:

WebStalag13: <http://www.grooviespad.com/stalag13>

Barracks 2: <http://jordanna.net/librarie/hogan>

Hogan's Heroes: <http://www.kwiknet.net/~shalpin/heroes.html>

HH Fan Fiction: <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/2545/fanfic.htm>

Hogan's Heroes: <http://www.timvp.com/hogan.html>

The largest e-mail group is at www.smartgroups.com; www.yahoo.com also has several e-mail groups.