

# Theater of War

## Act Three

*"I Have Played the Fool"*

A  
Hogan's Heroes  
Story

*E. M. Seifert*



# Theater of War

## Act Three

by *EM Seifert*

**is set in the universe of *Hogan's Heroes*.  
This story is the third in a series of "Acts".  
Special thanks to Barbara Musser for her help.**

**"I have played the fool . . . "**

**- The First Book of Samuel**

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# Act Three

## Scene One



## Scene One

– One –

Europe 1945 — World War II still raged on. The Battle of the Bulge, that seemingly endless quagmire that had cost the lives of tens of thousands of German and Allied men, finally ended, ended with the Allies victorious. From both fronts, the Allies continued their relentless march toward Germany. Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz and other Polish cities had already been taken by the Russians who continued on to Berlin. Auschwitz, a name not yet known to the world, had already been liberated. Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin were preparing for a meeting that would determine the fate of postwar Europe. The feeling among the Allies was that Germany would be defeated sometime in the summer.

In Germany, conditions kept deteriorating. German cities continued to be bombed by the Americans during the day and the British during the night. Thousands of tons of bombs, including incendiaries, rained on helpless civilians, reducing centuries old cities to rubble. Men, women and children took to the countryside to escape the bombs and the invading armies. And they were not the only ones. As the Allies approached, tens of thousands of concentration camp inmates were sent on forced marches to camps in the interior of Germany. Thousands died. Also on the march were thousands of “Kriegies”<sup>1</sup> or prisoners of war, evacuated from POW camps by the Germans. The evacuees faced not only the harshest winter in years, but also a lack of adequate clothing, food and shelter as they made their way into Germany. They also faced the constant danger of bombing raids by the Allies if they were transported by rail, and strafing runs by fighters if they used the roads. Throughout war-torn Europe, it seemed as if the death and destruction would never end.

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<sup>1</sup> The German word for POW was Kriegsgefangenen which was shortened to Kriegies by the POWs. David A. Foy: *For You the War is Over*

## Scene One

But, in time, they would, bringing peace, bringing changes, good and bad.

Changes.

Colonel Robert Hogan, the senior POW officer of Stalag Luft 13, a small POW camp not far from the town of Hammelburg in Western Germany, walked across the compound after supper.

He'd been thinking about the events of the past few weeks lately. About the changes in the camp, most of them not particularly pleasant, and about the change in his relationship with the camp kommandant, Colonel Wilhelm Klink.

The biggest change in the camp was the increase in the number of prisoners. There were over nineteen hundred men in a camp originally built to house twelve hundred. And as the camp population continued to swell, the budget shrunk. Food and other necessities were stretched to their limits. In the past, Hogan and Klink had been able to buy food and other supplies from Hammelburg and the surrounding countryside. But as the war disrupted transportation and supply lines, the town of Hammelburg was feeling the pinch as well. Once common items had become luxuries — still available, if one knew the right person and had the right currency. Hogan, thanks to his links with the underground, had the right currency and the right connections. But he chafed at having to pay exorbitant prices for once commonplace items. And he realized bleakly that, in time, those items might no longer be available, regardless of the price or his connections.

The greatest change for Hogan was in his relationship with the camp kommandant, Wilhelm Klink. For years, Hogan had thought of Klink as a pawn, a means of running his escape and sabotage organization. To keep the Gestapo, SS and Luftwaffe from discovering his operation, Hogan had used Klink, unofficially of course, and without Klink's seeming knowledge. As a result, Hogan had had to develop a relationship with Klink that went far beyond the normal camp kommandant-senior POW relationship that existed in other camps. A relationship that pretty much gave Hogan a free rein in the camp and an open door to Klink. And in the course of that relationship, Hogan



## Scene One

found himself closer to Klink than he'd ever been to any other person.

And it had frightened Hogan. Outwardly, Hogan was a social being, a natural wit, a charming companion with women, a friendly sort with men. He was a friend to everyone and everyone liked him. But his relationships with others were casual. He'd known what he wanted to do with his life since he was a kid. And that put Hogan on a fast track in school and in his career. Third in his class<sup>2</sup> when he graduated from flight training, he was a squadron leader in his early thirties, a full colonel at thirty-five, and on loan to the RAF a year later. That was when his luck finally ran out. On a routine bombing mission, he found himself in a burning plane and had been forced to bail out over Germany nearly two months before the U.S. and Germany were officially at war. Well, the fast track had been fun while it lasted. But it had left him little time to develop close friendships with other officers. Or little inclination. Who knew when that friend might become a rival for a post Hogan wanted. It was much better to keep things light and friendly. Much better for his ego and his career.

But here in this godforsaken POW camp, Robert Hogan suddenly found himself having to develop a relationship with — of all people! — a German prison kommandant. An unexpectedly close relationship. Hogan had to know Klink as well as he knew himself if his plans were to succeed. But it didn't matter. For Hogan, it was superficial. After all, Klink was the enemy, a uniform, someone he used, someone he needed to use. It didn't matter what happened to Klink. It didn't matter what he did to Klink. Klink was expendable. Just a way to get what Hogan had wanted. It didn't matter if Klink was hurt or if he died. It didn't matter . . .

Until that appalling moment when Hogan realized that it did matter. Very much. Somehow, during those three years, the seemingly naive and foolish camp kommandant had managed to become closer to Hogan than any other human being. And Hogan

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<sup>2</sup> "Hogan's Double Life"

## Scene One

had run from that realization. More — he had pushed Klink away, physically, emotionally, wishing him ill. Wishing him dead. It had taken Klink's pain and near death for Hogan to finally admit how he felt about Klink.<sup>3</sup>

None too soon. Their newfound relationship helped to temper the increasingly crowded conditions at the camp. And it had done more than that. It had finally helped Hogan realize the truth about the seemingly inept kommandant — that Klink was not the incompetent he appeared to be. On the contrary, Klink had been fighting the Nazis for ten years as the notorious resistance leader known as the Stage. It was a fight that had nearly ended with Klink's death, and with Hogan's unmasking as well, when circumstances had let their common enemy, Gestapo Major Hochstetter, discover the Stage's identity. Hogan, his men and Sergeant Hans Schultz had rescued Klink, but only after Klink had been tortured for nearly three days. After his rescue, Klink had decided to return to the camp instead of going to England or Switzerland. And Klink had also decided to resume his identity as the incompetent kommandant. Until Hogan convinced the lonely and isolated hero that it was time for the real Wilhelm Klink to live again.<sup>4</sup> And ultimately that was the greatest change of all. The rebirth of the long hidden Wilhelm Klink.

That change was made so slowly that few people noticed it. Hogan's eyes took in the soldiers patrolling the grounds. By now, many of the experienced men, the Luftwaffe men, had gone. Their replacement Wehrmacht guards tended to be too old, like 63-year-old Klaus Krieger, or too young, like baby-faced, fresh-off-the-farm 17-year-old Emil Reinwald, or men who had been wounded and could no longer function in combat, like one-armed Oskar Kaufmann. But over the past few weeks, they were becoming more professional than the departing guards had ever been because Klink, without their being aware of it, was making them so.

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<sup>3</sup> *Act One*

<sup>4</sup> *Act Two*

## Scene One

Hogan grinned. He wasn't sure he liked that change; it made it more difficult to get out of camp. But Klink, via Schultz, kept an eye on them, letting things get lax just when they needed to be lax.

Funny, Klink never asked about any of Hogan's operations. Of course, Klink was far too busy. Within a couple of weeks of Colonel Weiss's visit<sup>5</sup>, the Stage exploded on the scene again. Literally. In one night, five major installations across the country had blown up. And there was no doubt about which group had been responsible. The Stage had returned with a vengeance. And Hogan, to his chagrin, had no idea how Klink had arranged it.

There were other changes as well. Changes in the way Klink talked to soldiers and prisoners alike. His conversation with underlings wasn't as condescending as it used to be, nor was it as diffident with his superiors. There was an unexpectedly dry sense of humor surfacing, used to chide erring subordinates. The yelling that had been a part of the old Kommandant was disappearing. Klink's voice was far quieter, yet oddly firmer as well. His walk too was somehow different.

And his chess game was definitely different.

Hogan bounded up the stairs to Klink's quarters and knocked. Another change; Hogan no longer walked into Klink's quarters without waiting for a response.

"Come in," Klink called.

Hogan walked into the living room; the chessboard was already set up on the table.

Klink was at the bookcase, leafing through a book. He glanced at Hogan and smiled. "Give me a moment, Colonel." He gestured toward the chess set. "You can begin."

"I don't know why I bother," Hogan complained as he sat down. "You win almost every game."

Klink smiled. "True. But now, you no longer let me win. It makes the game much more interesting."

"Maybe. But I still lose." Hogan moved a white pawn.

Klink returned the book to the shelf and joined Hogan at the

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<sup>5</sup> *Act Two*

## Scene One

table. He moved a black pawn.

“I was looking around the compound as I walked over,” Hogan said as he pondered his next move. “I’m not sure I like all of your changes.”

A passing smile. “Interfering with your plans, Colonel Hogan?”

Hogan grinned as he moved another pawn. “Not yet.”

“Good. I don’t want you getting restless.” The knight moved.

The next few moves were made silently.

Finally, Klink said, “You have something on your mind. I do wish you would talk about it. It’s interfering with your game.”

“Huh?”

“Come now, Robert,” Klink said quietly. “I know you still have unanswered questions.”

Robert. That was another change. Rarely used and only when they were alone.

“Yeah,” Hogan admitted. He looked at Klink squarely. “I didn’t think you wanted to talk about it. You ignored me at first. Rather pointedly.”

“Well, yes.” An embarrassed smile. “I apologize for that. But I was still trying to build up Kommandant Klink; trying to bring to life a character I thought had died in that cell.”

“Until I resurrected him,” Hogan said a bit pessimistically.

“I went into it with my eyes open, Robert. I didn’t need any pushing,” Klink said. “The truth is, I might have come back even if you didn’t think of it.” A smile. “Now, I’m trying to kill the Kommandant off. Only this way, it is much more difficult.”

“If you want the truth, I don’t think most people know what’s going on.”

“I hope not. It would raise far too many awkward questions.”

Hogan moved a piece. “Speaking of awkward questions — ” Klink’s eyes lifted to his face. “And you can tell me it’s none of my business — ”

“I’m already intrigued. Ask your question.”

“Weiss said something in your office that day. Something about knowing what they did to you, not for the first time.” Hogan watched Klink’s face change.

Klink rose without a word and went over to the sideboard. He

## Scene One

lifted a tray with a flask of brandy and two glasses on it. He brought it over to the table. Hogan stayed silent as Klink poured the brandy into the two glasses and handed him one. Klink took a sip of his own drink before sitting down. The silence was becoming uncomfortable when Klink finally broke it.

“The first happened years ago,” Klink began quietly, staring at the brandy glass. “Shortly after Dunkirk. I was in France, an airfield outside of Paris. It was fairly quiet but resistance activities were starting. Since I’d had little contact with French groups, I decided to ‘scout’ them out. I dressed as a laborer with false papers and went out to meet with a group. Unfortunately, I picked the wrong night.” He sipped the brandy. “The SS was conducting a sweep to round up the opposition. I was arrested as well.”

Hogan glanced at him in surprise.

“My papers served me well. I was supposed to be an Austrian laborer and that is what they believed. I played, I believe the expression is, dumb. Actually, it wasn’t too difficult; I really had no idea what was going on.”

“But they didn’t buy that?”

Klink shook his head. “No, they didn’t. At first, they were too busy to bother with me. I was thrown into a cold, dark cell and left alone for a couple of hours before they came for me. They asked their questions, questions I really couldn’t answer. They didn’t like the responses so I was beaten. They left me semi-conscious on the floor while they decided what to do with me.” His eyes grew haunted. “I could hear screams from some of the other cells and started to wonder if I would be next. I had never been so frightened in my life.”

“I’d be scared too,” Hogan admitted. “More than scared.”

“I was more than scared. I’m afraid I dirtied myself as I lay there.” A sigh. “I was not too proud of myself then.”

“You had nothing to be ashamed of,” Hogan told him quietly.

“I know that. Now.” Klink shook his head. “But back then, I was still rather naive.” A faint smile. “And I didn’t even have the excuse of youth to fall back on.” He took another drink.

“What happened next?” Hogan prompted soberly.

“They had examined my papers and decided they were false.

## Scene One

That made them more interested in me. I was taken to another room. There was a generator with cables running from it to a table.” Klink’s brow was now wet. “They tied me to the table and — ”

“Don’t,” Hogan interrupted.

Klink drained his drink; Hogan refilled his glass.

“That was my first taste of real pain,” Klink continued. “Up until then, I had led a fairly charmed life, managing not to get really hurt. I don’t know how long it went on. They couldn’t control the level and my tolerance for pain was not as high as it is now, so I kept losing consciousness. Somehow, I hung on, not giving them the answers they were looking for.

“After a while, they lost interest in me and left me there. Feeling rather sorry for myself, I might add. And very, very angry. I had drifted off to sleep when, unexpectedly, I heard shots in the hallway. The SS had miscalculated. There was a well-organized counter-raid by the resistance. A man burst into the room with a machine gun. He freed me and handed me a gun.

“I don’t really remember much of the rest of the night. It is a blur of gunshots and grenades, people crying out as they were hit, blood and fires.” Klink shook his head. “The next thing I remember clearly was running through the woods before I collapsed. I had a bullet in my shoulder; to this day, I don’t remember being shot. An elderly farm couple found me, removed the bullet and tended me until morning. Then, over their objections, I left.

“The Stage was really born that night, Robert. When I returned to my unit — officially, I had been on leave — I had go on as if nothing had happened. I learned to live with that kind of pain. I had something to compare it with. Something infinitely worse. But it wasn’t easy.”

“And you told Weiss?”

Klink nodded. “He was my commanding officer.”

Hogan looked surprised.

“He wasn’t with the SS then,” Klink explained. “He joined the following year. We decided we needed someone there we could trust and he volunteered. But one of the last things he did was transfer me back to Germany. And I have been here ever since.”

## Scene One

Klink glanced at Hogan. "There were a few other times when I have been caught. Fortunately for me, they never realized who I was. Occasionally, I was beaten. Occasionally . . . But I always managed to escape or be rescued within a few hours. Hochstetter, he had the distinction of holding me the longest. Without your intervention, it would have been permanent."

"As I said in the cave, Wilhelm — " That name was even more rarely used. "You and me. To the end."

Klink smiled. "Any more questions?"

Hogan grinned. "I'll think of something. But for now, checkmate."

Klink looked at the board in surprise. "Very sneaky, Colonel. You made me lose my concentration."

"I had to do something," Hogan said with a grin. "I was getting tired of losing."

"Another game?" Klink asked.

"I should rest on my laurels, but — "

The sound of a low-flying airplane interrupted him. Klink stood and walked over to the door. Hogan followed him onto the porch.

"RAF," Hogan said, "from the sound of it."

Klink nodded and turned to go back into the building.

Off in the distance, a blinding light blossomed. Then seconds later, a huge explosion rocked the ground.

"Hammelburg?" Hogan asked.

Klink nodded.

"But there's nothing there of any importance now."

"An accident," Klink said. "Or perhaps they had to lighten their load."

Sergeant Hans Schultz ran up to them, puffing slightly. "Herr Kommandant!"

"Yes, Schultz," Klink said, "we saw."

Klink went back into his quarters and walked over to the telephone. He put in a call to the nearby town. Hogan noticed he had trouble trying to get an answer to his questions.

Klink gave up in disgust. "Schultz!"

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant!"

"Get my car. I'm going to town to find out what's going on,"

## Scene One

Klink said. "You follow with another car and two men. Watch for anyone who might have parachuted out."

"Wait a minute," Hogan began and shut up as Captain Fritz Gruber<sup>6</sup>, Klink's second-in-command, came in.

"Hauptmann Gruber," Klink was saying, "I'm going to Hammelburg to see what happened. Sergeant Schultz will follow and pick up any Allied pilots who may have landed. You are in charge."

Gruber saluted smartly. "Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

Klink went out on the porch, carrying his topcoat. "Forgive me, Colonel Hogan. Our chess game will have to wait."

Hogan smiled grimly.

Klink glanced up and stopped putting on his topcoat. "Lights!" He ordered loudly. "Sweep the skies!"

Instantly, every searchlight in the camp turned upward.

Hogan followed Klink's gaze and swore beneath his breath. A parachutist was heading straight for the camp, his figure frozen in the searchlights.

"Sound the alarm! Search for others!" Klink ordered. "Patrols, outside the camp! All prisoners confined to the barracks!"

No, Hogan thought, there were definitely some changes he didn't like. The old Klink would have gotten the same idea, but not so quickly, leaving them time to get the jumping men into the tunnel.

The guards reacted well to the flow of orders. Another change, Hogan thought with annoyance. They were actually beginning to operate efficiently. A few months, a few weeks ago, the same orders would have produced utter chaos. Now, one searchlight stayed on the parachutist, the rest swept the camp and the outside woods. Two patrols had been dispatched outside the wire and the prisoners were actually staying in the barracks.

The parachutist had almost landed. Hogan could see the shock and dismay on his face as he realized where he was heading.

"Herr Kommandant!" Schultz shouted and pointed skyward.

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<sup>6</sup> "Don't Forget to Write"



## Scene One

Another parachutist was heading for the lit camp. A searchlight picked him up and stayed on him as the first man landed in the middle of the camp. Instantly, soldiers, their rifles aimed at him, surrounded the landing man. He undid the straps of his parachute and, ringed by the soldiers, walked over to the men waiting on the porch.

The other man was blown slightly away. Hogan realized with alarm that the parachutist was heading for the electrified inner fence surrounding the camp.

So did Klink. "Cut the fence current!" he ordered.

The sweeping lights picked up one more figure. This one slightly to the west of the camp.

"A blasted party," Hogan murmured with disgust. The Germans would pick up the third man as well.

"Sorry, Colonel," Klink said in a voice only Hogan could hear. "I'm afraid these three are mine."

The second man yelled loudly as he headed straight for the fence. His parachute snagged on the barbed wire on the top of the fence. Luckily for him, he hit it none too hard and with his back. The metal caught on his jacket but did no damage. The parachute hung him up, some six feet above the ground. The guards were there, waiting for him. The third man landed on the road right outside the camp. The guards instantly surrounded him.

"Very neat, Kommandant," Hogan murmured.

A thin smile. "I try."

The first man had reached them; he saluted sharply. "Captain John Witton," he said in an American accent despite the British uniform.

Klink saluted absently, watching the progress of the other two men. He left the introductions to Hogan.

"Colonel Robert Hogan, senior POW officer," Hogan said. "This is Colonel Wilhelm Klink, Kommandant of Stalag Luft 13, the toughest POW camp in Germany."

Hogan caught the amused glint in Klink's eye as he turned toward them.

"Captain, that was quite an entrance," Klink said.

"Yes, sir." The pilot was clearly disgusted with himself.

## Scene One

Another explosion in the distance shattered the quiet of the night.

"That's my plane," Witton muttered. "I hope everyone got out."

"If they did," Klink said, "we will pick them up."

The other two men joined them; both saluted smartly.

"Lieutenant Michael Scott." A broad Scots accent.

"Sergeant Willy Baines." A cockney edge to the voice.

Another absent salute from Klink. "Hauptmann Gruber, for tonight take them to the cooler. Give them whatever they need to make them comfortable. If he wishes, Colonel Hogan can talk to them."

Gruber saluted. "Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

"I still have a trip to town to make." Klink slipped on his coat. "Schultz!"

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant!" Schultz hurried to get Klink's car.

Around them, the camp settled down to normal. The guards slowed down to their normal pace; the three men were being herded toward the cooler. However, the lights still searched the woods outside the camp.

Klink noticed Hogan's expression as the American watched the lights. "Hauptmann Gruber."

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant?"

"The excitement seems to have died down. If there are any men outside the camp, we should find them with the car. The lights can resume their regular pattern," Klink said nonchalantly.

Gruber accepted the statement without a murmur and passed the order on to the men. Hogan hid his smile.

Schultz brought Klink's staff car over.

Hogan held the door open for Klink and, with a grin, shut it. He continued to grin as he walked back to his barracks.

"What rotten luck!" Corporal Louis LeBeau, a diminutive Frenchman, said to Hogan as he entered the barracks.

Hogan smiled. "Not completely. Klink's cut the outside lights. We might still pick up the others. You and Baker, through the tunnel. See what you can find."

## Scene One

“Right, Colonel,” Sergeant Richard Baker, a tall black man, said.

Hogan poured himself a cup of coffee.

“Where’s Klink going?” asked Sergeant James Kinchloe, a mustached black man.

“Hammelburg,” Hogan said. He glanced at the eastern sky visible through the barracks’ still unshuttered window. “Looks like there’s a fire that way.”

## Scene One

– Two –

Hogan came out of the barracks for roll call the next morning and wrinkled his nose. A burning smell hung heavily in the air and brown clouds in the eastern sky obscured the pale sun.

Corporal Peter Newkirk was surprised. “Still burning?” he asked in an English accent.

Hogan nodded. “And Klink’s not back yet,” he murmured as Gruber presided over the roll call.

“Must be one hell of a fire,” Kinch observed.

“Yeah,” Hogan agreed. “That could give us some problems.”

“Why, Colonel?” Sergeant Andrew Carter, a young American, asked.

“Simple. We rely a lot on the underground in Hammelburg. That fire might affect them as well.”

“We might have company for a while,” Newkirk said.

“That won’t make them happy,” LeBeau said.

“At least they’re gonna get out of here,” Baker said. “Those three in the cooler are stuck here for the duration.”

“Uh, oh,” Hogan said. “Look’s like Gruber wants to talk to them. See you later.” He headed for the Kommandant’s office.

Gruber got little out of the new prisoners besides name, rank and serial number. He soon gave up and assigned the three men to a barracks.

Hogan accompanied them there, giving them a quick introduction to the real workings of the camp. They were surprised, and none too pleased, to learn that they would have to remain with no chance of an escape. But they acquiesced once they discovered that they really had no choice. Besides, as Scott observed, the war won’t last much longer. He hoped.

Hogan talked to Witton a bit longer. Witton was surprised and happy to find out that six more of his crew were hiding in the tunnels beneath the camp. The question he had was, where was the remaining crewmember?

## Scene One

Hogan couldn't help him.

Klink came back shortly before nine. The sky was growing ominously darker and the wind had picked up from the east. Schultz hurried over to the barracks as Klink went into his quarters.

"Colonel Hogan," Schultz said breathlessly as he entered the barracks. "The Kommandant would like to see you in his quarters."

Hogan drained the last of his coffee and stood. "How's the fire, Schultz?" Hogan asked as he went into his room for his jacket.

"Terrible," Schultz said dismally. "Very terrible."

"And the Kommandant?" Hogan asked as they walked across the compound.

Schultz shrugged and stayed silent.

Klink, in his shirtsleeves, was drying his face with a towel when Hogan came into the room. Hogan was surprised at his appearance; Klink's clothes were stained with dirt and smoke. Klink dropped the towel on the sofa back and poured himself a brandy. He looked tired.

"Did you get any sleep?" Hogan asked him.

Klink shook his head. "I've asked Captain Gruber to be here as well."

Hogan was annoyed. "Why?"

"I have an unusual request to make, and I would like to make it official."

None too pleased, Hogan waited.

Captain Witton came in with Gruber. "Sir," Witton said, "I came to see if you have any news on the rest of my crew."

Klink stared at his drink before lifting his eyes to Witton's face. His voice was almost gentle as he said, "I can only tell you about one man."

Hogan felt a chill as he looked at Klink.

"I don't know his name, but one man is dead."

Witton stiffened.

"The fire created a very strong draft," Klink continued.

## Scene One

Hogan shuddered as he realized what was coming.

"I am sorry, Captain, but the townspeople said a man with a parachute was pulled into the flames."

Witton looked sick. "Oh God!"

Klink nodded toward the brandy and turned away. Hogan poured the shaken captain a drink; Witton took it blindly and gulped it down.

Hogan walked over to Klink. "How's the fire?"

Klink rubbed his eyes with a hand. "At least ten people are dead so far; forty are missing, probably dead as well. Another hundred or so are injured, some badly. The eastern end of Hammelburg is gone; that's where the plane crashed. The wind is picking up and there are fears that the fire will spread further, much further." Klink turned to Hogan. "That is what I want to talk to you about."

"I'm listening," Hogan said.

Klink went over to the dining table. He pointed to the map on it. "This is the section that is currently burning," he said as Hogan walked over. "The fire is moving this way. The plane obviously contained incendiary bombs. The bombs plus the fuel in the plane have made the fire extremely hot; it is feeding on itself and everything in its path. As you know, a good deal of Hammelburg is constructed of wood. The fire is jumping from one street to another without a break. They have been able to contain just the edges, but they have not been able to stop it."

Hogan looked at the map. "It's heading this way?" He indicated on the map.

Klink nodded. "Yes. If it reaches the woods, it will be impossible to stop. Not even the river will stop it. It will simply burn the bridges and keep going through the woods."

"We're in those woods," Hogan said slowly.

"Yes, Colonel Hogan," Klink said quietly. "We are. That is what I want to talk to you about."

"Go on," Hogan said.

"There are two points." Klink turned to a listening Gruber. "Hauptmann, all guards not currently on duty and not sleeping are to be assembled and sent to fight the fire. That will give them another forty or fifty more men." He faced Hogan. "I want your

## Scene One

word that there will be no attempted escapes.”

Hogan knew the question was a formality for the listening Gruber and Witton. He glanced at the map. Even if it weren't, where could anyone go? “You have my word.”

A thin smile. “The second request is more unusual,” Klink continued. “If the fire reaches the woods, I will have to begin evacuating the camp.”

Hogan glanced at him sharply.

Klink's eyes met his. “I think we both have a vested interest in keeping the camp going. I am therefore asking for volunteers from the prisoners to fight the fire. I am also asking for your word, their word, that there will be no escapes.”

“You're nuts!” Witton interrupted. “Colonel, you can't take him seriously.”

“On the contrary, Captain,” Klink's eyes stayed on Hogan, “I am deadly serious.”

“If no one volunteers?” Hogan asked.

“That is their choice,” Klink said. “I hope you, and they, can accept the consequences. Once the fire reaches those woods, Colonel Hogan, I will begin evacuating the camp. And I want you to draw up an evacuation plan.”

“Me?”

Klink smiled briefly. “Yes. Our normal evacuation procedures will not do in this case. I would prefer to keep the stronger men here and evacuate the weaker ones first. I will leave the order up to you. Subject to approval, of course.”

“Of course,” Hogan echoed ironically. “Evacuate them where?”

Klink went over to the table to get another drink. “Other stalags, Luftwaffe camps, if possible.” He faced Hogan. “You know that will mean the end of Stalag 13.”

Hogan nodded soberly, worriedly.

Klink drained the brandy in one gulp. “You can use the assembly hall to inform the camp of what is happening. I would appreciate an answer from you in,” a glance at his watch, “two hours. I will be going back to Hammelburg then.

“Hauptmann Gruber, send a truck of men to Hammelburg now. The rest can accompany me later.”

## Scene One

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.” Gruber saluted and left.

“Colonel Hogan,” Klink said soberly, “if you are worried about any possible consequences in helping the enemy, this will be treated as any other work detail. I will accept full responsibility in any possible disciplinary proceedings that may develop as a result of this. But regardless of your, their, decision, I would like you to have your men prepare for the possible evacuation of the camp.” He rubbed his eyes with his fingers. “Forgive me, but I must get some sleep. I doubt if there will be a chance again later on.” And he looked at Hogan. “Two hours, Colonel Hogan. One way or another.”

“Yes, sir,” Hogan said grimly and saluted. Witton, next to him, did the same.

Wearily, Klink pulled off his tie as the Americans left.

Schultz, forgotten in a corner, asked, “What do you think, Herr Kommandant?”

“Hogan knows what will happen if we have to evacuate,” Klink answered. “The question is, can he convince the others to help? We will need a great deal of help to stop this fire. A great deal.” A sigh. “And even then, I don’t know.”

“Bloody bastard,” Witton murmured next to Hogan.

Hogan glanced at him. “I don’t think you’ve been here long enough to say that,” Hogan said.

“They’re all bloody bastards!” Witton said. “Every stinking last one of them. I hope they all burn up!” He strode away from Hogan.

Hogan stared after him. What was eating Witton?

The others hurried up to him.

“What’s up, mon colonel?” LeBeau asked.

“Spread the word,” Hogan said. “I want all the officers, noncoms and barracks’ leaders in the assembly hall in thirty minutes. Everyone! Baker, we need to contact London.”

“Right, Colonel.”

As the others dispersed, Baker and Hogan went back to their barracks.

Down in the tunnel, Baker called London. Hogan quickly apprised them of the conditions at the camp. As he expected,



## Scene One

London left the decision up to him. London knew that if the camp were to be evacuated, their entire operation would be shut down. Hogan also passed on the news about the dead crewmember, asking them to notify his unit.

The six men hiding in the tunnels were aghast at the news.

"It'll hit the Captain badly," Murray murmured as Hogan signed off.

"Yeah," confirmed Douglas. "He and Lieutenant Richey were real close."

"Your Captain doesn't seem to like Germans much," observed Hogan.

Murray snorted. "He hates them. Always has, always will."

"Why?" Baker asked curiously.

"Not really sure," said Douglas. "'Course the fact that his father was killed in the Great War may have something to do with it."

"He couldn't have known his father," Baker said.

"Naw, he was only a baby. But that's why he joined the RAF," Murray said. "To take care of the Germans."

"What's wrong, Colonel?" Baker asked softly as the others walked back to their cots.

"I'm not sure," Hogan admitted. "It's just the way he was talking."

"It could be just that," Baker said.

"I hope so," Hogan said. "The last thing we need right now is some hothead causing trouble. Let's go. We've got a meeting to go to."

Though he had half expected it, Hogan was still a bit surprised that there were no guards at the meeting. After posting lookouts at the doors and windows to warn of intruders, Hogan walked to the front of the hall; all of the men he'd requested were there.

Hogan's eyes swept the hall as he waited for them to quiet down. There were over nineteen hundred men in camp now. These men, some one hundred or so of them, had to report to them; these were the men he had to convince first. What would they think of what he had to say?

Hogan began. "I think you know there's a bad fire in

## Scene One

Hammelburg. It started last night when Captain Witton's," he nodded toward the pilot, "plane went down.

"According to Klink — " A few scattered boos. "According to Klink, the eastern end, the newer end, of Hammelburg has been destroyed and the fire's still not contained. The way it's going, there's a good chance that it will reach the woods east of here."

He had their attention now. He took a deep breath. "If that happens, Klink will evacuate the camp."

Hogan let the expected uproar continue for a few moments. Then his group called for quiet; it came reluctantly.

"I think you all know what this camp is about. And why there have been no successful escapes."

There were grins and some laughs.

"If I didn't thank you before, I want to do it now. All of you have contributed to the success of the operation. I know it hasn't been easy. Some of you have been here three, four years. It's a long time to be away from your families and friends. And let's face it, Stalag 13 is no Ritz.

"If the camp is evacuated, our operation will be shut down. And most of us, if not all of us, will be dispersed to other camps. And we won't be coming back."

"What about a mass escape, Colonel?" someone near the back asked.

"I'll admit I've considered it," Hogan said. "But there are a number of serious problems.

"First, it's winter. Few of us are equipped for a long trek anywhere in this kind of weather. Nor do we have many papers, civilian clothing or the other things we normally supply escaping prisoners.

"Second, that fire. We rely a lot on nearby resistance groups for help. We've tried reaching them. Most of them, we can't contact. The rest are saying flat out they can't help. That fire is threatening them as well. Also, Hammelburg is normally the first stop for any escape. The fire has ended that option. The next town is twenty miles further away. As I said, it's winter.

"Third, again, that fire. We'd have to go around it. Klink might be calling in help from the outside. He'd have to, to evacuate the camp. So the entire area will be crawling with

## Scene One

people.”

“So what’s left, Colonel?” came the question from Captain John Mitchell<sup>7</sup>.

Hogan took a deep breath. “Klink has asked for our help in fighting the fire.”

“What!”

“He can ask all he wants!”

The uproar was even louder than the first.

Finally, the noise died down.

“The way I see it,” Hogan said quietly, “if we want to keep Stalag 13 going, we should help.”

“Help Klink?” someone spat.

“No!” Hogan shouted over the impending roar. “Help ourselves! I’m not going to gloss over how things are here. But given what’s going on in some of the other camps, it could be worse! A lot worse!”

“The Allies aren’t that far away now. It’s only a matter of months, perhaps even weeks, before they get here. Given a choice, I’d rather spend the time here than in some other camp.”

“But to help Klink,” murmured someone.

Hogan sighed inwardly. Klink had played his part too well; he was still disliked by most of the camp.

“Think of it as helping yourselves,” Hogan said. “Do you really want to move to another camp?”

There were general murmurs of “no” from the men.

“Look,” Hogan said, “I’m not ordering anybody to help. I won’t kid you. Fighting a fire this size is no picnic and could be dangerous. London’s been informed of the situation. They’ve left the decision up to us. There will be no repercussions later on for those who help. I’m just asking you to think about it. My group and I will be helping fight the fire. But we can’t do it ourselves. We’ll need help. If it’s any bonus, if there’s an evacuation, those fighting the fire will be the last to go. If it’s put out, they may not have to go.”

“If it comes to an evacuation, Colonel,” Captain Edward

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<sup>7</sup> “The Big Gamble”

## Scene One

Martin<sup>8</sup> asked, “what about escapes?”

“If it comes to an evacuation,” Hogan answered, “the no escape orders are canceled. But remember, you won’t have any help. And that you stand an excellent chance of being picked up or shot by any troops you encounter.”

“Understood, Colonel,” Martin said.

“Again, I’m asking for volunteers. Particularly anyone who’s had any experience fighting fires in the past. Just think about it.” He glanced at his watch. “You’ve got about forty minutes to decide. That’s all.”

Hogan left the hall, the buzz of conversation loud in his ears.

Forty-five minutes later, Klink came out on the porch and impassively watched some two-dozen guards get into a truck.

Hogan walked over to him.

“How many?” Klink asked.

“A couple of dozen,” Hogan said. “Most are waiting to see what develops.”

Klink nodded. “I can’t really blame them.” He gestured toward his staff car. “Join me?”

Hogan nodded, glancing at the driver. It wasn’t Schultz.

A faint smile. “I didn’t have the heart to wake him. He’s been up all night.”

“You were too,” Hogan said.

“I’m used to it,” Klink said as he entered the car.

*Yeah*, Hogan thought, *but I wanted to talk*. The presence of the driver made that impossible. With a sigh, Hogan got into the car.

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<sup>8</sup> “The Gold Rush”

## Scene One

– Three –

The staff car moved slowly through the mass of people.

Though he had expected confusion, the scene was worse than Hogan had anticipated. The fire had gone on for so long that people were beginning to panic. The Town Council, the Burgermeister and the inexperienced fire chief had lost control of the situation. There appeared to be no one in charge.

Until Klink took over. He took one look at the panic, noise, chaos and the completely haphazard way the fire was being fought, and intervened. It wasn't very hard to do. As the senior military officer in the area, Klink could take charge. And he did.

Hogan had watched with admiration. He was well aware of the Stage's reputation for efficiency, for coordinating all of the details of an operation with seeming ease. He also knew of the Stage's uncanny ability to read people, to use them wherever they were most useful, and to get them to help him, sometimes without them even realizing it. Within hours, the panic was controlled, evacuation of the endangered parts of town was proceeding in an orderly manner, and the firefighters were organized into as efficient a force as possible.

But was it enough?

Hogan wiped his forehead with a dirty sleeve and walked over to where a pretty teenage girl with a worried look on her face was handing out dippers of water to the firefighters. Hogan gave her a beaming smile which she slowly returned as she handed the dipper to him.

Klink walked over to them. Hogan was secretly amused at the way reluctant admiration crossed the girl's face as Klink joined them. Klink, with his tall form, missing tie and open shirt, was looking unexpectedly gallant, even heroic.

However, Klink was oblivious to the girl. "Colonel Hogan, may I talk to you?"

"Of course, Kommandant."

The two men walked apart from the others.

## Scene One

"You've done wonders," Hogan said quietly.

"Not enough." Klink sounded frustrated. "The fire keeps spreading no matter what we do."

"I'll get you more men," Hogan promised.

"We'll need them," Klink said grimly. "But," his eyes met Hogan's, "Robert, I cannot promise I won't evacuate."

"I know. I don't expect you to." A tiny smile. "But if we evacuate, I hope you don't expect a promise of no escapes."

Klink managed a return smile. "No, I never have. You came up with that on your own."

"Well, yeah. But it worked out pretty well. For both of us. Even if only one of us knew about it for a while," he added.

A quick smile from Klink.

"Get me a ride back to camp?"

"Use my car," Klink said. "I'm not going anywhere." He strode back to the tent he was using as a headquarters.

An hour later, Hogan, with a couple of trucks of prisoners, was back at the fire. To his surprise, Captain Witton went with him.

"I've spent summers with the Forestry Service doing some firefighting," Witton explained. "I can be of some help."

"You can," Hogan said. "But I didn't think you wanted to help."

Witton shrugged. "As you said, any place they send me would probably worse."

Hogan accepted his offer, along with that of Witton's remaining crew. Scott and Baines rode in a truck with another couple of dozen prisoners. Witton rode with Hogan in the staff car; Schultz drove them back. As soon as the men were dropped off, the trucks would return for another load of prisoners.

Hogan was pleased. A couple of hundred prisoners were already fighting the fire, and more continued to volunteer, although reluctantly. But no one was too pleased at the alternative if the fire spread.

Hogan was surprised when they reached the outskirts of the fire. It had spread further than he'd expected. The wind had picked up quite a bit and the flames looked hotter and higher

## Scene One

than ever.

Klink was everywhere, cajoling, encouraging, ordering as needed. Hogan wasn't surprised to see respect, even admiration, on many faces now. Klink had been as disliked in the town as he had been at the camp. Now he was showing a side that no one had expected. Hogan had to admit he was a bit worried about possible future repercussions. But he also had to admit that Klink didn't really have a choice. If things had continued as they had, the town would have had no chance at all, and neither would the camp.

Hogan was also concerned about Klink personally. He was continually on the front line of the fire, a couple of times coming close to being trapped by the blaze or a toppling building. But his presence was encouraging others to fight harder.

It was dark when a weary Hogan went back to the headquarters area. Klink had just moved it to the western edge of town. The cold here was welcome after the incredible heat of the fire.

Hogan wiped his sooty face with a handkerchief and glanced back at the fire. Even at this distance, it lit up the sky. Would it never end? It was as if none of their efforts made any difference.

He took a couple of cups of ersatz coffee from an elderly woman and walked over to Klink. Klink was studying a map as Burgermeister Rudolf Scheinfeld, almost in tears, watched.

Hogan handed Klink a cup. Klink took it absently and sipped the coffee, his eyes on the map.

Hogan glanced at the map and shuddered. The damage was even worse than he'd thought. The fire had started in the newer industrial area of eastern Hammelburg. Thanks to bombing raids and resistance activities, the once busy area had been largely abandoned. The fire had swept through the derelict buildings at an astonishing speed and turned on the residential areas adjacent to it. That area was also new, built to accommodate the workers who had been employed in those plants. But as the industries disappeared, so did the workers. Many of the buildings, built of cheap wood, had housed

## Scene One

transients or refugees from other bombed-out areas. But as the fire spread, those occupants had fled, leaving the buildings to their fate.

But the fire didn't stop there. It continued on to the long established portions of town. And, just as ruthlessly as it had gutted the abandoned buildings, it destroyed homes, businesses, buildings, which had been around for decades, even centuries. Churches, schools, hospitals, the town's center with the centuries' old Rathaus and other municipal buildings had been consumed by the flames. Only the heroic efforts of the volunteers had saved most of the town's records from the fire. Saved so that the town could rebuild again.

Or could it? The fire seemed unstoppable. It was likely that by dawn there would be nothing left of Hammelburg. And after Hammelburg, Stalag 13.

Klink straightened and faced the Burgermeister. "There is but one chance."

The Burgermeister started nervously.

Klink's finger jabbed at the map as Witton and his two crewmen came up. "This part of town, here, has a concentration of brick buildings. If the buildings were destroyed, it might stop the fire."

"A firebreak," Witton said.

Klink glanced at him. "Yes."

"But," the Burgermeister said nervously, "to destroy all —"

"If we don't," Klink said, "the fire will destroy it for us. That and the rest of the town. And then spread into the woods. Do you want that?"

Scheinfeld shook his head. "Nein, Herr Kommandant." A nervous twitter. "Do what you must."

"But to destroy all that," Witton said, "you're going to need explosives. Quite a bit."

"Yes," Klink said. "They have already been requisitioned. The truck will be here within a couple of hours."

"Requisitioned?" Hogan asked with a smile. "Or confiscated?"

"Colonel Hogan, you wound me." A small smile. "The garrison was very happy to supply the explosives. Once I made the situation clear."



## Scene One

Hogan grinned widely. "I assume you also made clear what would happen to them if they refused."

"No, I merely hinted." A smile. "They had no difficulty understanding the problem." He walked over to greet Captain Gruber who had arrived with a new load of guards and prisoners.

Hogan turned to Witton. "What do you think?"

"It could work," Witton admitted. "The charges will have to be placed carefully."

"Do you know how?" Klink asked as he returned with Gruber.

Witton was surprised. "Are you asking us to place the explosives?"

"I'm asking everyone who knows about explosives to help," Klink said. "Colonel Hogan, some of his men, some of mine. It will take a lot of time and work to place them. And it needs to be done before the fire reaches those buildings."

"All right," Witton said slowly. "I'll help. I think Baines knows quite a bit about explosives as well."

"Yes, sir, I do," Baines said promptly.

Klink nodded. "Good. We'll go check out the buildings now. Schultz!" he called.

Schultz appeared from the tent. "Jawohl, Herr Kommandant!"

"Find sergeants Carter, Baker and Kinchloe and corporals Newkirk and LeBeau, please."

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant." Schultz saluted and left.

Hogan drew Klink off to the side. "Don't trust Witton," he said softly.

Klink looked at him curiously. "Why?"

"Just don't," Hogan repeated cryptically and walked away.

A short time later, Klink, Hogan, Witton, Baines, Captain Gruber, a lieutenant named Grünwald, Newkirk, Kinch, LeBeau, Baker and Carter and some soldiers from the nearby, evacuating garrison were riding to the area Klink had described. It was a core of solid brick and stone buildings. At the rate the fire was spreading, it would reach this part of town at about two in the morning. Hogan glanced at his watch. That didn't give them too

## Scene One

much time. They had about twenty buildings to go through.

The truck stopped in front of the largest brick building. These buildings had already been evacuated. But just beyond the buildings was a large square. On the far side of the square was a large hotel, a popular restaurant called the Ratskeller, several small shops and apartment buildings. The owners and occupants of those buildings were still evacuating the area.

“Kommandant,” Hogan asked as they walked toward the buildings. “I meant to ask earlier, but where’s the SS? Their men could be useful.”

A humorless smile. “They decided discretion was the better part of valor and left soon after it was apparent they were in danger.”

“Figures. Must have been a mess trying to get out of here with their prisoners,” Hogan observed.

“Who said anything about prisoners,” Klink said soberly.

Hogan looked startled.

“I understand the prisoners were shot before they left. Attempting to escape is the official story,” Klink added as Hogan stopped walking. Klink continued, trailed by the Germans.

“And these are the wonderful people we’re helping,” Witton said bitterly to Hogan.

Hogan looked at him sharply. “Nobody forced you to help.”

“No? And what’s my option? Shot during the evacuation?”

“Klink would never,” Hogan began angrily.

“No? He’s a bloody kraut, just like all of them. Just as soon shoot you in the back as not.”

Hogan and his men stared after Witton and Baines.

“What’s got him so riled up?” asked Carter.

“I don’t know,” admitted Hogan. “But keep an eye on him, will you? A hothead like that can blow our entire operation.”

The men nodded and headed toward the buildings where Klink waited for them.

God, it was hot. Not so much from the fire as from the cramped location he was in and Hogan had to admit, the state of his nerves.

For hours, they had poked about the buildings, looking for the

## Scene One

best spots to plant the explosives and, since the truck arrived, actually planting them as well. But it looked like they were doing it. Most of the charges had been set.

There. One more done.

Hogan climbed out of the hole he was in and straightened tiredly.

*Ouch.* Hogan rubbed the crick in his neck and walked to the front of the building, a spool of wire unwinding behind him as he walked. One of the Germans took the wire from him and began splicing it into the master line.

Hogan walked out of the building. The area had come to life as the fire approached. People were soaking the few wooden buildings in the area with water, knocking down a few of the smaller structures and removing the wood. But stopping the fire still hinged on blowing up the buildings. Hopefully, the blast would have the secondary effect of smothering part of the fire.

Hogan walked over to the other side of the square where a table with food on it had been set up. Berta Haganspfeffer, the beautiful young widow who had bought the Ratskeller<sup>9</sup> last year, handed him a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

Hogan walked over to where Newkirk and LeBeau waited tiredly. They looked a mess. Come to think of it, so did he. They made room for him to sit down. Hogan ate his sandwich silently. Finally, he sat back, sipping his coffee.

He watched as Witton, trailed by Kinch, picked up a sandwich. Getting one as well, Kinch joined them.

“Anything?” Hogan asked Kinch as Witton sat a little away from them with his men.

Kinch shook his head. “Quiet as a lamb.”

Hogan grimaced. Perhaps he was suspicious for no good reason. Witton had been of enormous help. His knowledge of fires had proved very useful. Klink had deferred to his suggestions more often than not. Something that clearly surprised Witton.

Hogan put his cup on the ground and rubbed his eyes. God, he

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<sup>9</sup> “The Big Broadcast”

## Scene One

was tired. And he'd only been at this since this morning. Many of the townspeople had been fighting the fire since last night. As had Klink.

Hogan watched as Klink came back to the area, trailed by Gruber. Klink had gotten barely two hours of sleep in the past thirty-six, and it promised to be a long night. Klink had been more solicitous of others than he was of himself, insisting that those fighting the fire take the time to rest and, if possible, sleep. Hogan had once suggested that Klink do the same and had been silently rebuffed.

Hogan sighed. The Stage part of Klink's personality had taken over; it was what kept him going. It was also winning him admirers. People who had formerly slighted Klink, even insulted him, were now deferring to him in a way Hogan would never have thought possible.

Another sigh. If the town survived, things were never going to be the same around here again. Hogan could only hope that those same people would have the sense to protect Klink if his behavior prompted too many questions from Berlin.

## Scene One

– Four –

It was finished. Hogan waited beside Klink as the last group of men returned from the buildings.

Klink's eyes were on the approaching fire. If they were lucky, they had maybe a couple of hours before it reached this location. Except for a privileged few and the firefighters, everyone else had left the area, retreating to the woods.

Hogan wiped his brow. Already, he could feel the heat from the blaze.

The death toll from the fire was over forty with another hundred missing and presumed dead. Some of the victims had been fighting the fire. Already, sixty percent of the town had been destroyed, and the entire town had now been evacuated. If the firebreak failed, Hammelburg would be almost completely destroyed before the fire turned on the woods. Then it would sweep unimpeded toward the camp. The weather forecast called for snow sometime after dawn, but it would be too late to halt the destruction already in progress. Too late to save Stalag 13.

Several hundred men from the camp had volunteered to fight the fire. As of yet, there had been no escapes, though Hogan wouldn't have wanted to bet there would be none if the camp were evacuated. There had been some injuries among the prisoners, but only one was considered serious. Now, most of the camp's volunteers had been returned to Stalag 13 to get ready for the evacuation.

At a word, Klink and the others who had placed the charges returned to the empty buildings for a final check. As soon as they were finished, they were to return to headquarters. Klink wanted no one, including the firefighters, near the buildings when they blew. And the fire was already far too close for comfort.

One by one, the men checked their assigned buildings and returned to the group waiting on the edge of the woods. Soon,

## Scene One

there were only a few of them still checking.

Hogan ran into Klink as the latter checked and rechecked the connections.

“Colonel Hogan,” Klink requested, “I would like you to recheck the connections on the south end once more. I don’t want to take any chances.”

“Of course, Kommandant.” Hogan turned away.

“Robert.”

Hogan glanced back at Klink in surprise.

“There might not be time later on. If this fails, you and your men will return to camp.”

“And you?”

“I’ll go back later. But Captain Dingel<sup>10</sup> has orders to begin the evacuation at dawn. You will need to talk to your officers and men. To get ready.”

Hogan looked far too soberly at Klink, wanting desperately to think of something else they could do. But there wasn’t anything left to try. All he could do was nod his agreement.

Klink continued, “Dingel will hand out the remaining Red Cross packages, blankets and clothing. Your officers and noncoms can distribute them. Then the men will march to a railway siding some ten kilometers from camp. A train will be waiting there.”

“Where will they go?”

Klink shook his head. “I don’t know. That decision is out of my hands. Somewhere east I think. Wherever there’s room.”

“No camp has room,” Hogan said.

“I know. I’m sorry.”

Hogan nodded. “So am I.”

Klink glanced back at the fire. “You and your men, stay with Schultz.”

“We’re not leaving with the others.” A statement, not a question.

“No.”

“London?”

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<sup>10</sup> “Klink vs. the Gonculator

## Scene One

Klink hesitated. "I don't know." A sober look. "One of the things we will have to discuss. But first," he added as a soldier appeared, "we still have work to do."

Hogan nodded and left.

Klink headed over to the building where Baines was still checking.

Klink entered the dark building. The charges here were crucial. This building had to be destroyed totally or there was a good chance the fire would jump the firebreak and continue on. The charges on the first floor looked fine. Now down to the sublevel.

It was dark, the flashlight in his hand barely adding any light. It was also dismal — dust, dirt, broken boxes, bits of concrete.

The first charge should be here. His light found it.

Klink froze. The charge had been tampered with, the wire leading to the detonator severed.

Fury clouded Klink's mind for an instant, replaced by an icy calm as he set to work, fixing the damage.

He found another one, also sabotaged. He knelt, and began to fix it.

Klink was on the third charge. Engrossed in his task, he failed to hear the faint step behind him. Something gleamed in the faint light, something that struck at his back.

Klink felt the savage thrust rip into his back, the horrible pain darkening his vision, and he collapsed forward onto the charge.

Clumsily, the knife slashed again in the darkness as he fell.

Then the silent figure retreated, leaving behind Klink's fallen body, a stain dampening the left side of his uniform jacket.

Hogan met Witton in one of the buildings. Witton, to Hogan's surprise, was also rechecking the connections on the charges. Hogan challenged him on it.

"If I do a thing, I want it done right," Witton said belligerently.

"Maybe," Hogan said pointedly. "But a few hours ago, you would have been happy if the whole thing failed."

"All right," Witton admitted. "But that was yesterday. Before

## Scene One

I saw the women and kids and old people. They didn't care if I was an American or whether the fire was my fault. I never really thought of them as people before. Just targets. Or puppets." A deep breath. "I guess it's not their fault that Richey died."

"Or your father?" Hogan ventured.

A lopsided grin. "Or my father."

"Well, I'm glad you came to your senses," Hogan said. "You wouldn't have helped our operation by being a hothead."

"No, I guess not. But, Colonel," Witton touched his arm, "I'd better warn you about Baines."

Hogan stood still, a chill going through him. "What about Baines?"

"Colonel, I'm a hothead," Witton said. "He's not. He's as cold-blooded as they come. He hates Germans even more than I did. And," a deep breath, "I think he may have slipped over the edge. He lost his family in a recent air raid. I was gonna ground him after this mission."

"Then why did you drag him along with you?!" Hogan demanded.

"To keep an eye on him. I'm not sure I can trust him alone. But I've lost him. Do you know where he is?"

"I left him in one of the buildings," Hogan said tonelessly. "Klink was going to check on him."

"Colonel," Witton began in alarm.

"Come on!"

Lying on the dirty floor, his right hand beside his head, his left arm at his side, Klink's eyes opened. He blinked in the near total darkness. His head lifted. He started to push himself off the floor and almost cried out as his left arm gave way beneath him. Pain shot across his left shoulder and down his back and arm.

Gasping, he lay still, trying to catch his breath. After a moment, gritting his teeth against the pain, he tried again.

Clumsily, favoring his left side, Klink rose to his knees. His shirt stuck to his back as he moved, he could feel wetness on the left side. His right hand lifted to his left shoulder. The dirty fingers came away stained with blood.



## Scene One

Someone had tried to kill him. Under better conditions, they might have succeeded. But for now, he couldn't worry about it. He had to finish the job he'd started.

Ignoring the pain and the blood that flowed whenever he moved, Klink began reattaching the wires.

Klink had found the remaining charges on the lower level and fixed them. He blinked the sweat away from his eyes. It was getting hot. The fire couldn't be that far away now. Precious time had been lost. Time the town desperately needed.

He staggered to his feet. The wounds had congealed at least; he was in no immediate danger of bleeding to death. But he hurt.

*Getting soft, Klink? You're used to working with pain.*

But he was also far too tired and hot. And it was a little difficult to breathe. Did the knife puncture a lung?

Klink found the stairs and dragged his aching body up to the next level. It was a little cooler and more open up there.

He wiped his wet brow with his sleeve, smearing more dirt on his face. He had to check the charges up here again. Whoever had attacked him may have sabotaged them as well.

Wearily, he found the first charge. And wearily, he knelt to fix it. A moment later, Klink heard a noise in the darkness.

He stopped, listening.

There it was again. Not that far away.

Alert now, Klink stood and looked around. There were shadows everywhere as light from the approaching fire dispelled some of the darkness. But he could see nothing. Nor did he have anything to use as a weapon. But he had to get his attacker out in the open, before he struck again.

"All right," Klink called out. "Where are you?"

Silence.

"Have you come back to finish what you started? As you can see, I am not that easy to kill."

A faint noise to the left.

Klink turned toward it. "Afraid?" he taunted. "Of course you are. Only cowards stab their victims in the back."

There was a noise, almost like a snarl to his right. Then a crash to his left. Instinctively, he started to turn but he never

## Scene One

completed it. A figure jumped him, a knife raised high in its hand. Klink caught his attacker's wrist with his right hand as they fell to the ground. Klink landed heavily on his left shoulder, a cry escaping his lips. For an instant, the darkness became absolute, but he held on to consciousness.

Klink's grip tightened on the wrist of the man above him. He forced his left hand up, fighting the pain as he did so. Sweat slid down his face as he fought to keep the knife away from his body. But he had no idea how long he could do so. He was far too tired and the pain from his wounds was more than just troublesome; he could feel consciousness slipping away.

Unexpectedly, the weight lifted from him. Klink's hands dropped uselessly and he lay there gasping for breath.

"Kommandant!" a voice was saying urgently.

Klink lifted a shaking hand to his face to wipe the sweat out of his eyes. His eyes focused blearily on Witton's face as the American knelt beside him.

"Kommandant?" Witton repeated.

A deep breath to still his adrenaline-shaking body. "Help me sit up, please," Klink said in a low voice.

Witton moved to help him. Klink swallowed a cry as Witton grasped his left shoulder firmly.

Startled, Witton removed his hand from Klink's back. Blood stained his fingers. "You're hurt!" Witton gasped.

Klink ignored him. Leaning on Witton, Klink stood awkwardly, swaying a bit as he did so. "Who is it?" he asked in a shaky voice.

Hogan dragged a stirring Baines to his feet.

"But why?" Klink wanted to know.

"You killed them! You and all those other bastards! Killed my babies, you f . . . !"

The obscenities continued, alternating with his sobs.

Klink sighed; another victim of the war he hated. He looked at Baines pityingly.

"What do we do with him?" Witton asked, shaken by what happened.

"Take him back to camp," Hogan said, not without pity.

"And do what with him?" Klink asked wearily. "Lock him

## Scene One

up?”

“Well, what else can we do?” Witton asked in frustration. Then, “You’re not going to shoot him, are you?” He was aghast.

“No,” Klink said slowly. “But perhaps it would be better if he were a casualty of the fire.” He looked at Hogan.

A slow smile on the American’s face. “It would wreck your perfect record.”

“Hardly,” Klink retorted. “He would be listed as missing, presumed dead, like the rest of the victims of the fire.”

Witton was horrified. “You’re not going to leave him here!”

Klink sighed. “No, we are not. Colonel Hogan will explain.” Klink turned back to the charge.

Now Hogan noticed the slashes and the blood on Klink’s stained jacket. “Wilhelm!” The name slipped out.

Witton’s startled eyes swung to Hogan’s face and back to Klink.

“Robert.”

Witton started. What kind of a prison camp was this when the Kommandant and senior prisoner were on a first name basis?

“Robert,” Klink repeated. “I will finish resetting the charges. They will go off in exactly,” he checked his watch, “fifteen minutes.”

“Leave them,” Hogan said tersely.

Klink shook his aching head. “They are too important.” God, he was tired, and he hurt so. But . . . “Without these, the fire cannot be stopped. It is already too close.”

“But you’re hurt,” Hogan protested. “Let me — ”

Klink interrupted him, his toneless voice hiding his pain and fatigue. “You need to deal with Baines. Both of you.”

“But — ”

Klink turned back to him, wincing as he did so. “Go. Now,” Klink said far more calmly than he felt. “That was a direct order, Colonel.” He managed a small smile. “From both of our armies.”

“You would pull rank,” Hogan grumbled. “You’d better get out. I’m not breaking in a new kommandant this late in the war.” The expression in his eyes belied the flippancy.

Their eyes held for a moment before Klink turned away. “I

## Scene One

intend to.” Then, “Go. I have work to do.”

Hogan stared at Klink’s bloodied back for a moment, his throat tight with emotion. Then he turned to Baines, pulling him to his feet. “Come on.” His voice was rougher than he intended.

Hogan and Witton dragged the whimpering Baines away. They left the building using a side entrance away from the view of any observers. Hogan explained what they were going to do as they walked unseen toward the woods.

Minutes later, Hogan and Witton joined the observers watching the buildings.

“Where is Kommandant Klink?” the Burgermeister asked.

“Still checking the connections,” Hogan said tensely. “Some appear to have slipped.”

“But,” objected Gruber, “there are only a few minutes left.”

“Two minutes,” a voice said tonelessly.

*Oh, God, Hogan found himself praying, after all this, Klink had to make it. If he didn’t . . .*

“One minute.” Again that emotionless voice.

Then all too soon. “Thirty seconds.”

“There!” LeBeau shouted.

Klink was running toward them, his figure silhouetted by the fire behind him.

The voice began a countdown. “Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . .”

All too quickly, it reached one.

The charges blew.

The buildings lurched and then, as if in slow motion, began to crumble. As Hogan and the others watched, Klink was caught in the shock wave that followed. He was picked up and tossed like a rag doll. After a few horrifyingly interminable moments, his body dropped, crumpling to the ground.

“Look!” a voice cried.

As the dust finally settled, they could see the remains of the buildings blocking the fire. And, as they had not dared to hope, the force of the explosions appeared to smother the hottest flames.

There was a wild cry from the firefighters and they surged forward with renewed hope to battle the remaining blaze.

## Scene One

Hogan ran, oblivious of the others. He reached Klink's limp body first. He turned Klink over. "Wilhelm?" he said in a soft voice. Then louder, "Kommandant?"

Doctor Ernst Bauer<sup>11</sup> arrived just behind Hogan and felt for a pulse. "He is alive. Bring a stretcher!" he ordered, his gentle hands feeling for possible fractures. Startled, his fingers pulled away. The doctor stared at the blood on his hand and then at Hogan.

"Doctor," Hogan said softly, "I think he would appreciate it if you didn't say anything to anyone about that."

"But how?" The doctor was shaken.

"Later," Hogan promised. "But for now, please."

The doctor nodded, "All right, Colonel. For him, I promise."

Hogan smiled faintly, an unexpected lump in his throat.

The stretcher-bearers arrived. Hogan helped them place Klink gently on it. Then, slowly, carrying their pale burden, they walked to the waiting ambulance.

Hogan stood, his eyes straying to the fire. It did seem to be dying. Finally.

Absurd tears stung his eyes. After all these years of fighting, was Klink ultimately to be destroyed by a fire?

*Oh, God, he prayed, not now. Not when the end was so close. Klink had to survive to see it. He had to.*

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<sup>11</sup> *Act One*

## Scene One

– Five –

Morning. Hogan walked toward the mansion through the heavy snowfall; it had started snowing an hour ago. Hogan rubbed his eyes and yawned. He had spent the past few hours fighting the remaining blaze. But they had won. Most of the fire had been eradicated; the snow would help put out the rest of it.

Snow. It was welcome now. But later on, it would be a different kind of tragedy for those without homes. At least those townspeople who had decided to stay had been able to save many of their possessions. Hammelburg would rebuild again. It was finding a strength and a unity that had been nearly erased by the war. People who had once argued and actively fought each other were extending hands of help. It was nice to see.

Hogan entered the abandoned mansion that had been converted into a small hospital. All of Hammelburg's hospitals and clinics had been destroyed. The most seriously injured had been removed to hospitals in other towns. The remaining victims were ambulatory and could be treated in their homes or with others.

Hogan smiled at a couple of men from the camp. He went over to check on them. "How's it going, fellas?"

"Fine, sir," Corporal Gordon McMartin answered. "Just a broken wing." He held up his cast-encased right arm. "Be right as rain soon enough."

"Good," Hogan said. He turned to the other man. "What about you, Spencer?"

Private Jimmy Spencer held up his bandaged left hand. "Coming along nicely, Colonel. Just a slight burn."

"Uh, Colonel," McMartin asked cautiously, "how's the Kommandant?"

More changes. A few days ago, McMartin wouldn't have asked, or cared.

"That's what I'm here to find out."

"He sure was something out there," Spencer observed. "You

## Scene One

know I always thought of him as a bloody fool. He was anything but last night.”

“Yeah,” McMartin said. “Guess you can’t always tell how a bloke will react under pressure.”

“Guess not,” Hogan agreed. “I’ll see you boys back at camp.”

“Right, sir.”

“Never thought I’d say this, but I’m glad to be going back,” Spencer said.

Hogan returned their grins and left. He nearly bumped into Witton.

“What are you doing here?” Hogan demanded.

A grin. “Same thing you are.”

“He might refuse to see you,” Hogan said.

“Then again he might not.”

“All right. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Schultz watched as Doctor Bauer changed the bandage on Klink’s back. The Kommandant had regained consciousness not too long ago and looked tired. But Schultz wasn’t worried. Klink was not going anywhere for some time. Not if Doctor Bauer had anything to say about it. And, Schultz knew, Doctor Bauer would say plenty.

A knock on the door.

Both Doctor Bauer and Klink turned to look at the door. Schultz turned as well and opened the door a crack. Colonel Hogan and Captain Witton stood there.

“Can we come in, Schultz?” Hogan asked.

Schultz glanced back at the doctor. Bauer nodded. Then Schultz glanced at Klink. Annoyed at being consulted second, Klink also nodded.

Schultz, with a grin, opened the door to let the two Americans in.

Hogan smiled as he saw Klink. Shirtless, with a bandage covering the back of his left shoulder and winding around his torso, Klink was being eased back onto the bed by the Doctor. Klink winced as he was laid on his wounds.

The Doctor was brisk. “I give you five minutes only, gentlemen. Then the Kommandant will have a nice long rest.” He

## Scene One

cut off Klink's attempted protest. "Herr Kommandant, three hours of unconsciousness, with a concussion, do not make up for nearly forty-eight hours without sleep. You are staying here until I am convinced you are rested enough and well enough to leave."

Klink gave up. "Jawohl, Herr Doktor."

With a smile at the Americans, Bauer left the room.

"How's the fire?" Klink asked.

Hogan grinned. "Don't you know?"

"Nobody tells me anything around here," Klink grumbled. "Including him!" He glared at Schultz. And was ignored.

"The fire's nearly out." Hogan sat beside the bed. "And it's snowing."

"That I could see for myself," Klink retorted. His head lay back on the pillow, his eyes on the ceiling. "And our missing prisoner?" he asked in a low voice.

"On his way to France along with the others."

Klink nodded and his eyes closed. "I haven't thanked you for saving my life."

Hogan smiled. "This makes us about even."

A small smile played on Klink's lips. "Actually, it doesn't," he said to Hogan's surprise. "But who's counting?"

"What do you mean, it doesn't," Hogan began and stopped as a spasm crossed Klink's face. "I'll argue with you later, when you're feeling better." Hogan's voice dropped to a quieter tone. "What about Bauer? Is he saying anything?"

A faint smile. "Dieter<sup>12</sup> would like him. He's very good and has decided that the less he knows the better. He is also very discreet. The stabbing will not be in his report to Burkhalter." The blue eyes opened to look at Witton. "And how discreet are you, Captain?" Klink asked bluntly. "And have you stopped hating me yet?"

"How did you . . . ?" Witton began shakily and stopped as Klink's eyes appraised him. Witton swallowed nervously. "Yes, sir, I guess I have. And before any of this happened."

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<sup>12</sup> Dieter Müller, Klink's physician brother-in-law. *Act One*



## Scene One

A tiny smile from Klink.

“And I can be as discreet as necessary.”

“Good. I also hope you can follow orders as well.” Klink’s eyes closed again. “Because Colonel Hogan will not tell you anything more than you already know.” Then the eyes snapped open and swung to Hogan. “I assume you didn’t have time to say much?”

“No, sir, not really.”

“Good. Keep it that way.” Klink’s eyes closed. “And to forestall any questions, the reason is mainly for my protection. And yours. The less you know, the better it will be.”

“Yes, sir,” Witton said.

Klink’s eyes opened and met Witton’s unswerving gaze. A slow smile. “I think I like you, Captain. Perhaps we can talk later.”

“I would like that, sir,” Witton said quietly.

Klink nodded wearily, his eyes closing.

The door opened Doctor Bauer reentered the room. “Time, gentlemen,” he said firmly. “The Kommandant needs to rest.”

Hogan nodded and stood. “We’ll see you later, Kommandant. If you don’t mind.” A glance at Bauer. “And if Doctor Bauer has no objections.”

“Not until tonight,” Bauer countered. “Kommandant Klink will be having a nice long sleep. Good day, gentlemen.” He held the door open for them.

With smiles and soft goodbyes, the two Americans left the room.

By mutual if silent consent, the two Americans waited in the hallway. After a few minutes, Doctor Bauer emerged from the bedroom.

“Still here, gentlemen?” he asked, not appearing surprised to see them.

“How is he, Doctor? Really?” Hogan asked quietly.

“Doing better than I would have expected,” Bauer admitted. “He is in excellent physical condition.” That seemed to surprise him. “Odd, I always assumed he wouldn’t be.”

“So did I,” murmured Hogan.

“He came out of the concussion well, though he will have a very bad headache for some time,” Bauer continued. “The

## Scene One

knife," he looked curiously at the Americans, "did no serious damage either. In a few days, he should be up and around."

"You may find you have to release him earlier," Hogan said.

"Absolutely not!" protested Bauer.

"Doctor Bauer," Hogan said softly, "you're supposed to be treating him for a concussion and fatigue. Not a stab wound. I don't think you can hold him for more than a couple of days."

"I will arrange a relapse," Bauer retorted.

Hogan shook his head. "Then General Burkhalter will probably want to take him to a military hospital. Or have him examined by a Luftwaffe doctor. He can't afford either one," Hogan reminded.

"I see." The doctor was not too pleased.

"Let him determine when to leave," Hogan suggested. "As long as it's a reasonable amount of time for a man with a concussion," he added to cut off the doctor's protest. "I think you'll find he knows his limits."

"Yes," Bauer murmured. Then a deep sigh. "He has some interesting scars."

"Which don't exist either," Hogan said.

"All right, Colonel," Bauer agreed. "I suppose I do not have much choice."

"No, Doctor," Hogan said. "You don't. Not if you really care whether he lives or dies."

Bauer looked startled. "I . . ." His voice was subdued. "I think I understand, Colonel Hogan." He looked at Hogan. "And yes, I do care if he lives or dies."

"Good," Hogan said. Then he added almost pessimistically, "I hope the rest of the town does as well."

A smile. "Colonel Hogan, I assure you that, right now, Kommandant Wilhelm Klink is the most popular man in town." His smile grew. "And that comes from a man who had little use for him in the past." He shook his head. "How could I, we, have been so wrong!"

"Doctor," Hogan smiled, "if it's any consolation, you weren't the only one."

"Colonel, I had already gathered that. Now," his tone became businesslike, "I have other patients to see. And," a quick glance

## Scene One

out the window, "I see your ride back to the camp is here. Until later, gentlemen."

The doctor started down the hallway, then stopped and turned back to the Americans. "Colonel Hogan!"

Hogan turned to him.

"I wish to thank you as well. Without the help of your men, the town would have been destroyed. Thank you all."

Hogan smiled. "You're very welcome. But our help wasn't completely altruistic."

"Whatever the reason, thank you."

Hogan nodded and, trailed by Witton, started down the stairs.

Doctor Bauer stared after them for a minute and then at the door to Klink's room. What was going on at that prison camp? Come to think of it, did he really want to know?

He headed down the hallway to the other bedrooms.

## Scene One

– Six –

The next few days were quiet. Kommandant Wilhelm Klink stayed in the impromptu hospital. Hogan went to see him a couple of times, finding him more rested with each visit. Hauptmann Fritz Gruber remained in charge of Stalag 13 until the Kommandant's return.

A report, Hogan knew, had gone to Berlin from the Burgermeister and the Town Council regarding the actions of Stalag 13 personnel during the fire. Hogan had no idea what was in it, but from the hints dropped by Bauer during his last visit, it should have been fairly straightforward and rather matter-of-fact. Hopefully, it downplayed Klink's actions during the crisis. In a way it was funny. The old Klink continually tried to get a promotion; the new Klink shied away from bringing attention to himself. His actions during the fire could have earned him that promotion. But it would also jeopardize his cover.

Over the objections of the doctor, Klink returned to the camp on the second evening following the fire. He promised to take it easy, arguing that he preferred not taking up much needed bed space.

And he did take it easy. Klink barely nodded at Hogan when he arrived. Besides Sergeant Schultz, his only visitor was Captain Gruber who brought him up to date on what had been happening at the camp.

Captain Gruber. Hogan watched from his room as Gruber entered Klink's quarters. Something was bothering the man. But Hogan had no idea what. Maybe Klink could find out.

He closed the shutters; it was nearly time for lights out.

General Albert Burkhalter, Klink's obese superior, arrived the next morning. Hogan, who had wondered when Burkhalter would show up, watched from the door of his barracks.

"Who's the brass?" Witton asked as he walked over.

"General Burkhalter, Klink's commanding officer," Hogan

## Scene One

replied. He straightened up. "Let's listen in."

By the time Hogan and his men had set up their listening device, the amenities in Klink's office had been dispensed with.

"I've been reading the reports on the fire, Klink," General Burkhalter was saying in his rather distinctive voice. "Most interesting."

"Yes, sir," Klink said. "Have you been to town yet?"

"No," Burkhalter said. "I wanted to see you first."

Witton was puzzled as he listened in. "Klink sounds different."

Hogan grinned. "No, that's the way he normally talked."

"Huh?"

"Don't ask, Captain."

A sigh. "Yes, sir."

"You appear to have done well, Klink," came Burkhalter's dry voice.

"Thank you, sir," Klink said in a puffed up voice.

"So did the prisoners."

"Yes, sir, they did." Klink was almost gloating.

"I would like to say thank you to Hogan and his men." The chair creaked as Burkhalter stood.

"Of course, sir. I'll have Sergeant Schultz get him."

"No. I think I'll go see him myself."

"As you wish, Herr General."

"Oops. Time to shut down," Hogan said.

The coffee pot was hurriedly put away and the men adjourned to the common room. Hogan's men set up a card game while Witton poured Hogan a cup of coffee and then one for himself.

Burkhalter, followed by an inanely smiling Klink, entered the barracks.

"Achtung!" Schultz called from the door.

There was a halfhearted attempt to stand at attention from the prisoners in the room.

Hogan saluted, a little more professionally than his men. "Good morning, General," Hogan said cheerfully. "What brings you here?"

"I heard about the fire," Burkhalter said.

"Quite a mess," Hogan said, less cheer in his voice.

## Scene One

“So I hear. The Kommandant and I will be going to town shortly to see for ourselves.” The general’s eyes swept the room. “I also hear that you and your men were quite helpful, Colonel Hogan.”

“We tried, General.” Hogan glanced at Klink for a moment. “Just doing what we were told.”

“I doubt that very much, Colonel.” Disbelief in Burkhalter’s voice. “I rather suspect it was the other way around.”

Hogan grinned. So that’s the way Burkhalter interpreted the report. That Klink was just getting credit for whatever Hogan and his men came up with. “Well, you’re the general, sir. I’m sure you know best.”

Klink managed to look completely confused throughout the exchange.

“I do,” Burkhalter said in a very dry voice. “Be that as it may, Stalag 13 came out of this looking remarkably well. No escapes, few injuries, though I understand there was one death?”

“Yes, sir.” Klink looked appropriately sad. “One of the prisoners got too close to the explosives. A great tragedy.”

“Yes. Unfortunate,” Burkhalter echoed. “But the town’s report to Berlin was very commendatory, Colonel Hogan. They had high praise for everyone from this camp.”

“I’m sure the Kommandant deserves all the credit,” Hogan said truthfully.

As he expected, he was not believed. “I am sure,” Burkhalter’s voice was mocking, “the Kommandant did as well as any of us would expect. However, you have my thanks.” Burkhalter was in an almost jovial mood.

Hogan smiled. “You’re welcome, General.”

“Come, Klink.” Unexpectedly, as he turned, Burkhalter’s hand came down on the left shoulder of the man standing slightly behind him.

Hogan’s men froze; Hogan had told them what had happened. A shocked Witton dropped his cup to the floor, attracting Burkhalter’s attention. Witton hurriedly bent to clean up the mess, his hands shaking.

Hogan’s eyes stayed on Klink. He knew that the knife wounds were barely healed and still painful. As usual, Klink was

## Scene One

functioning without the benefit of painkillers.

Klink's face was immobile; the spasm that had crossed his face was gone. His eyes had closed to hide the sudden pain and they opened slowly.

"Come, Klink," Burkhalter was saying.

Klink managed a wan smile. "Of course, Herr General." His voice was perfectly normal.

Klink was just a touch slow as he turned around. By then, Burkhalter had gone out of the barracks. His body tightly erect, Kommandant Klink left the barracks, trailed by a worried looking Sergeant Schultz.

Witton stood up, ashen faced. "I'm sorry, Colonel," he began shakily.

"Don't be," Hogan said quietly. "You gave him the time he needed."

"But the pain!" Witton whispered.

The coffee tasted bitter in Hogan's mouth. He put the cup down. "It's not the first time." His voice was low, grim. "Unfortunately, I don't think it will be the last."

Much later in the day, General Burkhalter and Klink returned to the camp. Burkhalter, to Hogan's surprise, decided not to stay for dinner. The general's car and its escort left almost immediately.

Hogan sauntered over to Klink's quarters.

A glum Schultz opened the door. "Come in, Colonel Hogan. Please."

"How is he, Schultz?" Hogan asked in a low voice.

A shrug from the large sergeant.

Klink emerged from his bedroom, carrying his shirt, a bandage on the back of his left shoulder.

Schultz hurried over to Klink and took the shirt, holding it for the Kommandant. Klink slipped his arms into the sleeves; Schultz settled the shirt on his back.

"Why don't you just get ready for bed?" Hogan asked.

"At this hour of the day? Don't be ridiculous!"

Hogan smiled faintly. "How does it feel?"

An indifferent shrug. Then a wince.

## Scene One

"That's what I thought," Hogan said dryly.

Klink sighed, buttoning his shirt. "It felt much better before Burkhalter decided to get friendly."

Hogan smiled. "How did Burkhalter like the tour?"

Klink waved Schultz away as he brought over the uniform jacket. "He was more bothered than he let on. Now that the snow has stopped, the damage is even more apparent."

"And what did the Town Council say?" Hogan asked quietly.

Klink sat at the dining table. "Pretty much what they said in the report. No less and, more important, no more."

"So they're keeping their mouths shut," Hogan observed.

Klink nodded. "Fortunately Burkhalter was more interested in getting back to Berlin than in asking a lot of questions."

"Good."

Klink smiled. "Agreed." Then his eyes twinkled. "Are you up to losing another game?"

"Losing?! I won the last one."

"By getting me to talk," Klink countered. "I warn you, I'm not feeling very talkative tonight."

Hogan grinned and walked over to the table. "I'll risk it anyway."

With a faint smile, Schultz brought over the chess set. And glanced at Hogan warningly.

"Don't worry, Schultz," Hogan said in a low voice. "I'm not staying late."

"You can stop whispering," Klink said with annoyance. "I am not a child."

Schultz walked over to the door, enjoying the friendly argument going on behind him. Back to normal again.

No, he corrected. Back to the new normal, the way it had been since that SS colonel left. He didn't know what, but something had happened between the two men after that visit. Something that deepened the bond between them. Something that, he had come to realize, was spelling the demise of the old Kommandant character. And Schultz was glad, so very glad. Finally, Wilhelm Klink was beginning to emerge from his shell.

Then a frown. Now, if only no one would notice . . .



## Scene One

– Seven –

“Colonel.” Newkirk nodded toward Klink’s office. “What’s Gruber up to?”

Hogan looked over to where the German captain stood indecisively.

“He looks a bit shaky,” Kinch observed.

“Why,” Baker asked softly, “is he wearing a gun?”

Hogan straightened up. “He is, isn’t he?”

Gruber seemed to have finally made up his mind. He started up the stairs.

“Let’s listen in,” Hogan said.

Hauptmann Fritz Gruber looked around the outer office nervously. Fraulein Hilda was not at her desk; she had gone into town to deliver some supplies. Good. He really did not want anyone around right now. Gruber knocked on the inner door.

“Come in!” a voice called from inside the office.

Gruber opened the door. Kommandant Wilhelm Klink sat at his desk, doing some reports.

Klink glanced at Gruber as he walked in. “Come in, Hauptmann,” Klink said. “I was about to call you.” Klink sifted through the piles of paper in front of him. “Berlin has come up with a new report. I’d like you to . . . ” He looked at Gruber.

His next words sent a chill through Hogan and his listening men. “Hauptmann,” Klink asked calmly, “may I ask why you are pointing that gun at me?”

Gruber looked uneasy.

Klink sighed and started to push away from the desk.

“Please!” Gruber was almost pleading. “Do not move!”

“All right, Hauptmann.” Klink settled more comfortably in his chair. A smile, pleasant enough but with a hint of something else in it. “May I ask what is wrong?”

“You are!” The words tumbled out. “You’re not the same. You’re not the Kommandant!”

## Scene One

A puzzled smile. "I assure you I am."

Gruber looked confused.

"What makes you think I'm not?"

"You're different!" Gruber blurted out. "You're more efficient, more professional. Less of a . . ." He stopped, embarrassed.

"Less of a fool?" Klink finished softly.

Miserable, Gruber nodded.

"So you think there's something wrong with me because I act more like you think a soldier should act?" The irony was tinged with sarcasm.

"It is like . . . The night of the fire . . ." Gruber's voice was almost wondering. "You took charge. General Burkhalter thinks it was Colonel Hogan and the others who were in charge. But he is wrong. Everyone listened to you. You organized everything. You even knew how to set the explosives. It was you!"

"And why are you so surprised, Hauptmann?" Klink asked slyly. "After all, I am a colonel in the Luftwaffe. I did nothing that any officer in the finest fighting force in the world would not have done." The irony in his voice could not be mistaken.

It was lost on Gruber. "But you have never acted like that before. I mean, not so well. Or perhaps, before, you were playing a part . . ." His voice trailed off at the look in Klink's eye.

"Perhaps I was tired of playing the part, Hauptmann," Klink said softly.

"What do we do, Colonel?" Carter asked.

Hogan's voice was tight. "We stay put. Let him handle it."

"But Gruber's got a gun on him!" protested Baker.

"Yeah! And if we rush in, he just might pull the trigger and get Klink killed."

"He might get killed anyway," Newkirk said glumly.

"It's a chance we have to take," Hogan said, none too happy about it.

"Or, perhaps," Klink continued, "that night, I discovered qualities in myself I never knew I had."

Gruber looked shaken.

"Sometimes it takes a disaster to show what we're really

## Scene One

made of.”

“I . . . I suppose that is possible,” Gruber said more to himself than Klink.

“Of course it is, Hauptmann,” Klink said heartily. “Now please, put that gun away. And we’ll forget this ever happened.”

The gun wavered in Gruber’s hand. “I . . . I do not know what to do.” He thought for a minute. Then his voice was stronger as he came to a decision. “I will call General — ”

“No.” Klink’s voice was soft.

Startled, Gruber looked at him. He found himself shaking at the look in Klink’s eyes.

“No,” Klink repeated. “That is not an option.”

“But — ”

“You have two choices, Hauptmann Gruber,” Klink said in a deceptively soft voice. “One, put the gun away and give me your word that you will never mention this to anyone. Or two — ”

Gruber looked at him, fear in his eyes.

“You pull that trigger. And I warn you, Hauptmann, you had better not miss. Because you will not get a second chance.”

Klink stood slowly. The gun followed him as he rose.

“You had also better be prepared to pay the consequences. If you kill me, there is an excellent chance that you will not leave this camp alive. And you will also be branded a madman, or worse, for killing your commanding officer.”

“But . . . But . . . ” Gruber stammered. “I will explain — ”

“To whom?” Gruber found himself shivering when Klink smiled. “Who can you really trust, Hauptmann? If you think I can’t be trusted?”

“I . . . ”

The gun in Gruber’s hand shook and he looked stricken. This was not going as he had expected. The gun should have given him the upper hand. Instead, it had not. Klink seemed unafraid of it. That in itself was wrong.

But what if Klink was right? Other men found courage in times of crisis. Perhaps the Kommandant had never really been tested. Perhaps he never knew what he was capable of.

The gun lowered fractionally.

Perhaps . . .

## Scene One

Perhaps Klink was not what he seemed. Perhaps he was playing a game. If so, then he was a traitor. And it was Gruber's duty to kill him.

No. Gruber couldn't do it. He couldn't kill anyone in cold blood. In fact, he had only killed once in combat. He had also been wounded by a grenade. Sent home, he had contrived to pull every string in the book to keep from being sent back into combat.

Perhaps that's what Klink had done as well. Realized he was no soldier, and this was his way of avoiding battle.

But if Klink was playing a role, perhaps it was for a sinister purpose. Perhaps even treasonable.

Gruber couldn't decide.

He didn't want to. He wanted to call Burkhalter. Burkhalter would get the truth. Burkhalter . . .

Or the Gestapo.

Gruber went white. He hadn't thought of that. Things were insane in Berlin. Everyone knew that. The war was going too badly. The Allies were already inside German borders. Many of those in charge were too busy pointing fingers at others. Anyone suspected of any hint of treason was turned over to the Gestapo. And they . . .

Gruber stared at Klink.

He couldn't. Even if Klink were his worst enemy, he couldn't turn Klink over to the Gestapo. And he knew he couldn't kill him. The gun dropped to Gruber's side.

Klink straightened up with an inward sigh of relief. He hadn't been all that sure what Gruber would decide. "Your word, Hauptmann," he said quietly, "that you will say nothing about this to anyone."

Gruber nodded unhappily. "You have my word, Kommandant."

"Good." Klink sat down with a faint smile. "As I said, Hauptmann, there's a new report that Berlin wants. Now, where did I . . . ? Oh, here it is." Klink's voice was back to normal, as if nothing had happened. He picked up the paper and handed it to a numb Gruber. "I'd like you to take care of it."

Gruber took the paper unthinkingly.

## Scene One

“Dismissed, Hauptmann.” Klink saluted.

Gruber’s hand, still holding the gun, rose partway to return the salute. Then he seemed to notice the pistol. With embarrassment, he returned the gun to its holster. Holding the new report, Gruber backed toward the door and reaching it, opened it hurriedly. The door slammed behind him.

Klink’s expression became somber. He leaned back in his chair and waited.

Moments later, Hogan came in.

“You heard?” Klink asked.

Hogan nodded. “Now what?”

Klink sat straighter. “He’s confused. He wants to trust me. But he’s not sure. He also doesn’t want to deal with the consequences of his thoughts.”

“We could get rid of him.”

Klink shook his head. “No. He will keep his word; he won’t say anything.”

“And if he doesn’t?” Hogan asked quietly.

A very faint smile. “Then I will have misjudged someone for the last time in my life.” His tone changed. “Now, get out of here, Colonel Hogan. I have work to do.”

An inward sigh. “Yes, sir.”

Hogan saluted and left.



# Act Three

## Interlude





## Interlude

– Eight –

With narrowed eyes, Kommandant Wilhelm Klink looked at the five men who were entering his office. It had only been a few days since the fire, and he really hadn't expected to see Burgermeister Rudolf Scheinfeld, Kurt Hausner, Police Chief Werner Krueger, Monsignor Jürgen Geisler and Doctor Ernst Bauer at the camp. A very curious Colonel Hogan brought up the rear.

Klink had come to know Doctor Bauer reasonably well. Bauer shared a love of medicine with a love for his patients, no matter who they were. He had not been actively involved in the resistance groups in Hammelburg, but he had turned a blind eye more than once when those groups crossed his path. And Klink knew of at least two instances when the doctor had sheltered injured people who had been sought by the Nazis.

The other men of Hammelburg were also extraordinary for the times they lived in. Men of quiet courage and ideals.

Rudolf Scheinfeld, a plump genial man in his late forties, had long served Hammelburg. An astute, honest businessman, he had seen most of his fortune ruined when he refused to play by the rules set up by the Nazis, rules abetted by far too many men of business. And he had refused to play the political games as well. Which meant that, despite a long family history of Scheinfelds serving as Burgermeisters, Rudolf Scheinfeld hadn't become the Burgermeister until late last year when the aged, and clearly powerless, Burgermeister died. Scheinfeld had been appointed as an interim Burgermeister, pending elections to be held after the current crisis, that is the war, ended. Since Hammelburg had lost much of its influence and war industries, thanks to Hogan and the local underground, more powerful interests hadn't opposed Scheinfeld's appointment. The more powerful interests had abandoned the town long before the fire destroyed most of it.

Police Chief Werner Krueger. Just elevated Police Chief

## Interlude

Werner Krueger. Unlike his politically appointed predecessor, Hans Strauss, Krueger, who had come up through the ranks, wasn't a Nazi. That little fact had kept the 57-year-old Krueger from becoming chief until now. But when the previous chief had had the misfortune of being one of the victims of the fire, Krueger had taken over. And Klink wouldn't have wanted to bet that Strauss's death had been just an unfortunate accident. While not as bad as others holding that position in other cities, Strauss had not been above using bribes and intimidation in the performance of his duties. And he had cooperated far too enthusiastically with the SS and Gestapo when it came to arresting those suspected of opposing the Nazis. No one would mourn Strauss. Or question the manner of his death. Least of all the man most probably responsible for it.

Monsignor Jürgen Geisler, pastor of the sole remaining church in town. Hammelburg had been an oddity in this part of Germany — a primarily Catholic enclave in predominantly Protestant northwestern Germany. Young Father Geisler had arrived in Hammelburg in 1930, fresh from a seminary. And he had stayed on after old Father Braun died a couple of years later. Geisler had been young and idealistic, but tempered with a realistic knowledge of what he could and couldn't accomplish in the country that was fast becoming Nazi Germany. He had trod a careful line, exhorting his parishioners to love and serve their fellow man, yet he managed to avoid directly criticizing the Nazi masters who listened carefully to his sermons. A path that would surely have sent him to one of the concentration camps. Camps already filled with thousands of priests, ministers and other religious who had crossed that line, either deliberately or accidentally. Monsignor Geisler was no longer so young, and no longer idealistic. But age had also brought out a streak of covert daring. Taking the example of thousands of others to heart to do what he could to protect the victims of the Nazis' hate, the parish's old baptismal rolls had swelled when Father Geisler had found a number of errors committed by the late pastor. Father Braun had been a saintly man, but he had been prone to the forgetfulness and lethargy that affects many old people, and had kept less than accurate records of who had been baptized. In

## Interlude

fact, it seemed to be a failing of several previous pastors as Father Geisler discovered when the Nazis instituted the Aryan laws. He had been forced to spend several sleepless nights reconstructing those old baptismal records that had been so sadly neglected over the past few generations. At least that was the official story, if anyone bothered to ask. But only one person had bothered to ask — the man standing next to Monsignor Geisler, Kurt Hausner, the head of the Town Council.

Kurt Hausner, like Rudolf Scheinfeld, his life-long friend, also came from a family with a long history of service to Hammelburg. Hausner, really von Hausner, was the only remaining aristocrat left in the area. Others like the Baroness von Krimm<sup>13</sup>, Field Marshall von Leiter<sup>14</sup> and General von Behler<sup>15</sup> had long since left Hammelburg. The Baroness's abandoned estate now served the town as its hospital, and the other estates had been appropriated to house some of the homeless citizens of Hammelburg. But Hausner, who had dropped the "von" from his name upon reaching his maturity, had stayed and continued to serve. Years ago, Hausner had, as did many aristocrats and ambitious men, joined the Nazi Party. The token ideals, the slogans, and the real grievances that Germany had, had caught his then naive idealism. But those days, and the naïveté, had long disappeared. Hausner had retained his nominal membership in the party, using it to discreetly help the local resistance movement and others like Monsignor Geisler. He was fortunate enough to have had an honorable name, enough money, and the right acquaintances so that the real Nazis in town rarely questioned his word. Among the documents that Klink was certain had not been saved from the fire was the list of Nazi Party members in Hammelburg. Klink, the Stage, didn't care. He had his own list of the Nazis in town. And Hausner wasn't on it.

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<sup>13</sup> "My Favorite Prisoner"

<sup>14</sup> "Hogan's Double Life"

<sup>15</sup> "Operation Hannibal"

## Interlude

The amenities had been dispensed with and Klink gazed curiously at the five men sitting in the now crowded office; Hogan leaned unobtrusively against the door. The five men had looked at each other as if wondering what in the world they were doing in the Kommandant's office, a place they had managed to stay away from in the years Klink had been at Stalag 13. But that was before the fire, back when they all privately saw the Kommandant as a bragging fool. Now . . .

"So, Meine Herren," Klink asked after a short and uncomfortable silence. "What can I do for you?"

The quick glances again, then Hausner spoke, "We, that is, Hammelburg needs your assistance, Herr Kommandant."

"If it is in my power," Klink said noncommittally.

"Herr Kommandant," Geisler leaned closer to the desk, "conditions in Hammelburg are even worse than we had anticipated."

"Go on," Klink prompted as Geisler fell silent.

"Herr Kommandant." Doctor Bauer took a deep breath. "As you know, most of Hammelburg is gone. Homes, businesses, schools, hospitals. All the public buildings. What is left is primarily residential. Very few businesses. Most of the farms have survived, but this area has never been agricultural. It had been mining country once but —"

"Meine Herren," Klink cut in. "I am aware of the history of the area. I don't mean to be rude, but what does this have to do with me?"

Scheinfeld took a deep breath. "Hammelburg is dying, Herr Kommandant. Only a few hundred people remain. But unless something is done, most of those will leave as well."

"The problem is, Herr Kommandant," Geisler picked it up, "that we have almost no reserves of food to get our people through the winter. We can salvage shelter from what is left, but food is the most pressing problem."

Klink frowned. "I see the problem but —"

"We would like your help in procuring food, Herr Kommandant," Hausner said. "Right now, it appears that only the military has access to transportation and supplies."

"We are not begging, Herr Kommandant," Scheinfeld rushed

## Interlude

in. "We can pay. We," a glance at Hausner, "have enough funds to do so. The problem is procuring the goods we need, not paying for them."

At the expense of whatever remained of their fortunes, Klink knew. But these men were willing to make that sacrifice. However . . .

"I wish I could help you, Meine Herren," Klink said soberly. "But I have no special access to food or other goods. Everything now comes directly from military stores. And everything is strictly rationed. The camp," Klink reminded them, "had been supplementing its supplies from merchants in Hammelburg; you know that."

"We had been hoping," Geisler whispered.

"Forgive me, Meine Herren," Klink said with a glance at the police chief. "But there is an illegal source of supplies that has long been popular for many years. Why have you not gone there?"

"The black market," Krueger said heavily. "Of course, we considered it. But," a grimace twisted his face, "all the suppliers I, we, knew about are gone. Their goods, if they salvaged any, are also gone."

"There is Dusseldorf," Hausner said with a scowl. "But I know what their prices were like in better times. We can afford to pay Hammelburg prices, but not Dusseldorf prices. Not when we need to feed hundreds of people."

Now Klink frowned. "All the suppliers are gone?"

Krueger nodded.

"But the fire didn't reach the Baumann mine."

It was Krueger's turn to frown. "The Baumann mine?"

"You cannot mean Helmut Baumann, Herr Kommandant," Geisler said with certainty. "Herr Baumann, while not known for his generosity —"

"Baumann is a skinflint," Hausner said bluntly. "But I know for a fact that he never had anything to do with the black market in Hammelburg."

"Not Hammelburg," Klink said. "Dusseldorf. Herr Baumann is one of the top three black market operators in Dusseldorf."

Krueger nearly choked. "Baumann? That self-righteous

## Interlude

hypocrite! We had a meeting last night at the hotel to determine what our supplies were like. Baumann was — ”

“Pleading that he barely had a loaf of black bread in his house!” The normally placid Geisler was livid.

“I suspect he was telling the truth about the black bread,” Klink said wryly. “He simply didn’t tell you about the white bread he has hidden away.”

Krueger stood. “I think we should pay Herr Baumann a visit. Now.”

The other men murmured their loud agreement and stood.

As did Klink. “I think we will accompany you, Meine Herren. If you have no objections.”

“None, Herr Kommandant,” Hausner said.

“And I think we should take some of my men and a truck as well,” Klink said.

Krueger nodded curtly. “An excellent suggestion, Herr Kommandant.”

Klink pressed the intercom.

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant?” Hilda answered the buzzer.

“Have Sergeant Schultz get a truck from the motor pool along with half a dozen guards, Fraulein Hilda. We are going for a ride.”

At the door, Hogan grinned widely.

A small convoy made its way over the hard packed road leading to the Baumann mine. Klink’s staff car was in front, followed by the Hammelburg police car and the camp’s truck. It was a trip made primarily in silence. Hogan had asked one question on the way, “How do you know about Baumann?” And received only a smile in return.

The convoy stopped in front of a shack that looked ready to fall down. A barn in even worse shape stood a few meters away. The rugged hillside behind the structures was dotted with half buried holes and broken tools.

Hogan got out of the car and looked around. He’d never been in this part of the Hammelburg township. “This is it?” he asked with disbelief in his voice.

A disbelief reflected on the faces of the men who got out of the

## Interlude

second car. Men who looked askance at Klink.

“Herr Kommandant,” Scheinfeld began uncomfortably.

“You! What are all of you doing on my property?!” A short, grizzle-faced man in his early sixties came out of house.

Krueger glanced at Klink’s impassive face and stepped forward. “We are here to talk to you, Herr Baumann. About the town’s problems.”

“We talked last night,” Baumann said. “I can’t help you.”

“Kommandant Klink believes you can,” Scheinfeld said in an appeasing voice.

“Klink?” Baumann looked at him contemptuously. “He manages to do a couple of things right during the fire, and now you’re listening to him?” A short laugh. “You’re even more of a fool than he is!”

“Why don’t we go inside, Herr Baumann,” Geisler suggested. “You’ll be more comfortable.”

“Why don’t we stay right here,” Baumann said. “What do you want?”

Hausner shot a quick glance at Klink, a glance tinged with uncertainty. “The Kommandant believes that you can help us with our problem.” Hausner’s eyes lit on Baumann. “He believes you have contacts with the black market.”

Baumann stared at him. “The black market?! The fool is delusional. I’ve never been near the black market in Hammelburg — ”

“Not Hammelburg,” Klink said. “Dusseldorf.”

Baumann’s face tightened almost imperceptibly. “Dusseldorf?” A curt laugh. “That explosion has affected your wits, Kommandant. I haven’t been to Dusseldorf this winter. Don’t have time to go visiting cities — ”

“You were in Dusseldorf at least twice last month, Herr Baumann,” Klink said in a soft voice.

Baumann stared at Klink with something akin to shock. “That’s a lie.”

Klink smiled, a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Perhaps. Or a mistake on your part. It doesn’t matter. These gentlemen have a business proposition for you, Herr Baumann. I suggest you listen.”

## Interlude

Baumann's temper returned; his face was florid as he turned back to the townspeople. "What proposition?" he spat.

"We wish to purchase food for the town —" Scheinfeld began.

"At Hammelburg prices," Klink said softly.

"At Hammelburg prices," Scheinfeld continued. "Enough food to tide us over until we can get other supplies."

Baumann stared at him and then started to laugh. Long and hard.

"And where," he finally asked, "do you suggest I get this food?"

"From your," Scheinfeld floundered. "From your . . ." He shrugged, turning to Klink.

"Your hidden stores," Klink said.

"My hidden what?!" Baumann began another peal of loud laughter. "Ja, my hidden stores. The stores I have stashed in the barn." He waved a negligent hand. "Or the house. Or —"

"Or the hidden cellar under the house," Klink said. "Or . . ." He smiled as Baumann's face lost color. "Do you really want my men to go looking for those stores, Herr Baumann? If we find them, how much do you think the town will pay for them?"

"Not one pfennig!" Krueger said angrily, annoyed that Baumann had operated under his nose and he didn't even know about it!

Baumann stared at Klink, loathing in his eyes. Then he shook himself and straightened, turning back to the townspeople. "Perhaps I might be of some help, Meine Herren. You must forgive my caution. After all, you can't be too careful nowadays."

"Natürlich," Hausner said through clenched teeth. *The miserable, little . . .*

"You know what we need, Herr Baumann," Doctor Bauer said with barely concealed disdain. "We discussed it last night. Can you supply what we need?"

Baumann hesitated and nodded. "For a price." A toothy smile. "For a price, anything is available. Champagne, caviar."

"We are only interested in bread!" Bauer said. "And canned goods. Items our people need to live!"

"Natürlich, Herr Doktor," Baumann said smoothly.



## Interlude

“Natürlich. Now, the price will be quite high, Meine Herren.”

“The price will be the normal price for such foodstuffs,” Klink said evenly.

Baumann ignored him. “As I said, the price — ”

“Will be the normal price,” Krueger said, picking up on Klink’s words.

“Meine Herren,” Baumann said genially. “That is impossible. I have associates. And they have associates. It all costs money. Gold, in fact, for the quantity you require. You must understand. It will be very expensive.”

“I see,” Klink said evenly. Then, “Herr Baumann, you have a choice.”

“A choice?”

Klink nodded. “A choice. Either you sell what the town requires at the normal price. Or . . . ”

“Or?”

Klink looked at him unflinchingly. “You die.”

Monsignor Geisler gulped audibly. “Entschuldigung,” he murmured and walked back to the car.

A hard, dangerous look lit Baumann’s eyes. “You dare to threaten me, Klink? Do you know who I am?”

“Oh, yes. Quite well. You are a petty, vindictive man who enjoys feeling superior to others. And one who has been preying on his countrymen for years. Now, it is time you paid.”

“I have friends, Klink. Important friends. They will — ”

“Ah, yes, your friends.” A humorless smile. “Oberführer Theisen has been transferred to the front; he was rather indiscreet in an affair of the heart with a general’s mistress. And Oberführer Folker is under investigation for some irregularities involving war supplies. They couldn’t protect themselves, Baumann. You think they can protect you?”

Baumann stared at Klink with something like shock on his face. “There will be questions,” he mumbled.

“In Nazi Germany?” Klink said softly. “Where thousands died in public view, and no one did anything? But if anyone does ask, I am certain that Herr Krueger will have no problem filing the proper charges and the proper paperwork. Perhaps, ‘Shot while resisting arrest’.”

## Interlude

"You cannot kill me. I have what you need." Baumann was now openly sweating.

"I think we will eventually find all of your stores. It might take a few days," Klink said. "But we will find them."

Baumann stared at Klink, fear in his eyes.

"Well, Baumann?"

The silence dragged on almost unbearably.

Finally, Baumann found his voice. "I . . ." He cleared his throat and turned back to the townspeople. "I will be happy to sell you what you need, Meine Herren," he said in a hoarse voice.

"At the normal price," Hausner said tonelessly.

"At the normal price," Baumann echoed in a barely audible whisper.

"Well, now that that is settled," Klink said in his old Kommandant voice, "let's begin, shall we?"

"The cellar," Baumann said faintly.

Klink shook his head. "Nein. I believe the mine would have more of the supplies the town needs."

Baumann swallowed hard. "Natürlich, Herr Kommandant. The mine."

Klink gestured. "After you, Herr Baumann."

Baumann nodded and started toward the hillside, trailed by the others. Hogan, who had watched silently with folded arms, shook his head in silent admiration. Then he sauntered lazily after them.

Hogan was bored. For what seemed to be an interminable time, Baumann and the townspeople had been haggling over the price of the stuffs the town wanted, needed. Hogan was far more interested in seeing what else the mine held. From what he'd already seen, it held quite a bit — crates, boxes, tins of food, medicines and other supplies. None of them had quite believed it, especially the chagrinned police chief. Baumann had secreted enough supplies just in this cavern to outfit a small army. What else was in here?

Hogan picked up a spare lantern and slipped away. He walked further into the mine, past abandoned mine carts, stumbling

## Interlude

over the remains of rust-eaten rails, past half buried alcoves. He'd been ready to call a halt when he saw a timbered door where one had no business being. A door in a mine?

Hogan tried it. Locked. Well, the years with Newkirk had taught him a few tricks. The door proved surprisingly easy to open. Baumann was obviously relying on the much more elaborate security system at the entrance to the mine.

Hogan opened the door, lifted the lantern high, and stared . . .

Back in the main cavern, the wearying haggling was continuing. Only to be interrupted by a loud shout.

“Kommandant! Kommandant Klink!”

It was Hogan's voice. Surprised, Klink stepped back into the main tunnel. He couldn't see anything.

“Colonel Hogan?” Klink called. “Where are you?”

“Turn left and keep going! There's something here you should see.”

Klink, flashlight in hand, went down the tunnel. The others followed, Krueger holding on tightly to a suddenly nervous Baumann. A few minutes later, they were at the door. Hogan was just inside, his lantern held high.

Klink turned his flashlight on the contents of the room. Even he couldn't hide his surprise. The cavern was filled with boxes very familiar to the Kommandant and Hogan. Red Cross boxes. Hundreds, thousands, of Red Cross packages. Stolen Red Cross packages.

Klink's cold eyes went to Baumann, Baumann who was sweating profusely despite the chill. “Would you care to explain, Herr Baumann?”

A nervous smile. “They were sent here for safekeeping, Herr Kommandant. By Oberführer — ”

“They were stolen!” Hogan said.

“Nein! I swear — ”

“Don't bother, Baumann,” Klink said. “Up until now, we have been extremely lenient with you. No longer.” A look at the police chief. “Is there any place he can be locked up, Herr Krueger?”

“I will find a place, Herr Kommandant,” Krueger said grimly. “I believe the von Behler estate has some exceptionally deep and

## Interlude

secure wine cellars.”

Klink nodded. “Gut. Schultz, take Herr Baumann out to Herr Krueger’s car and lock him inside.” His eyes met the large sergeant’s. “He is not to get away. Verstehen Sie?”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.” Schultz’s beefy hand clamped down on Baumann’s elbow painfully. “He is not going anywhere.”

“Send Private Reinwald back to the camp in my car. He is to get the other truck, half a dozen guards and a work detail of prisoners. Ten or so. I want them here as soon as possible.”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.”

“Herr Kommandant,” Baumann began in an almost pleading voice. “There has been a slight misunderstanding. There is no need for all of this unpleasantness. To show you my goodwill, you,” a glance at the silent townspeople, “may have anything — everything — at the price you first quoted. Surely, that is fair.” He looked at one man, then the others. Their expressions were less than impressed, and less than willing to listen. “Herr Kommandant.” He turned back to Klink.

“Baumann,” there was an odd humor in Hogan’s voice, “if I were you, I’d shut the hell up.”

“An excellent suggestion, Colonel Hogan,” Klink said. “I suggest you listen, Baumann. Get him out of here, Schultz.”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.”

Schultz dragged the extremely unhappy former black marketeer out of the cavern as Klink and the others turned back to the booty.

Hogan was staring at the unexpected bounty. “There’s enough here to last us for months.”

“Perhaps,” Klink said.

Hogan glanced at him sharply. There was an oddly cautious note to Klink’s voice. He opened his mouth . . .

“Later,” Klink said softly.

Hogan shut his mouth.

“Can we really lock him up?” Monsignor Geisler asked suddenly. “It doesn’t seem very . . . legal.”

The others looked at him in surprise.

“Legal?” Krueger asked. “After all these years of Nazi rule,

## Interlude

you ask about legalities?”

“I like to think we’re better than the Nazis,” Bauer said quietly.

“If it makes you happier with the decision, Herr Doktor,” Klink said just as quietly, “the only way Baumann got these packages was to steal them. Or he bought them, knowing they were stolen. Under any form of law, he is guilty of theft. Theft from the military. Under martial law, he could be shot.” Then an unexpected smile. “But I am not interested in shooting Herr Baumann, or keeping him imprisoned. I just want him out of the way until the war ends. Until he can do us no harm. Then Herr Krueger can release him.”

Bauer and Geisler nodded their agreement, Geisler with obvious relief.

Scheinfeld sighed loudly. “It would be very unfair not to pay him anything.”

Klink smiled. “That would be for you to decide, Herr Burgermeister. But for these,” he nodded toward the packages, “his life is more than enough payment. Now,” he said more briskly, “we have work to do.”

## Interlude

– Nine –

They had more than enough work to do. It took some time, and several trips, for the prisoners' detail and the extra guards to get the Red Cross packages back to camp.

Hogan looked at the packages now filling one of the supply buildings. "We could give some of these to the town," he suggested.

Klink shook his head. "We'll need them. You know what the official supplies are like. And besides, with the additional prisoners we're going to be getting . . ."

Hogan grimaced. Klink had finally told him Burkhalter's good news for the day. More prisoners. Over a hundred — he didn't know how many over a hundred — in the next few days. Beginning now. Hogan looked at the truck pulling into the compound.

The newer prisoners were a different breed, Hogan noted. Some were still pilots and aircrews. But now, most were combat soldiers, rougher, coarser, definitely less clean than the prisoners they normally got. Rowdier, and insultingly disdainful of any and all Germans. While that disdain was natural among most of the prisoners, with these men, it was even worse. Their open contempt, even hatred, would have surprised Hogan in the past. Since he and Klink had become friends, it was more than annoying. Hogan was very glad that his behavior toward Klink had changed even before he knew who Klink was. It influenced the men who had been there a while. And they in turn influenced the new men as well.

But once in a while, the new men went too far. Way too far.

Klink glanced at Hogan; Hogan grimaced — the new prisoners were accompanied by SS troops.

Nine men were climbing down from the back of the truck. Three were flyers; the others, infantry. American infantry.

The combat soldiers were distinctly unhappy. Especially one. A big, brawny man with irregular features. Features of a man

## Interlude

who had gotten into trouble more than once.

The SS captain smiled humorlessly at Klink. "Your prisoners, Herr Kommandant."

Klink took the papers from him and glanced at them. "They appear to be in order." He signed the papers and handed one back to the captain.

"Heil Hitler!" the captain shouted.

Klink raised a hand in farewell but said nothing. Klink had all but stopped using the words nowadays.

The truck and its accompanying patrol left the compound.

Klink glanced at the men. "Schultz!"

Schultz hurried over with a couple of men; Hogan trailed behind.

"More guests, Colonel Hogan," Klink said. "I am Colonel Wilhelm Klink, kommandant of Stalag Luft 13. This is Colonel Robert Hogan, the senior POW officer. Welcome to the camp, gentlemen. This will be your home for the duration of the war."

"Which won't be long, Kraut," a contemptuously loud whisper from one of the men.

Klink ignored the voice. He tended to ignore snide remarks now, relying on Hogan and his men to control the prisoners. A few comments often helped to relieve some of the fear and anxiety the incoming men had. The old Klink didn't ignore them; the old Klink didn't have an overcrowded camp to worry about either. Normally within a couple of days, after Hogan and his men checked out the new prisoners and talked to them, the new men merged into the camp population, grudgingly accepting their new, and hopefully temporary, lives.

"Sergeant Schultz will escort you men to the delousing station," Klink continued, ignoring the interruption. His eyes swept the mainly dirty group. "Once you are clean, he will process you in and inform you of the rules of the camp. I would suggest you learn them quickly and obey them. Colonel Hogan will assign you men to a barracks. I am certain that he will also inform you that no prisoner has ever successfully escaped from this camp. It is a record I intend to uphold."

Klink had walked up and down in front of the men as he talked. He finished up next to the battered-looking man.

## Interlude

A troublemaker, Hogan decided, noting the dangerous glint in the man's eye. His opinion was confirmed in seconds.

Klink had half turned away from the new arrivals. The man spat at him, catching Klink on the side of his face. As Hogan and his men started in surprise, the man also lunged for Klink. Two of the guards managed to catch the prisoner's arms as he barreled into Klink and held him as he spouted obscenities at Klink.

Klink had been startled by the attack; in all these years, none of the prisoners had ever, save for the mad Martinelli, spit at him, let alone attacked him. And while the new Klink had forgiven a great deal, this he would not ignore. His handkerchief rose to his cheek, wiping away the spittle.

"Cooler, seven days, bread and water rations," Klink ordered curtly and turned away.

"Bastard!" The man spat at him again. And turned to Hogan. "Ain't you gonna do anything? He's abusing me."

Hogan's voice was cold. "I would have given you two weeks."

Even in the past, he wouldn't, couldn't, have allowed a prisoner to get away with this. Heckling, sometimes coarse remarks, had been part of the game. A game he was now ashamed to admit he had, if not encouraged, at least abetted. But not what had just happened. That broke the rules more than even he was willing to do. And even in the past, there were limits, and physical violence and spitting was something he wouldn't have put up with even back then. Especially now, he wouldn't put up with it. And the sooner these men realized it, the better.

The clearly unhappy prisoner, struggling with each step, was manhandled away by the guards. The others followed Schultz to the delousing station.

Hogan walked over to Klink as he put the handkerchief back in his pocket. "I'm sor —"

Klink shook his head and waved away the apology. "How much trouble are they giving you?"

"A little," Hogan admitted. "But they're listening to reason. And if that doesn't work, they listen to orders."

Klink smiled briefly. "Good. Well, if Burkhalter's right, after



## Interlude

the next batch of prisoners, we won't be getting any more guests."

"I would appreciate it."

A sigh. "So would I."

A salute, which Hogan returned, and Klink walked back to his office.

Later that evening, new guards arrived, Wehrmacht guards.

Klink's eyes swept the newest arrivals as Schultz took the roll. His eyes stayed on the one next to the end. When Schultz had finished, Klink walked before them, inspecting them. He stopped in front of the guard he had been watching. "Your name."

The guard saluted. "Private Gustav Hirschfeld, Herr Kommandant!"

"How old are you, Hirschfeld?"

Another salute. "Seventeen, Herr Kommandant!"

Klink's disbelieving eyes stayed on his face. "Seventeen?"

The salute faltered, the hand dropped as he stammered in a brave voice, "I will be seventeen, Herr Kommandant." He swallowed nervously under than cool gaze. "In ten months . . ."

Klink signed inwardly. "I see." And turned away. He could almost feel the relief that swept the boy. "Sergeant Schultz, take the new men to their quarters."

"Jawohl, Herr Kommandant."

He returned Schultz's salute as Hogan came over.

"They're getting younger," Hogan said.

Klink nodded; Hogan walked beside him. "I have nephews who are almost fifteen. When will they be forced into uniforms?"

"Can you do anything for them?" Hogan asked.

"I don't know," Klink admitted. "They are already working as laborers for the war effort." His eyes swept the hills around the camp. "Another crime of the war, the destruction of childhood. They should be in school, thinking about their futures. And girls. Not whether they may have to kill someone. But if they do get called up, I have some strings I can pull."

"And get them sent here?" Hogan asked.

"Yes. Though I am not certain that this is the best place for

## Interlude

them.”

“Any others you have to worry about?” Hogan asked. He still didn’t know too much about Klink’s family.

Klink shook his head. “Dieter and Therese are fairly safe in Konstanz. Wolfgang is a chemist and has found a relatively secure niche. His wife used to be a teacher, now she works in the store. Their oldest are the nearly 15-year-old twins. They have one more son, Walther; fortunately, he is only ten. Franz is in the reserves, assigned to Leipzig. He, unlike Wolfgang, has been in combat, North Africa. He went home in 1942, wounded and ill from the heat. Since then, he has managed to stay in Leipzig. I suspect his father-in-law, who happened to be a general, had something to do with it.”

“Ever think of asking him for a promotion?”

A faint smile. “I really don’t want one, as you well know. Besides he provided this one.”

Hogan glanced at him in surprise.

Another smile. “I started to tell you that<sup>16</sup>; you didn’t want to hear it.”

“Sorry. Could he help now?”

A sad shake of his head. “He died a few months ago. Heart attack.”

“Does Franz have any children?”

A nod. “A little girl, eight years old.”

“Any other family?”

“Some assorted cousins whom I haven’t seen in a long time. And Mama.”

“How’s she holding up?”

“Fine, all things considered. It is difficult for her. She takes care of the children and the house. Luise runs the store; it is too much for Mama. Norberta works in a factory.”

“Not too easy for civilians, is it?”

Klink shook his head. “No. I had hoped they would go with Dieter and Therese, but Mama doesn’t want to leave the house. It has been in her family for generations. I often wonder how long

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<sup>16</sup> “Easy Come, Easy Go”

## Interlude

she will be able to stay there. And the others.”

“Too dangerous?”

Klink nodded. “My sources indicate the Russians will be too close. I have no love for Stalin. And even less trust. If the Russians get too close, they will leave Leipzig, regardless of Mama’s wishes.” Klink changed the subject. “I’m going to lose more men.”

“Who this time?”

“All the Luftwaffe personnel,” Klink said to Hogan’s surprise. “Save for Gruber, Schultz and Langenscheidt. I was able to get exemptions for them. For some reason, the general staff wants Luftwaffe personnel on the front; they’ll be replaced by Wehrmacht guards.”

“When?”

“The day after tomorrow.”

Two days later, the remaining Luftwaffe guards, save for Captain Fritz Gruber, Sergeant Hans Schultz, and Corporal Karl Langenscheidt<sup>17</sup>, were getting ready to leave. To be replaced by Wehrmacht soldiers. Soldiers. Well, that was the official description, Hogan thought as he looked at the incoming guards. Some were youngsters, not much older than Hirschfeld. Most were older, several much older, in their sixties, Hogan guessed. Some were former clerks or reluctant draftees. But most were combat veterans. Wounded veterans. Hogan’s eyes swept them. Two of the men had lost arms, one an arm and a leg. Several limped badly, a couple had eye patches. Others were scarred, one had been badly burned.

Hogan didn’t envy Schultz’s job right now. Or his for that matter. He’ll have to talk to his officers and barracks’ leaders about handling the new guards gingerly until they had a feel for them. He’ll also have to —

“So, what do you think of our replacements, Colonel Hogan?”

Hogan turned to Captain Matthias Dingel, a pleasant faced young man. Hogan shrugged noncommittally. “Leaving us,

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<sup>17</sup> Hold That Tiger”

## Interlude

Captain?"

Dingel nodded and smiled thinly. "It appears that the generals think my efforts will make a difference to the war."

"I'm sorry," Hogan said. A flicker of surprise — he really was sorry.

Another thin smile. "So am I, Colonel." Dingel looked around the camp. "It has been . . . interesting being here. More so recently." His smile broadened. "Perhaps we could meet after the war and exchange stories, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan found himself grinning. "Perhaps we could."

Dingel's eyes were calm as they looked at Hogan. "I am certain the stories will be . . . enlightening. And totally unbelievable."

Another smile. "That definitely is the right word."

Dingel nodded and held out his hand. "Goodbye, Colonel Hogan. And good luck."

Hogan shook his hand. "Good luck to you as well, Captain."

"Thank you." A deep breath. "I think I will need it." His hand lifted in a salute that Hogan returned. "Auf wiedersehn, Colonel Hogan."

"Auf wiedersehn, Captain Dingel."

More changes. Corporal Karl Langenscheidt became Sergeant Karl Langenscheidt. And found himself with many of the responsibilities of the now departed Captain Dingel. Dingel had been the supply officer for the camp. But, as Langenscheidt discovered, many of the supplies had long since been depleted.

Even food was a problem. Luxuries were nonexistent. But so were many staples. Meat and real coffee were unattainable. Cheese, sugar, margarine, butter and other foods were rarely available. Meals for the guards had become a monotonous diet of potatoes, supplemented by watery vegetable-based soups, ersatz coffee and sawdust-based black bread. In the past, Klink had been able to buy produce and goods from Hammelburg and other places. The war, and his decreasing budget, had taken care of other sources; the fire had eliminated Hammelburg. The town even more desperately needed the food stocks they had found in Baumann's hidden stores, though the Town Council had voted to

## Interlude

give a quarter of the supplies to the camp. But as Langenscheidt looked at the remaining supplies, he could only pray that the war would end before they all found themselves on starvation diets.

The prisoners, oddly enough, were in better shape. The official mess hall meals were just as monotonous, and even more meager than the guards' meals. But the prisoners had their meals supplemented by their Red Cross packages<sup>18</sup>. Klink had always kept an eagle eye on the Red Cross packages, making certain that the guards didn't steal the packages. But that alone wouldn't have been enough. In theory, each man in the camp received one package per week. And for the first few years of the camp's existence, the theory was the practice. But after the Allied invasion of Normandy, Klink, to Hogan's intense annoyance at the time, began carefully husbanding the packages. The camp, for months after the invasion, continued to receive its regular allotment of packages, and for months, the packages managed to keep pace with the camp's population. But Klink, anticipating future shortages, had doled out the packages far less generously than Hogan had liked. Hogan had, of course, complained when Klink grew more parsimonious with the packages. However, for a change, his complaints hadn't work; Klink had refused to relax his grip on the packages. Now, Hogan could only feel grateful that Klink hadn't acceded to his demands. It meant that, unlike most other POW camps, there were packages to hand out to the prisoners even as their numbers increased and supplies were disrupted. And the packages they had found in Baumann's mine only increased their relatively good fortune. At least for now.

Burkhalter had finally called with a count of the incoming

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<sup>18</sup> The standard Red Cross package contained: 12 oz. corned beef, 12 oz. Spam, 6 oz. liver paté, 8 oz. cheese, 1 lb. dried milk, 8 oz. coffee, 15 oz. raisins or prunes, 4 oz. powdered fruit drink, 8 oz. sugar, 8 oz. crackers, 8 oz. chocolate, 1 lb. margarine, 2 bars soap, 4 packs cigarettes and 5 books of matches. They could also include other foods such as canned fish and biscuits, special diets for men with specific dietary needs, and medicines. Lewis H. Carlson: *We Were Each Other's Prisoners*.

## Interlude

prisoners. The number shocked not only Hogan but Klink as well, both of whom had hoped that the recent fire would keep more prisoners out of the camp.

Four hundred. They were getting four hundred men, most of them prisoners from evacuating camps.

Hogan stared bleakly across the already crowded compound. The timing couldn't have been worse. They had new guards to worry about, a ravaged town, dwindling supplies, and now four hundred more men to add to the already overcrowded camp. A stiff wind sent a chill through him, and he shivered. For a moment, he wondered what had possessed him to talk Klink into returning to the camp after their escape from Hochstetter. He had done it so they could continue their operation. But the bitter truth was that for all practical purposes their operation was pretty much over. The destruction of Hammelburg had taken care of their sabotage activities; there was nothing left to destroy. And as the war continued to come closer, even their primary mission, helping escaping airmen, seemed to be over. There were still airmen being shot down, but with the Allies raining bombs on nearly every city in Germany, nearly every road, the airmen were much better off in the POW camps than they were out in the countryside.

Well, Hogan thought as he turned his collar up against the cold, maybe it was for the best. Reality was intruding rather harshly on their lives now, and, like it or not, the men in this camp were his responsibility. A responsibility that grew more important with each passing day. And grew harder. He walked toward the assembly hall where the officers and barracks' leaders were waiting for him. Waiting for him to pull off a miracle. Trouble was, he was finally out of them.

## Interlude

– Ten –

The next day went better than Hogan or Klink had anticipated. Far better. They had gotten a reprieve. The new prisoners were coming in two installments, a day apart. The first and smaller group, about one hundred and twelve men, was coming in from various Dulaglufts, transit camps holding men who had recently been captured. The new prisoners, arriving in trucks, were in good shape, decently clothed, and in high spirits. They came carrying Red Cross packages and spare clothing, confident that the war would soon be over and that their stay in Stalag 13 would be a short one.

Klink, after looking at the new prisoners, all airmen, had left their processing up to Hogan and his men. The officers and some of the barracks leaders checked in the newcomers, trying to place them with men who had once been in the newcomers' squadrons. Those men would be responsible for the newcomers' indoctrination into the camp's routine and activities.

And it had gone off smoothly. Hogan, backed up by the other officers, had given his customary welcome speech to the new prisoners in the assembly hall. With an added twist. Unlike in the past, Hogan filled in the newcomers immediately on the camp's real workings. There were too many of them to be checked out individually; he would have to rely on the barracks' leaders to keep an eye on the newcomers. And rely on Klink as well. If there were a spy among the prisoners, they would find out fairly quickly. Neither Klink nor Hogan thought that a spy would be likely, not at this point in the war. And Klink had already decided that no prisoners would be transferred out of the camp. They were all here for the duration. If there were a spy among the prisoners, he wouldn't be able to communicate with anyone on the outside. And if he became a danger to them, well, accidents did happen.

Hogan looked at the men still in the assembly hall and smiled. Yeah, it was going pretty well. He left the hall whistling a

## Interlude

cheerful tune.

But that had been yesterday. Today . . .

Hogan had known that Stalag 13 had been an exceptional camp in more ways than one. For a long time, he had given himself the credit for the way things had gone in the camp and the way he had twisted Klink around his finger. But since Klink had given him a lesson in how to run a prison camp in the beginning of the year, he found himself having to admit that a large part of the credit for the excellent conditions in the camp also had to go to the Kommandant. Hogan had some idea how much the kommandant of a camp affected the conditions in the camp; he'd talked to enough escaping prisoners from other camps. But he hadn't realized just how much better conditions were in Stalag 13, even with the reduced rations and the overcrowding.

Until he saw the three hundred and fifty-eight men who arrived the next morning.

Even now, staring at them, he couldn't believe it. He didn't want to believe it, and, as his eyes met Klink's across the compound, he knew he wasn't alone.

The men arrived from other camps that were being evacuated out of the way of the fighting. Not in trucks, not carrying spare clothing and Red Cross packages, not in good spirits.

They came on foot. They came filthy, lice-ridden, wearing clothes that were rags, in shoes that were falling apart.

They came unable to walk, carried on makeshift litters, carried by men who were scarcely able to walk themselves.

They came gaunt, hollow-eyed. Men who had been without decent rations in more months than they could remember, without any rations at all for several days.

They came ill, with diarrhea, dysentery, pneumonia.

They came dying, their emaciated bodies on carts pulled by other prisoners.

They came guarded by SS soldiers. And as Hogan looked at the smiling, sneering, immaculate SS major sitting in the car just outside the main gate, he knew he hated that man more than he'd ever hated anyone.



## Interlude

And he wasn't the only one. He could feel that hate radiating from the prisoners who were still outside the barracks. And, oddly, he could feel it from many of the guards as well. And from Klink.

Since yesterday had gone very well, Klink had intended on leaving the processing of the new prisoners in Hogan's hands once again. That plan evaporated when Hilda called him out of his office, panic in her voice. A panic reinforced when Schultz burst into the office a second later.

Only a decade of concealing his real emotions had kept Klink from erupting into the rage, and hate, that he felt as he looked at the men straggling into the camp.

A rage and hate mirrored in the eyes of every prisoner in the compound. A rage and hate that could erupt all too easily unless he and Hogan clamped down, hard, on it.

And he had. They had.

Klink snapped an order to Hilda to call Hammelburg and get Doctor Bauer and all the medical supplies he could spare to the camp as soon as possible. Another order restricting those prisoners who were not processing the new men to their barracks. An order that had to be backed up by Hogan before it was obeyed. If it hadn't been obeyed . . .

Neither Hogan nor Klink wanted to consider what could have happened next.

But that was just the beginning. The incoming men were ill, exhausted, starving. Their bodies and clothing were thick with vermin, vermin that could infect the rest of the camp. Vermin that would spread disease among even healthy men. Fortunately, sanitary conditions at the camp had always been excellent, latrines numerous and well tended, hot water and soap plentiful.

And there was one more thing that Stalag Luft 13 had that set it apart from all other camps in Germany. A camp kommandant and a senior POW officer who not only cooperated in caring for the prisoners, but who also, it had to be reluctantly admitted, were friends. Even the men who'd been there only a short time soon realized that there was something rather unusual about the relationship the two men had. Most attributed it to the real

## Interlude

workings of the camp, but whatever the reason, that relationship was the only thing now standing between the camp and disaster.

Hogan remembered that day as a series of scenes, beginning with Klink's flurry of orders. Orders to the chief medic, Sergeant Wilson<sup>19</sup>, to round up his assistants and prepare for the sick men. Orders to Sergeants Rizzo and Doyle<sup>20</sup> and the construction crew they had put together to convert the assembly hall into a makeshift infirmary for the sick; the real infirmary couldn't begin to house the incoming men. Orders to Kinchloe to get men to tear open Red Cross packages and pull out the soaps and few medicines they contained. Orders to LeBeau to round up others to help in the mess hall, preparing soups and light meals for the malnourished newcomers. Orders to Carter to search the camp for any spare clothing and blankets. Orders to Newkirk to round up all the tailors and cobblers in the camp and start working on clothing and footwear for the new men. Orders to Baker to start getting those men who were able to walk into the delousing station as quickly as possible.

It was a nightmare for everyone, prisoners and guards alike. But Klink's orders, backed up by Hogan, managed to keep a good portion of the camp's population busy.

A human assembly line had been set up. Newcomers, those able to walk, straggled into the delousing station where they were stripped of all of their clothes and footwear — which were immediately dumped into boiling water — placed under hot showers, thoroughly scrubbed down by volunteers, and shaved by other volunteers. They couldn't be inspected for pests, not yet, but hopefully the hot water and soap, the first some of them had seen in months, and the disinfectant that was liberally dumped on them, would kill most of the pests. Outside the station, shivering, naked men were given blankets and literally

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<sup>19</sup> "Operation Briefcase"

<sup>20</sup> *Act One*

## Interlude

carried by more volunteers into the assembly hall, if they had health problems, or into the mess hall. In both halls, cups of hot soup, into which had been put as many vitamins as Kinch's group had been able to find, were given to the near starving men. There, in each hall, barracks' leaders processed them in as Klink and Hogan decided what to do with them.

The new prisoners couldn't be put into the general population. Even if they weren't sick, or had mild illnesses, the lice they still carried would spread throughout the camp. They would have to be segregated. There were now eighty buildings in camp housing prisoners, as many as could fit into the overcrowded compound. Eighty buildings of various sizes housing an average of thirty men apiece. Which meant that they would need roughly ten buildings for the newcomers. Which meant that they would have to evict the occupants of those barracks and put them into others. Which meant a great deal of annoyance or outright antagonism among those being evicted. Which meant that Hogan and his officers had a nasty task of their own — how to keep the anger from boiling over into fighting.

Klink kept his guards away from the assembly line of prisoners and those who were helping them. That would, hopefully, keep the anger level down among the prisoners. Except for those who were helping with the ill newcomers, the guards kept to their normal routine as much as possible.

Doctor Bauer had arrived, along with his very efficient nurse, Klara Arensberg. Within moments, Bauer, Klara and Sergeant Wilson had set up a triage center just outside the main gate of the camp. Of the three hundred men who showed up, over a third had medical problems of some sort. Diarrhea was the most common complaint, one that would hopefully be alleviated by a more rounded diet than the men had had in other camps. The milder cases were sent to the delousing station and the mess hall. The more severe cases would go to the converted assembly hall after their showers.

Dysentery was more dangerous, harder to treat, and could lead to death. Some cases were mild, being little more than a bad case of diarrhea; they were sent on to the delousing station as well. But twenty other prisoners were more serious, with fevers,

## Interlude

vomiting, bloody foul-smelling discharges and pain. If they could replace the fluids the men were losing, it was possible that the men could survive. Or not. Replacing the fluids was not the only possible treatment, nor the best. But for most of the men, it was all they could do. Both Bauer and Wilson knew that certain sulfa drugs had been successful in treating the disease. But the camp had none, and Bauer had only a limited supply. He would try to get some from nearby hospitals, but given the conditions in most cities in Germany, he had little hope of getting any. So, that left Bauer with one course of treatment. Give the drugs to the more serious cases but only to those who were not too far-gone. For the rest, that only left replacing the fluid the men had lost, rest and prayer.

Klink was standing apart from the sick prisoners when Hogan joined him. "How is it going?" Klink asked.

"It could be worse," Hogan said. "Some of the men have volunteered to stay in the buildings we're evacuating. Some for less than altruistic reasons. But we're going to let them stay."

"I hope they know the risks."

Hogan managed a small smile. "Hopefully the worst risk is getting lice. We can live with that."

Klink nodded. "It looks like the assembly hall will be used as an infirmary for some time to come."

Hogan shrugged. "We can use the rec hall or the library for most camp meetings. But the classes<sup>21</sup> will have to find some place else to meet."

"The cooler?"

Hogan smiled thinly. "I don't think they'd like that, Kommandant."

"I suppose not. Your men can use one of the smaller supply huts. I'll have Langenscheidt move the supplies to the cooler."

"That's generous of you, Kommandant."

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<sup>21</sup> To combat boredom and to better themselves, most POW camps had classes in a wide variety of subjects. By the end of the war, American, Canadian and British colleges and universities had granted credit to a number of POW courses. David A. Foy: *For You the War Is Over*

## Interlude

Klink shrugged. "Practical is a better word. It keeps the prisoners occupied, less likely to cause trouble. All this is going to make it much harder for you to control them. Especially since most of your other activities have been curtailed."

Behind the two men, a couple of unnoticed prisoner volunteers raised their heads to look at Klink in surprise.

Doctor Bauer walked over.

"Thank you for coming, Herr Doktor," Klink said quietly.

Bauer shook his head. "I wish I could do more."

"How bad is it, Doctor?" Hogan asked.

"For most of the men, malnourishment is the most serious problem. And lice. But you know how to treat those."

Hogan and Klink nodded.

"About seventy have diarrhea in various degrees of severity. Another twenty have dysentery. They should be isolated from the other cases if possible."

"We will partition the assembly hall," Klink said. "That should help."

"Of those twenty, seven have severe cases. Two of them . . ." Bauer's head shook. "Fifteen men have pneumonia. Some are very ill; it will be a miracle if they recover. The pneumonia cases, Sergeant Wilson will take to the infirmary. He and his medics know what to do. Another dozen or so have assorted wounds that have not healed properly. Time, rest and proper care, which I am certain they will receive here, will help most of them. But two of them will require amputations. I would like to take those men to the clinic."

"What about the lice they carry?" Klink asked.

"I can keep them isolated." A twisted smile. "The Baroness's manor has more than enough space. And it has a very efficient boiler and water heater," Bauer said. "We will manage. In fact, I will be able to send over a goodly supply of linen and bedding for your use."

"That is very generous, Herr Doktor."

A short laugh. "Thank the Baroness's former housekeeper, Kommandant. It appears that the Baroness neglected to pay her. In revenge, the housekeeper took off, leaving nearly all of the household supplies. Including enough linen to outfit a normal

## Interlude

household for years. At least, it will be put to good use here.”

Klink nodded. “When should we send the men to you?”

“If I could take them now?”

“If you wish.”

“And I would like to take a couple of the prisoners to act as nurses. Frau Arensberg is needed for other duties.”

“Of course. Colonel Hogan, Sergeant Wilson can decide who to send.”

Hogan nodded and left to talk to Wilson.

“Schultz!”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant!”

“Schultz, Doctor Bauer will be taking some of the prisoners to the clinic. Get one of the trucks ready. We will send Corporal Kaufmann; he is well used to being around amputees. And Private Reinwald.”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.”

Schultz left just as Monsignor Geisler arrived.

“Forgive me for being late, Meine Herren,” Geisler greeted.

Klink smiled. “Monsignor, I did not expect you.”

Despite his age, Geisler blushed. “I wanted to help. If I can.” His eyes swept the emaciated men who were walking or being carried into buildings. The blush paled.

“Seven have died, Monsignor,” Klink said quietly. “More will die.”

Geisler nodded grimly, and walked toward the prisoners.

“I will send over some food supplies tomorrow, Herr Doktor,” Klink said. “And some Red Cross packages.”

“Danke, Herr Kommandant.”

Three guards, including the one-armed Kaufmann and the baby-faced Reinwald, came over and saluted.

“You men will accompany Doctor Bauer and help him in any way he requires,” Klink said. “And you will remain at the clinic for as long as he needs your assistance.”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant,” Kaufmann said.

“Danke, Herr Kommandant,” Bauer said with a slight bow. “Follow me, bitte.”

Klink nodded a farewell and walked back to the gate. It was dark now, and most of the newcomers were either in the mess

## Interlude

hall or the assembly hall. Only a few of the most seriously ill were still waiting to be taken inside. Bauer, the three guards and a couple of Wilson's medics were putting the two special patients into one of the trucks. Near them, Monsignor Geisler was administering last rites to the dead prisoners. A group of volunteers waited for him to finish. They would take the dead men to a temporary morgue and prepare them for a proper burial tomorrow. From several of the barracks, prisoners were moving their few belongings to other buildings. As expected, with a maximum of loud grumbling, but as far as Klink could tell, no real animosity.

Klink walked over to Barracks 2, Hogan's barracks. Inside, it was mild bedlam as Newkirk shouted orders.

"Harper, you're not making a uniform for the king. Speed it up!" Newkirk spotted Klink. "Evening, Kommandant," he said cheerfully.

Klink looked around the clutter — a score of men were fashioning pants and shirts of various sizes from old, worn-out uniforms, blankets and whatever fabric they could get their hands on. A couple of men sat in a corner, making wooden clogs from bits of wood.

"How is it going, Corporal?" Klink asked.

"It's going," Newkirk said less cheerfully. "It turns out that a lot of the uniforms were salvageable. Sergeant Mannetti's going to keep the laundry going all night . . ." Klink looked at him. Newkirk grimaced. "I guess Colonel Hogan hasn't told you yet."

Klink smiled faintly. "Just as I haven't told him that we're forgetting about the lights-out tonight. You were saying?"

"Uh, yes, sir. Well, as I was saying, sir, Mannetti's going to keep the boys in the laundry all night. They'll salvage whatever they can and get them to us."

"You're going to work all night?"

"Pretty much. Us and the boys in Barracks 14. I figure that if we keep it up, most of the new boys will have something to wear tomorrow."

"Good. Is Colonel Hogan in?"

"Yes, sir. Just go on in."

Klink nodded and went over to Hogan's room. A glance back.

## Interlude

Newkirk was back to bossing the others around. Klink was mildly amused, not so the others.

Hogan and the officers with him were finishing up when Klink walked into the room. Hogan nodded a greeting and dismissed his men. The officers exited noisily as Klink sat on a high stool at the table. Finally, it was quiet.

“Coffee?” Hogan asked.

Klink nodded wearily.

Hogan opened his door. “Carr,” he asked the man on the nearest bunk, “bring over a couple of coffees.”

“Coming right up, sir.”

“Thanks.” Hogan turned back to Klink. “You look a little beat. How’s your shoulder?”

Klink flexed it experimentally. “I had forgotten about it. Too busy.”

“Yeah.”

The door opened and a black private brought in a wooden tray with a couple of cups, spoons, sugar and powdered milk on it.

“Thanks, Carr.”

“Sir.” The private looked at Klink for a moment before leaving.

“Here you go, Kommandant.” Hogan handed Klink a cup.

Klink sniffed the aroma for a moment. “Real coffee.” A sip. “I’ve almost forgotten what it tastes like.”

“Can’t do that. I’ll send some over.”

Klink shook his head. “I don’t think your men will like it. Not any more.”

“Yeah. Well.” Hogan sipped his own coffee. “How about a trade? Something from your cellar?”

Klink smiled faintly. “I’ve had some brandy taken over to the mess hall and the infirmary. Those men need something to get their blood moving again.”

“Yeah.” A thoughtful look at his cup. “I never appreciated, never knew, until those men showed up. I want to — ”

“Don’t!”

“What?”

“Don’t thank me. I did nothing.”

“Yes, you did,” Hogan said quietly.



## Interlude

“No! I did nothing that shouldn’t have been done by anyone, everyone, in my position.”

“Maybe.” Hogan looked at him soberly. “The point is you did it. They didn’t.”

“The point is, it doesn’t matter,” Klink said almost angrily.

“It does to me. It does to them. All right!” A hand rose to forestall Klink. “I’ll stay quiet.” He changed the subject. “About roll call — ”

“It’s been canceled. Also the lights-out. Same thing tomorrow. It will take a couple of days to get back to normal.”

“Yeah, normal. Will it? Get back to normal, I mean?”

Klink sipped his coffee. “I don’t know. I don’t think so. Not back to the way it was.”

“Sorry you came back?”

A faint smile. “I’m not sure yet. You?”

“Yeah, I am. I thought we could pick up where we left off. That nothing had really changed. That nothing would change. But it has. No town, no missions, too many prisoners.”

“Too much responsibility?”

“Yeah, too much responsibility.” A glance at Klink. “Did you know this would happen?”

“Specifically, no. Generally, I had a good idea. I knew more prisoners would come. And with the fighting coming closer . . . ” He shrugged. “You know, some of it is your fault.”

“*My* fault?!”

A faint smile. “Of course. You were too successful. It was inevitable that at some point the war industries would stop rebuilding. At least here.”

Hogan sighed. “I guess. Well, at least that’s one less thing to worry about. At least for me. Though I’m not sure about you.”

Klink smiled and sipped his coffee.

A short silence, then Klink stood. “I should take a look at the mess hall.”

Hogan grimaced. “For a change, the word ‘mess’ applies.”

“I know.” Klink finished his coffee. “Coming?”

Hogan nodded. “Might as well.”

Hogan and Klink entered the mess hall through the kitchen

## Interlude

entrance. LeBeau was there, ordering the mess hall crew — German and Allied — and the extra volunteers around. The diminutive Frenchman was in his element, despite the lack of variety in the fare. Huge pots of bubbling potato soup covered every burner and nearly every empty space.

LeBeau spotted them and waved a ladle in welcome. “Bon soir, mon Colonel, Kommandant.” Then, “Fritz! Be careful with those potatoes! Handle them carefully; they’re bruised enough as it is!”

“How is it going, Corporal?” Klink asked.

“Well, the fare is a little monotonous — potato soup and more potato soup,” LeBeau said. “But it’s filling and good. And I don’t think the men are ready for anything else. They haven’t eaten in days.” LeBeau’s voice took on a dangerous tone.

“We know,” Hogan said as Klink walked over to the swinging doors leading to the dining area. Hogan and LeBeau followed him.

Unnoticed, they looked out over the hall. The mess hall could hold about three hundred men. In the past, it had taken about an hour or so to feed every prisoner in the camp. The hall had served two meals a day, breakfast and a late afternoon meal. Most prisoners had eaten those free meals and then had gone back to their own barracks for other meals made from the Red Cross packages or from food smuggled into the camp. In theory, the prisoners were forbidden to cook in the barracks. In reality, Klink ignored the rule unless Burkhalter or some other superior showed up. Klink still ignored the rule, but the extra food that used to come into the camp had disappeared. Now, they were down to official rations — which grew scarcer and less edible with each passing day — and the Red Cross packages. LeBeau had started a series of classes using the Red Cross packages, training cooks for each of the barracks. The food in the packages was less interesting than the food they’d smuggled in before, but it was nutritious and edible.

From the hall rose a noisy, and welcome, clamor. When the new prisoners had arrived this morning, they could barely walk or talk. Most of them could still barely walk, but they were talking in a variety of accents — British, French, American. Few

## Interlude

of them had uniforms or bits of uniforms on. Most were still wrapped in the blankets they'd been given when they left the showers. Thirty of the camp's barracks leaders were sitting with the prisoners, one at each table. Also present were most of the officers.

"We might as well talk to them now," Hogan said.

"I'll let you do the talking. And be careful what you say."

Hogan nodded. These men had known pain and hatred for months, perhaps years. Fitting them into the camp was going to be difficult. Getting them to trust even more so.

Hogan and Klink walked into the hall. Slowly, the talking faded away as they were noticed. Replaced by an uneasy silence. Then slowly, grudgingly, the newcomers rose to their feet, surprising Hogan and the other longtime prisoners. But not Klink. He'd seen it before, especially in SS camps. Acknowledge the superior force. Not very willingly. But do it anyway and, maybe, you won't get killed.

Hogan suddenly realized what was happening. He wanted desperately to make light of it. And found he couldn't. Especially when he realized that under that false respect were fear and hate. Fear and hate directed at Klink.

And once again, he berated himself for coming back to the camp. No. For bringing Klink back to the camp. For thinking that it would be as it always had been.

But it wasn't. And never would be again. And he wanted more than anything to run out that door and keep on running. Trading insults with Hochstetter and the other monsters had been a piece of cake compared to facing these half-starved, distrustful men. And he was on their side! He was getting a taste of how it had been for Klink every time he faced the prisoners in the compound. In a camp where conditions had never been bad, had never been inhumane. Hogan found himself shaking as that overwhelming emotion coursed through him.

Klink was looking at him; Hogan could feel those calm eyes. It helped cut through the fear and hatred.

"They're waiting," Klink said quietly.

"I know." A deep breath. "I know."

Hogan turned to face the men, and he stepped away from

## Interlude

Klink, attracting their attention.

"Hi." Hogan tried a smile. Which failed. Of course, it failed. These men had known a reality harsher than any he'd ever known. And to pretend otherwise was an insult to them and what they'd been through. A glance at Klink. He knew what to do. They both did. Hogan turned back to the sea of men.

"Please, sit down, all of you," Hogan said quietly. "You'll find we're not much for formality here at Stalag 13. None of us. Not the officers. Not the Kommandant." He nodded at Klink. "This is Kommandant, Colonel, Wilhelm Klink. A Luftwaffe officer. He has no ties to the Gestapo or the SS. And," his eyes met Klink's, "he hates the Gestapo and the SS as much as you do. Maybe even more."

Several jaws dropped among the listening officers and barracks' leaders. A few exchanged uneasy looks.

"If the SS or the Gestapo show up, Colonel Klink will be all politeness and smiles," Hogan continued. "It's called survival." His eyes swept the men in the hall. "Something you're all familiar with." A grim pleasure as he saw heads nodding agreement.

Hogan walked between the tables; their eyes followed him. "One of the things you might hear in camp is that Stalag 13 has a reputation. No one's ever escaped from here. And we'll talk about that later. It's also been called the toughest POW camp in Germany.

"That's a joke," he said in a flat voice. "Not a very funny one from where you're sitting. But it was good for a few laughs here. And it also hid the truth. One we'd rather the outside world didn't know.

"You'll find we're an unusual camp for a number of reasons. There has never been an instance here of a guard abusing a prisoner without the guard being disciplined or transferred. No one has ever been starved or beaten. No one has ever been worked to death or exhaustion. And there's never been a case of a guard killing a prisoner. Most of the men here, the ones who have been here for a while, have gotten used to being treated as human beings. And we've forgotten why. Looking at you men, we now know why. The reason is that man, Wilhelm Klink.

## Interlude

“I won’t kid you. Life here is still hard. We’re still in a prison. We’re overcrowded, our food is rationed, and supplies are nearly impossible to get. But we’re all in this together — Germans, Allies, and townspeople. All of us, just waiting and praying for the war to end. And it will. Until it does, we’ll do the best that we can. All of us.” He looked at the pale, thin faces staring at him. They were listening. And accepting what he said. Most of them. As for the rest, well, they would behave. He and his men would see to that.

“Now,” a lighter voice, “there are still some rules in the camp. There have to be when there are so many people in one place. They’re fairly simple. Captain Martin will fill you in. Captain, they’re all yours.”

“Thank you, Colonel.” Martin stepped up to take Hogan’s place.

Hogan walked back to Klink. The tall figure was unusually still, his eyes veiled. Then he looked at Hogan. “Thank you, Colonel Hogan.”

A smile. A real one. “You’re welcome, Kommandant.” Then, to the utter astonishment of a couple of barracks’ leaders who were standing nearby, he added, “Now, get out of here. You’re not supposed to know why we’ve never had an escape.”

Klink smiled and quietly slipped out of the hall.

## Interlude

– Eleven –

The next day, there was a funeral for eight dead prisoners — one had died during the night. Nearly the entire camp turned out, prisoners and Germans. There was an honor guard of forty prisoners, newcomers and Hogan's men, and four Germans, led by Klink. Monsignor Geisler had presided over the burial of the men in the field across from the back gate.

Over the next few days, the newcomers lost their gaunt, hollow-eyed looks, and were slowly absorbed into the camp. The lice had spread, as had been pretty much inevitable, to a few more barracks. But Hogan and Klink's stringent cleanliness policies contained the pests before they threatened to become an epidemic. Both men knew it was more than just an annoying pest problem. Those disgusting little bugs spread not just themselves but also diseases, like typhus, to hitherto uninfected men. Diseases that would kill.

Doctor Bauer came daily to check on the patients. Four more men died, but that was all. The surviving pneumonia and dysentery patients were still far too weak. They might have to spend the rest of the war in the infirmary, but they would live. A few days later, the amputees returned from the clinic. For now, they would also live in the infirmary.

Hogan and Captain Witton walked around the compound. It was another cloudy and windy day, with a threat of snow to come. But quite a few of the prisoners were out, just to get away from the overcrowded barracks. One hardy group was playing a game of soccer near the front gate. Included in the group were some of the newcomers, wearing the makeshift uniforms that Newkirk and his helpers had sewn. Over at the delousing station, the prisoners from one of the infected barracks were in line. From the other end, naked and shivering men were being taken to the laundry where freshly cleaned clothing was waiting for them. At the infected barracks, other men were busy cleaning

## Interlude

and disinfecting every possible place where the lice might live.

A private hurried over and handed Hogan a few sheets of paper. “Here you go, sir,” said a British voice. “Hot off the press.”

It was the latest edition of the camp’s weekly paper<sup>22</sup>. Hogan glanced at it and handed the paper to Witton. Hogan already knew what was in it. Like everything else that went on in the camp, he had the final okay on it. Most of the paper dealt with the fire and their influx of prisoners. But there was one rather unusual item in this edition — an article about Klink. An article that acknowledged not only what Klink had done during the fire but also what he had done for the camp in the years he’d been kommandant. Hogan had almost vetoed the article; he knew how Klink was going to feel about it. Then he decided not to. It was time the camp finally began noticing what kind of a man Klink really was.

Hogan and Witton continued their walk. Other prisoners were entering the mess hall; they were on KP duty this week and would be helping with the afternoon meal. In a former supply hut, a French class was just letting out. Other men waited outside to begin an accounting class run by a bespectacled CPA-cum-supply sergeant. And the library was getting more than its usual crowd since Klink had appropriated several dozen books, many banned by the Nazis, from Baumann’s stash. In the nearby gymnasium, several men were working with some of the weakened new prisoners, helping them regain their strength.

Other men were on work details. Some men were shoring up a spot on the hillside that had tumbled down, partly blocking the road. Another group was clearing the road. One of the camp’s

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<sup>22</sup> Many POW camps had their own newspapers. They were used for camp events, announcements, classifieds, reviews, etc., much like “real” newspapers. They also gave fairly accurate news about the war. One camp paper managed to scoop the New York papers on the invasion of Normandy. Among their sources of information were radios that the prisoners built or otherwise acquired. Most POW camps had a radio or two that they managed, in very ingenious ways, to keep out of German hands. David A. Foy: *For You the War Is Over*

## Interlude

trucks, driven by Schultz, was leaving with a group of fifteen prisoners. They were on their way to the old coal mine that had been supplementing their fuel supply. That in addition to the groups of prisoners, and guards, who had been out earlier in the day cutting wood for fuel.

And for another construction project. Sergeants Rizzo and Doyle had come up with a plan to build second stories onto a couple of the sturdier barracks. Klink had stared at them in disbelief when the two had made their suggestion, and Hogan had felt exactly the same way. But Rizzo and Doyle had been very confident about the idea, so Klink had agreed to it. After muttering something about skyscraper barracks in a voice reminiscent of the old Kommandant.

The real Wilhelm Klink continued to emerge. For the guards, it was less disconcerting; nearly all of them were new and hadn't known the old Kommandant. Few of the guards were fit for other duties. They were children or wounded combat veterans or men otherwise unfit for combat. Yet rarely had the camp operated as well in the past as it did now. Odd. It was as if Klink were trying to instill pride in the soldiers, trying to blunt the sting of the defeat that everyone knew was coming. For the few men who weren't new, they did their duty and obeyed their orders. If they didn't like the changes in the camp or its kommandant, they had the sense to keep their mouths shut.

As for the POWs, they were beginning to accord Klink the respect due him as an officer. And it was a real respect, not the phony obeisance they had shown earlier. Hogan was glad. Wilhelm Klink had gone unsung for so long that it was nice to see him winning some praise. And their attitude, as well as Klink's behavior toward the new prisoners, influenced the newer men.

It was also a bit disconcerting for the prisoners. Not the new ones. The new Klink was quite a bit different from the commandants they'd known before. But then the camp was rather different too. The new prisoners accepted Klink because they hadn't seen his prior persona.

But for the older prisoners, the hundreds who had been at the camp for several years, the new Klink still took a bit of getting used to. The old Klink had to be continually fooled, continually



## Interlude

lied to, continually tricked, and continually fawned over. Not only by Hogan, but, to some extent, by the rest of the camp as well. Pretty much everyone in the camp had, at one time or another, been involved in some scheme or another that required getting around Klink. But the new Klink wasn't easy to trick, or easy to lie to. And, to the prisoners' consternation, he seemed to have a pretty good idea of what went on in the camp.

Hogan's schemes had been pretty much curtailed, thanks to the heavier fighting, the fire and the new prisoners. But there were still a couple of things they continued to do. Like printing counterfeit marks. One group of men had gotten the shock of their lives when Klink unexpectedly walked into their barracks and found them with hundreds of fake marks on the table. Schultz, who had accompanied Klink, looked away.

But Klink didn't. He picked up one of the marks and examined it closely.

"Not bad," Klink finally said to the prisoners' astonishment. "I must say you men are certainly turning into skilled artists. A trade for after the war?" He looked pointedly at Corporal Zimmerman who had been in charge of the group.

Zimmerman gulped audibly and managed to croak, "Yes, sir."

"Very good," Klink said. "Carry on."

And he had left, followed by Schultz. Leaving behind a group of flabbergasted men. And a story that soon spread throughout the camp.

Hogan had been secretly amused when he heard it. Though the men who were on the receiving end of his tongue-lashing would never have believed it. Hogan didn't care that Klink had walked in, but he did care that the men's security had been so lax. It could just as easily have been Gruber or a guard who had discovered their artistry. And that would have caused headaches for everyone, including Klink.

That had been the only potentially threatening incident. And Hogan intended to keep it that way. But there were still other hints to the real Wilhelm Klink: Hogan's and Klink's easier relationship, a relationship that some were starting to openly call a friendship, Klink's actions during the fire, and his behavior after the fire and with the new prisoners. Not to

## Interlude

mention a few less than guarded remarks made by Hogan or Klink when others were around.

All of which had started some lively discussions in the camp's barracks. One group felt that Klink was just starting to notice things and had decided that it was in his best interests to ignore them. Another far smaller group was starting to think that Klink had always noticed things and had decided long ago to ignore them. However, most of the prisoners seemed to have decided that Klink, old or new, wasn't any of their business. If Hogan was acting more friendly toward Klink, so what? Or if Klink was more competent than he used to be, so what? As long as no one got into trouble, and the prisoners' needs were taken care of, Klink was, as he had always been, Hogan's problem. Which was as it should be.

Hogan and Witton's circuit of the camp had taken them back to the front gate.

"Colonel! Colonel Hogan!" Kinch called, walking toward them.

Hogan left Witton, walking over to Kinch. "What's up?"

"Trouble, Colonel," Kinch said in a low voice. "We found a British agent in the tunnels."

Trouble. Hogan was beginning to hate that word. He followed Kinch into Barracks 2.

## Interlude

– Twelve –

Hogan looked soberly at the man on the cot. The camp medic, Sergeant Frank Wilson, had already looked at the injured man and had shaken his head sadly as he left.

The man stirred. “Colonel?” he said in a barely audible voice.

Hogan knelt beside the cot. “Yes, sir?”

“I understand you can get a message to the Stage.”

Hogan hid his surprise. “We can try.”

“I,” the man coughed, “I would like to see him.”

“I’ll try,” Hogan promised. “You just rest.”

Hogan walked into Klink’s office after a perfunctory knock. Klink was a little surprised at his grimness.

Hogan leaned over the desk, talking quietly. “There’s a man in the tunnel. He wants to see the Stage.” Hogan’s eyes met Klink’s. “I think he should.”

Klink nodded after a moment. “I’ll meet you in the tunnel.”

Klink, still in uniform, walked toward them. Hogan held a dark sweater in his hand. Klink took off his jacket and slipped into the sweater. From the pocket, he pulled a mask. It also went on.

The Stage glanced at the man on the cot and visibly started. He walked slowly over to the cot. To Hogan’s surprise, he pulled off the mask.

Klink knelt beside the cot. The man’s pained eyes turned to him. “Hello, Mark,” Klink said quietly.

“Hello, old man,” the English voice said faintly. “A long way from Switzerland, isn’t it?”

“Very,” Klink said softly, his hand resting on the Englishman’s.

“Rotten luck, getting this.” Mark smiled thinly. “Especially here. But everyone’s luck has to run out some time. I am glad

## Interlude

yours hasn't."

"It almost did, once or twice," Klink said as he lifted up the bloodied bandage. A flicker of emotion in his eyes as he saw the dreadful wound.

"Yes," Mark said. "When the message was sent a few weeks ago, I thought you'd bought it. Satisfy my curiosity, old man. How did you get away?"

Klink nodded toward Hogan who stood a few feet away from them. "Colonel Hogan got me out."

"So you finally told him."

"No." Klink managed a faint smile. "He guessed."

"I told you he was bright," Mark said weakly to Hogan's surprise.

"Yes, you did," Klink agreed. "But you forgot to mention a few other things."

A faint smile. "Wouldn't be the same, old man, if I told you everything."

Then Mark coughed, spitting up blood as Klink held his head gently.

"How is the Baroness?" Mark finally asked in a low voice.

"I am told she is well."

"And how is she?" Mark asked in a voice too low for Hogan to hear.

A softness in Klink's eyes. "Fine, the last I heard."

"You hang on to that one, old man," Mark said weakly. "She's a rare one."

"I know, Mark, I know," Klink said softly.

A spasm crossed the Englishman's face. "I had a pouch with me. Has some interesting things on troop movements and the like in it. Make certain it gets to the proper people in Dusseldorf, will you?"

"You have my word."

A fleeting smile. "And you always keep your word. You always have. Rather boring of you to be so dependable."

Klink managed a smile. "I like being boring."

The smile became a grimace. "Sorry, old man. Don't mean to be a bother."

"Just rest, Mark. Can I get you anything?"

## Interlude

A shake of his head. "I'm afraid even the Stage can't find me a new set of insides." He groaned slightly.

As Klink watched, Mark's eyes closed and he lay still. Asleep or unconscious, Klink wasn't sure.

Klink stood and walked back to Hogan. "I assume he's seen Sergeant Wilson."

Hogan nodded. "I've thought about taking him to Doctor Bauer."

Klink shook his head sadly. "It's too late for that." A hard glance at the pouch in the corner. "He must have dragged that thing for miles. I hope it was worth it. It has to get to Dusseldorf."

"We'll get it there," Hogan promised.

"Thank you. Call your normal contact in London, but use your emergency code. Tell them that Colonel Mark Richmond is badly injured and left a pouch in your keeping. Use the code word, M. Rodin. They'll let you know where it goes." He shook himself. "I have to get back upstairs. Try to keep him comfortable; I'll be back later."

Hogan nodded as Klink turned back down the tunnel.

It was night when Klink went back into the tunnel. Supposedly the Kommandant was in his quarters, preparing for bed. Schultz had orders to keep an eye out in case the Kommandant was needed. As an added precaution, Hogan had his men watching and listening as well. Some of his men. LeBeau and Newkirk had slipped away with the mystery pouch right after roll call.

Mark's eyes opened as Klink knelt beside him. "Quiet upstairs?"

A nod; Klink's hand rested lightly on Mark's.

"Colonel Hogan has been kind enough to fill me in on the past few months," Mark said. "You've had quite a time of it."

"Colonel Hogan exaggerates notoriously," Klink said with a faint smile.

Mark managed a grin. "I doubt it."

A cough choked him, blood again being spit up. This time, pain tore through him. His hand gripped Klink's cruelly.

The pain eased slightly; Klink wiped the sweat off Mark's

## Interlude

brow.

“That was a nasty one,” Mark whispered hoarsely. “Sorry, old man.”

“Try to rest, Mark,” Klink said softly.

“Rest? Soon that’s all I’ll be doing, eh?” A hint of a smile. “I’ve wondered what I’d say to you when we met again, Wilhelm. Now, I can’t think of anything to say. Except, thank you.”

Klink shook his head. “No, thank you. You believed in me when you had no reason to. Without your support, I would have failed.”

“I guess we’re even then,” Mark said. “We both gave it our best shot.” Another spasm crossed his face.

“Try to rest, Mark,” Klink said quietly.

A nod. “Don’t go away, will you?”

Klink shook his head. “I’ll be right here.”

It was the dead of night when Wilhelm Klink rose to his feet, scarcely aware of his stiff muscles, a deep sadness in his eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Hogan whispered as Klink reached him.

Klink nodded and glanced back at the still man on the cot. “London has to be told.”

Hogan nodded and led the way to the radio room.

Klink wrote on a piece of paper and handed it to Baker. “Use this frequency.”

Baker glanced at it and adjusted the radio.

Hogan waited patiently as the Stage quietly informed his London contact that Colonel Mark Richmond had died.

Klink broke the connection after a few minutes. At a nod from Hogan, Baker left the two men alone.

Klink sat tiredly at the table, taking the cup Hogan handed him.

“Mark was my first English contact,” Klink said soberly after taking a sip of the coffee. “Back when most of the English were still deluding themselves about Hitler. His help was invaluable in those early years. Because of him, we received arms, money, anything we needed. If it was humanly possible, Mark got them for us.”

“He must have believed in you a great deal,” Hogan said.

## Interlude

“Back then, he had no reason to. I’m glad I was able to justify his faith in me.” He stared at the coffee in his cup. “I’m just sorry it had to end this way.” Klink sighed and looked around. “Can he be buried down here?”

Hogan nodded. “Unfortunately, he’s not the only one down here.”

Klink nodded and drank the rest of his coffee.

Klink presided over the burial.

Odd, Hogan thought, German, English, American, French, the prayers were pretty much the same. So many similarities and still men fought.

Klink closed with a poem, earning a surprised look from Newkirk as he recited from memory:

“If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there’s some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England’s breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

“And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England  
given  
Her sights and sounds dreams happy as her day  
And laughter, learnt of friends and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.’<sup>23</sup>”

There was a long silence after Klink’s low voice faded away.

Then Newkirk said in a husky voice, “Thank you, sir.”

Klink nodded, his eyes on the grave. “Every time we met, I

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<sup>23</sup> Rupert Brooke: “The Soldier”

## Interlude

would always remember that poem by Brooke,” Klink said softly. “It seemed to fit him so.” He turned away from the grave.

“Sir.”

Newkirk’s voice stopped him. Klink half turned toward the Englishman.

“Sir.” Newkirk’s tone was uncharacteristically humble. “Sir, I never had the guts before, but I want to apologize to you for everything — ”

Klink shook his head. “You don’t have — ”

“Yes, sir,” Newkirk interrupted him, “I do. The truth is, I was the worst of the lot. I resented . . . No, more . . . I hated it when Colonel Hogan began treating you differently. And, I’m sorry to say, I wished you harm because of it. I had no call to act like that. None. When you were playing your part, you never did anything to warrant that kind of treatment. I just want to say that I’m sorry for everything.”

Klink nodded.

“As long as we’re being honest,” LeBeau said soberly, his eyes on Klink. “I, too, wish to apologize. If Peter was the worst, then I was the second worst. I am sorry as well, mon Kommandant.”

“While we’re at it — ” Carter started.

Klink smiled faintly, soberly. “Apologies accepted, gentlemen.” His eyes met each of theirs. “And thank you.”

After another glance at the grave, he turned and walked down the tunnel.

“He’s quite a man,” Newkirk said.

Hogan smiled and followed Klink out.



# Act Three

## Scene Two



## Scene Two

– Thirteen –

It was a cold, bleak day. Everyone was dragging — the guards, the prisoners, everyone. The reason, as usual, was the war news. To the prisoners, it meant the end was still not here. To the Germans, it was as if Germany was slowly hemorrhaging to death and nothing was being done to stop it. It was only a matter of time. But the waiting was hard on everyone. Only Klink seemed immune.

Gruber. Hogan saw him crossing the compound to the front gate. He seemed to have accepted the terms of his uneasy truce with the Kommandant. He acted no differently than he had before the day he held that gun on Klink. According to Schultz, Gruber made no attempt to talk to any of the Germans in the camp, and he rarely left his quarters when he was off duty.

Hogan turned the corner of the barracks and halted. A car was coming through the gate. Only one man was in it. The car drove to Klink's office and stopped. The man got out.

Schutzstaffel — SS

Hogan's eye caught those of his men. They hurried back into the barracks. Hurriedly, they set up the listening device.

"SS," muttered Newkirk. "What does he want?"

Kommandant Wilhelm Klink was wondering the same thing as he greeted Major Sigfrid Reiner.

"Just a courtesy call, Kommandant," Reiner was saying as Klink sat behind his desk. "My family home is south of here. I am on my way there before returning to the front."

"Is that safe, Major?" Klink asked. "We have been hearing rumors about resistance raids on SS personnel."

A thin smile. "They will find that I am not that easy to kill or capture." The major walked over to the rear window. "An interesting camp, Kommandant. You are to be commended. I understand that you have never had a successful escape."

A pleased smile. "Yes, that is true."

## Scene Two

"I have never been to a Luftwaffe camp before, Kommandant. However, I have been to some of the other prison camps. This seems to be a little different. What is that?"

"What is what?" Klink rose and went to stand beside Reiner at the window.

"What is that?" Reiner pointed.

"Oh. That is the prisoners' recreation hall."

"Recreation hall?" Reiner sounded amused. "How quaint. Perhaps that is why you have never had an escape, Colonel."

A smile. "We try to make things as comfortable as possible. It encourages them to stay here."

"Apparently, it works," Reiner said. "Though many think it a waste of time to coddle prisoners. Wolfgang did."

"Wolfgang?"

"Wolfgang Hochstetter. Major Hochstetter," Reiner said. "I understand you knew him."

"Yes. We had met numerous times in the past." Klink sounded appropriately sad. "Such a tragic loss to the Third Reich."

"Very. Apparently, he was close to discovering the identity of a notorious resistance leader," Reiner continued. "One who had evaded capture for over ten years. One wonders if he had discovered the identity of the man before his death. Possibly that discovery caused his death."

"And," Reiner pointed out the window, changing the subject, "what is?"

"The delousing station," Klink said in an almost bored voice.

"As I was saying," Reiner continued. "Poor Wolfgang. I hope he died happy knowing the identity of the man who had bested him for so many years."

"He spoke of you often, Colonel. You and the other man. I wonder if he ever guessed the truth before everything fell apart for him. I doubt it. He hated too strongly to think clearly."

"Major, this is all very interesting. But I . . ." Klink broke off, stunned.

"Very good, Colonel," Reiner said in a voice almost too low for Hogan to hear. "Your control is really excellent. You make no sudden moves, no instinctive reactions that might cause severe damage."

## Scene Two

“What’s he talking about?” Carter asked in a puzzled voice.

“What do you want?” Klink’s voice changed to that quiet tone that Hogan and his men had come to know.

“You, Colonel Klink.” Reiner’s voice was chillingly soft. “Or perhaps I should say Stage?”

“Mon Dieu!” LeBeau cried. “He knows!”

“Who?” Klink asked politely.

Reiner laughed. “Of course. I really do not expect you to admit anything, Colonel. That would be too easy.

“Now, Colonel, I do not know if you have any safety measures to protect you here. But I would suggest no rash actions while that knife is embedded in your side.”

Hogan, who had been ready to rush to Klink’s office, stopped, frozen with shock.

“The blade is razor sharp,” Reiner continued. “And very thin as you can feel. I chose a spot that will cause you no permanent harm. There are no vital organs in the way, no arteries. There are, of course, nerves. But the way the knife is inserted now, it is merely annoying. Unless, of course, I press so.”

Klink’s eyes closed as pain shot through him.

“Excellent, Colonel, excellent,” Reiner said. “I have sent men to their knees with that move. You will be a worthy opponent.”

Klink’s eyes opened and he looked at Reiner. “What do you want, Reiner?”

“As I said before, Colonel, you. Do you hunt, Colonel?” Reiner asked.

Klink stayed silent, his eyes on Reiner’s face.

“It is an exhilarating sport. I have hunted all kinds of game. The more dangerous the game, the more thrilling the hunt. But of all the animals in the world, the most enjoyable, the most challenging to hunt is man.”

“You are mad.” Klink’s calm voice echoed the thoughts of the listening men as he turned back to the window.

## Scene Two

Reiner's expression turned ugly. The knife pressed.

Klink gasped as the pain tore through him, his fingers turning white as they grasped the windowsill tightly to keep from falling.

"It is not wise to anger me, Colonel. Not wise at all." Reiner's voice lost some of its smoothness. "I can cause you a great deal of unpleasant pain right now. And I really do not want to damage you unnecessarily."

Hogan's insides twisted as he heard Klink's gasp and Reiner's threat. Klink was at the mercy of that madman and there was nothing they could do.

"Colonel, we've got to do something!" Baker said.

"Right now, we're helpless," Hogan said in disgust. "Until we find out what he's up to."

Reiner watched as the pain slowly ebbed from Klink's face.

"As I said, Colonel, the most exciting game of all is man. And I have chosen you to be my final prize. A fitting end for a man who has outwitted all of Germany's security forces for the past ten years."

"It is?" Klink's voice was soft with irony.

"But of course," Reiner said happily. "Oh, it will be fair; you will be allowed to fight back. You might even get lucky and kill me. That is always the risk the hunter takes. It will be just the two of us, matching wits. It will be glorious."

"He's a bloody lunatic," muttered Newkirk.

"And what if I choose not to play your game, Reiner? Will you kill me now?" Klink asked softly. "Or forcibly remove me from the camp?"

"What?!" Reiner was outraged. "Where is the sport in that, Colonel? No, I will not kill you now. Nor kidnap you. I want you to come to me of your own free will. Once our discussion is concluded, I will walk out of this camp and return home." Reiner took an envelope from his coat pocket and tossed it on Klink's desk. "That contains the directions on how to find my estate. I will expect you there tomorrow morning at dawn."

## Scene Two

“And why should I play your little game, Reiner?” Klink asked curiously.

“Because, my dear Colonel, you are already dying.”

Klink turned to look at him, cold sweat breaking out on his palms.

“You see, Colonel,” Reiner explained in a matter-of-fact voice as an ashen Hogan and his men listened. “The blade was dipped in a little known poison. In my travels through Africa, I encountered a number of exotic poisons. This one is particularly interesting. It is odorless, colorless, tasteless. It enters the victim’s body by a cut or a scratch. It allows him to function normally for a number of days before the pain strikes. Then the victim’s last remaining hours are spent in unending agony. There is an antidote that works as long as the victim has not slipped into an irreversible coma. And the only way for you to get that antidote, Colonel, is to play my game.”

Klink still watched him unflinchingly.

“Perhaps you are thinking of escaping to Switzerland or London. That is your choice. I will not stop you. But I assure you, you will have died in excruciating pain before the doctors can begin to find out what is wrong. The poison is virtually undetectable unless one knows exactly what to look for. The only hope you have of living is to come to the estate, kill me and get the antidote. So, Colonel, you only have two choices. Die very unpleasantly. Or participate in the hunt.”

“And your choices,” Klink said softly in a voice Hogan could not hear, “are limited only by your imagination.”

Reiner smiled.

Klink’s eyes turned to the scene outside the window.

“You have time to decide, Colonel,” Reiner said. “I am patient. But do not wait too long. In forty-eight hours or so, the pain will begin. Your tolerance for pain is quite high but, in time, the pain will become unbearable and cloud your mind. And you will not have much more than another twelve hours after that before you lapse into the coma. Please, choose wisely, Colonel.

“And do not think you can attack me on the way to the estate. I do not have the antidote with me. And I promise you an attack on the estate or me will accomplish nothing other than your

## Scene Two

certain death. The only way for you to obtain the antidote is to participate in the hunt.

“Goodbye, Colonel Klink,” Reiner concluded. “For your sake, I do hope we meet again. Oh, and one other minor detail.” Reiner smiled. “To ensure time for me to get out of this camp easily, I am leaving you a little present. I do regret the discomfort this will cause, but as long as the blade is removed quickly, there will be no permanent damage. I would strongly advise you not to move, Colonel, until the blade is removed.”

The listening men started as they heard Klink’s strangled cry and then Reiner’s voice.

“Still conscious, Colonel?” Reiner laughed. “Yes, this will be a most challenging hunt. Until tomorrow, Colonel.”

They heard the door close.

Hogan, guessing what had happened, was already at the door. “Get the medical kit!” he ordered tightly. “That damn sadist just broke the blade off inside Klink’s body!”

Hogan was out of the barracks at a run. “Schultz!” he yelled at the rotund Sergeant and motioned him toward Klink’s office.

The alarmed Sergeant headed quickly toward the office. Reiner’s car was nearly at the gate. Captain Gruber, who had glanced after Reiner and the car in puzzlement, was walking up the stairs to Klink’s office. He had his hand on the door when he was swept aside by Hogan and Schultz. Indignant, he started to object. But by then, the door had opened.

Kommandant Klink was slumped against the wall under the window. Gruber stared at him in surprise.

Hogan had already reached Klink and knelt beside him.

Klink looked at Hogan numbly, pain in his eyes, drenched with sweat.

“All right,” Hogan said gently. “Don’t move. Let me do all the work.” Carefully, Hogan unbuttoned Klink’s jacket. “Schultz!”

The big Sergeant knelt beside his Kommandant. He wet dry lips. “Yes, Colonel Hogan.”

“Hold the jacket out of the way,” Hogan said. “Carefully! Don’t jar him.”

Schultz did as he was told. The tiny gash in Klink’s shirt,



## Scene Two

barely tinted with blood, was scarcely noticeable.

"I need scissors or a knife," Hogan said urgently.

Gruber, still not knowing what was going on, reacted to the order and walked over to Klink's desk. He took a pair of scissors from the desk drawer and handed it to Hogan. Gruber watched as Hogan, very carefully, cut away Klink's shirt. Gruber swallowed nervously. There was a bleeding wound in Klink's side; a small jagged bit of metal protruded from the wound. Where did it come from? And how did Hogan know about it? Gruber glanced at Hogan's men as they crowded the door. What was going on in this camp?

Hogan expelled a nervous breath. This was going to be tricky. To avoid hurting Klink and possibly causing a serious injury, he had to pull it straight out. "Ready?" he asked quietly.

"Do it," Klink said in a toneless voice. "Quickly!"

After slipping on one of Klink's gloves to protect his fingers from the sharp metal and the poison, Hogan gently but firmly grasped the end of the knife. He pulled it straight out with a smooth, even pressure. Then he held up the thin stiletto.

Gruber went white. Who had done that to the Kommandant? No one had come into the office except that SS major.

The SS major.

"You can breathe again," Hogan said in a soft voice.

Klink nodded and closed his eyes.

Carter came over with the medical kit. As Hogan, the knife in his hand, stood, Schultz expertly bandaged the small wound.

Hogan dropped the knife on the desk and walked over to the cabinet. He poured brandy into a glass and went back to Klink. He stooped down and handed Klink the brandy.

Klink downed the brandy in one gulp. "Help me up, please," he said in a quiet voice.

Schultz helped Klink rise and led him over to his desk.

Klink sat down wearily and wiped his wet face with the handkerchief Schultz gave him. Then he looked at Hogan. The American's face was grave, no hint of humor in his face.

"You heard," Klink stated.

"Every word." Hogan suddenly felt overwhelmed. "I . . . I don't know what to say. Or do."

## Scene Two

A humorless smile. "There is nothing to say. As for what to do . . ." Klink's voice trailed off.

There was a long silence in the room. Schultz and Gruber were puzzled but were afraid of intruding.

Klink picked up the knife on the desk and stared at it, his face impassive. Finally, he spoke, "I would like you to leave. There are some things that I must do. Alone." His eyes lifted to Hogan. "Come to my quarters tonight at seven. All of you. We will talk then." He seemed to notice Gruber for the first time. "Hauptmann Gruber. Yes, it is fitting that you are here. Well, Hauptmann, your struggle with your conscience may end very soon."

Klink's eyes swung to Schultz. "And you, my friend, don't know what has happened. Colonel Hogan will explain."

His gaze fell on the knife again. Klink dropped it, revulsion flashing across his face. "I would appreciate it if you requested the cook to prepare something special for dinner, Sergeant."

"Kommandant," LeBeau said in a tightly emotional voice, "I would be honored if you allowed me to prepare dinner for you."

Slowly, Klink's eyes lifted to the small corporal's face. And he smiled. LeBeau felt like crying as Klink said, "I would deem it an honor, my small friend." The smile disappeared and his gaze dropped back to the knife. "Go! Quickly!" Klink whispered, his voice too rigidly controlled.

One by one, the despondent men left the room.

Hogan was the last. He stared at the man who had become his friend long before he was willing to admit it. There was so much he wanted to say. But not now. Klink had to come to terms with the horrible fate before him.

Hogan closed the door quietly as he left the office.

At seven o'clock, they entered the Kommandant's quarters. Klink, in a black sweater and pants, his monocle missing, waited for them in the living room. He was pouring cognac into glasses from an old bottle.

The waiting, silent men were solemn.

Schultz's eyes were red, his face tightly controlled. When Hogan told him what had happened, the normally good-natured

## Scene Two

Sergeant exploded with rage, using language none of them had thought he even knew. Then he broke down.

Gruber. Gruber didn't know what to think or say. The whole thing seemed insane to him. Hogan had told him only the bare facts about what had happened. The American gave no details on how he knew about the events in Klink's office. And Gruber asked for none. He believed the story only because he had to. But he wasn't sure if he wanted to know anything else.

"Sergeant Carter," Klink said in a quiet voice, "please pass the cognac around."

Carter took the tray with the glasses on it and walked around the room.

Klink went over to the desk and took a thick packet from the middle drawer. He walked over to the table and leaned the packet against a vase. "There are letters here for everyone," he said quietly. "My mother, brothers, Therese, Dieter and others. Also," his eyes met theirs, "letters for each of you."

"Hauptmann Gruber, there is also a letter for General Burkhalter. It will explain what has happened here in the camp for the past four years and absolves you of all complicity in my actions."

Gruber swallowed nervously as he nodded.

Klink went over to a chair; a small black bag was on it. He pulled a Luger out of the satchel, examined it and returned it to the bag.

"You are to give me until midnight of the third day," Klink said quietly. "If I am not back by then," his eyes found Hogan, "you are to leave."

"Hans." Schultz started. "You are then to make the same telephone call you made the last time." Their eyes met. "This time, my friend, you will obey orders and leave," Klink said softly.

Tears in his eyes, Schultz could only nod.

"The packet, I entrust to you. Please see that everyone receives the letters."

Again, a silent nod. This time, a tear slid down Schultz's cheek.

"Robert." It was the first time that Klink had called him by

## Scene Two

name in the presence of others. "This time, you, too, are to leave. I," his eyes met Hogan's, "I do not wish to make it an order. Please, honor it as the last request of a friend."

Hogan nodded, too choked to say anything.

Klink smiled. He picked up the last glass on the tray and held it high. "To the end of the war."

The others echoed his toast and drank.

Klink then moved around the room.

Hogan couldn't hear what Klink said. But with each man, he shared a comment and a toast. Each man was visibly shaken by the goodbye. With Schultz, Klink shared an embrace. And Gruber, to Hogan's surprise, saluted.

Finally, it was Hogan's turn.

Klink smiled. "To our symbiotic relationship, Robert."

Hogan found it difficult to return the smile.

Their glasses clinked.

Hogan drained his glass without tasting the cognac.

Klink slowly held up his hand as in the cave. Hogan, a painful tightness in his throat, grasped Klink's hand, his eyes clinging to Klink's.

"I am sorry it will not be to the end, Robert," Klink said softly.

Hogan swallowed, his grip tightening on Klink's hand. Then Hogan broke the grip and embraced the man before him.

As they broke apart, Hogan's voice was filled with desperation. "Wilhelm, if . . ." He swallowed hard and tried again. "If you survive, don't come back. Try to get word to us, but don't come back."

Klink smiled. "If I survive, I will consider it."

Then he stepped away from Hogan and drained his glass. He broke the stem with his fingers, letting the pieces drop to the rug. Then he walked over to the chair and picked up the bag. His eyes swept over them one last time. And he turned to go.

Schultz's voice broke the silence. "Achtung!"

The men in the room snapped to attention and saluted.

Klink was surprised, and pleased. He returned their salute and was gone.

Gruber broke the long despairing silence. "He . . . He doesn't expect to live." There was wonder and puzzlement in his voice.

## Scene Two

Schultz walked as if in a daze closer to the door. Then he dropped into a chair and began sobbing loudly. LeBeau, his eyes grave, hesitantly walked over to Schultz and laid a hand on his quaking shoulder.

Hogan stared at the door, still unable to believe what had happened. Then finally, as if he were in a dream, he stirred. "Kinch," he said in a pale imitation of his normal voice. "Call our friend in Berlin. At least, we can protect his back. In case . . ."

"Yes, sir." Kinch walked over to the telephone and made the call.

With more than a little surprise, Gruber watched the American sergeant make a call to Berlin, to Abwehr, to a Major Hans Teppel.<sup>24</sup>

Hogan took the telephone from the sergeant. After a few, and to Gruber incomprehensible, sentences, Hogan began talking. "Major, we've got bad trouble here . . . No, we're fine for the moment. But we need a favor . . . Keep Burkhalter away from here for at least eighty-four hours. No calls, no telegrams and especially no visits. Do you think you can manage that? . . . Thanks . . . Yeah, we'll let you know what happened later. Goodbye."

Hogan replaced the receiver and stared at it. Then he picked up his glass.

*"To our symbiotic relationship, Robert . . . I am sorry it will not be to the end . . ."*

*To the end.*

*You and . . .*

Hogan hurled the glass against the wall. It shattered loudly.

Blindly, Hogan ran out of the room. The door slammed loudly behind him.

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<sup>24</sup> "Bad Day at Berlin"

## Scene Two

— Fourteen —

The next few days were a living nightmare for all of them.

Gruber took over the camp, much to the puzzlement of the guards and the prisoners. His explanation was that the Kommandant had been called away unexpectedly and would not return for a few days. But he was plainly uncomfortable in his role as caretaker.

Schultz walked around in a daze, scarcely eating or sleeping. He stayed on duty simply to have something to do. However, he barely talked to anyone. He barely noticed anyone either. Guards, prisoners, everyone stayed away from him, unable to deal with him.

Hogan's men were worried. About Schultz. They liked the rotund sergeant and knew how much he cared for his Kommandant. And themselves — they were preparing to leave the camp under circumstances that weren't very comfortable. And ultimately about Hogan. They had never seen him like this; it frightened them. As for Klink . . . They didn't want to think about Klink. Didn't want to think about the hell he might be facing at the hands of Reiner.

Captain John Witton was worried as well. Hogan had not told him what had happened. All Witton knew was that Klink had gone without warning. And now, Hogan was planning to leave as well. Witton was the senior captain in the camp. He would be in charge of the prisoners after Hogan and his men left. In charge of a camp that would finally have its first official escape.

Witton understood the need for secrecy. But he also wished that Hogan would open up to him. Whatever was wrong was affecting Schultz, the normally genial sergeant was impossible to get near; Hogan's men, they had continually worried expressions on their faces; even Gruber, the normally self-possessed officer was openly uneasy. And as for Hogan . . .

Whatever was wrong, it was tearing Hogan apart. The whole camp could see it. He hardly ate or slept. Hogan avoided

## Scene Two

everyone, even his own men. His eyes always seemed haunted by some unspeakable horror. There were even times when Witton was certain he saw traces of tears in Hogan's eyes. And that shook Witton even more.

If Witton had to make a guess, he would say it had something to do with Klink. Because he knew what had happened at the fire, Witton had been granted an insight into the relationship of the two men that most of the camp was denied. But he also knew that most of the camp understood that something had happened between Hogan and Klink in that cave-in last year. And what had happened during the fire simply reinforced the feeling.

However, Witton was at a total loss as to what had happened now. No one who knew anything was talking. All Witton could hope for was that the situation would be resolved quickly.

His eyes sought out Hogan. Before Hogan collapsed.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Hogan never knew what happened. One moment, Klink was running toward the barracks. Then he tripped and fell forward.*

*Hogan caught him and held him close. "Kommandant," Hogan whispered.*

*The blue eyes opened on his face. The pain in them shook Hogan. Bloodied fingers grasped Hogan's shirt, pulling his head down.*

*Hogan bent over Klink.*

*"Tell London," Klink gasped as Hogan listened in growing horror. "Tell London, the play is terminated," Klink said in a weakening voice.*

*"What?"*

*Klink coughed, blood appeared at the side of his mouth. "The play is terminated." Amazingly a smile. "The Stage is dead. The fools finally suspected."*

*"No!" whispered Hogan.*

*Klink's eyes were on Hogan's. "I . . . wish I had told you earlier. We . . . could have been . . . friends longer."*

## Scene Two

*Hogan's voice broke. "We were anyway." He knew it was true. A smile. "Thank you." A spasm twisted his face. "I would have liked to . . . the end, Robert. I wou . . . "*

*His fingers slipped from Hogan's shirt as his eyes closed.*

*"Kommandant? Wilhelm? . . . NO!" Hogan screamed. "Oh God, no." Hogan began sobbing. "No . . . "*

*His sobs filled the room.*

"No!" he whispered. "NO!"

A start. And he woke, tears on his cheeks.

*Just a dream. That's all. Only a dream. Only . . .*

Then he remembered.

*Oh, God, NO!*

Turning over on his side, painful sobs shook his body.

The yell had awakened Sergeant James Kinchloe and some of the other men. Kinch was on his feet instantly. He started toward the door of the office and then stopped.

Newkirk bumped into him. "Ouch! Why'd you stop for? Go on in."

Kinch shook his head. "No."

"But he could be in — "

"He's dreaming, Newkirk," Kinch said softly. "Just like after Martinelli died. Remember?"

"He's sure taking it awfully hard," Carter said.

"How would you take it if your best friend was facing certain death and you couldn't do a thing about it?" Kinch said quietly.

"Best friend?" from LeBeau. Then a subdued, "Yeah, I guess he is."

"There must be something we could do," Baker said.

Kinch shook his head. "All we can do is be there for him. When the time is up and Klink hasn't returned, we leave. After it's all over, after we're out of here, that's when it's really gonna hit him. That's when he's going to need us the most." A glance at the door. "Back to bed; we're not doing anybody any good here."

Slowly, the men retreated to their bunks.



## Scene Two

\* \* \* \* \*

Wilhelm Klink sat in his car, gazing at the arched gatehouse before him. It was a few minutes until dawn. It had taken him several hours to drive down to the estate, a task complicated by the fact that he had to take secondary roads to avoid the convoys and troops heading for the Western Front. An hour away from the several hundred-acre estate, he had stopped and slept. Klink's sleep was fitful and hardly refreshing. But he needed all the rest he could get to even have a hope of surviving. And right now, the question of his survival was very much in doubt. He wasn't sure if it was his own mind playing tricks on him or if the poison was starting to have an effect on his body, but he knew he wasn't at his best. But then, he was forced to admit, he hadn't been at his best for a number of months now.

Why on Earth hadn't he gone on to London? Or at the very least, stayed away from the camp after his escape from Hochstetter? He had used up more than his fair share of luck over the past few years, more than his fair share with the rescue. Why hadn't he left it alone? Why?

He hadn't. The reasons didn't matter any more. He had gone back to camp. And now, he had Reiner to deal with.

If he could.

Klink started the car and drove up to the gate. Silently, mysteriously, it opened for him. He drove through the gate. Just as silently, as mysteriously, it closed behind him.

Klink got out of the car. A small, rather odd-looking man limped out of the gatehouse and beckoned to him. Klink followed him inside. The stone interior was gloomy, an appropriate setting to Klink's mind.

He followed the limping man through an arch into a small room. A table had been set with gold cutlery and exquisite china. Wonderful smells from an adjoining kitchen filled the room. The small man pointed at the chair and turned away.

"Wait," Klink began.

The man shook his head and pointed again. He limped out of the room.

## Scene Two

Klink sat down. The chair faced the multi-paned window overlooking the grounds. There was some snow on the ground, but most of the dense woods were bare. The tall trees were a mix of evergreens, old oaks and chestnuts. In the summer, it would be beautiful. Now, it appeared to be dead. An illusion? Or reality? Klink wasn't sure which.

The little man came back with a large tray. He placed it before Klink. Eggs, real eggs, done just the way he liked them. Sausages, plump pork sausages, such as he hadn't seen in months. Bread, freshly baked with real butter. And fruits. Oranges, peaches, grapes — fruits impossible to get anywhere in war torn Europe. And wine, a rare, expensive French wine.

The little man had poured the wine into a glittering crystal goblet and held it out for Klink's approval. It would have been amusing, except for the deadly air with which the man performed the act. Klink nodded his acceptance; the goblet was filled with the wine. Then, with a bow, the man left Klink to his meal.

His last meal? Ignoring that dismal thought, Klink began eating, bent on enjoying the food as much as he could.

After Klink finished eating, the little man appeared again and beckoned to him. Klink was led into a bathroom. A tub of hot water was waiting for him. The man pointed at Klink, motioning him to remove his clothes. All of them. For a moment, Klink thought about refusing. But then he shrugged. What was the point? Why aggravate his erstwhile host unnecessarily? Besides, the tub did look inviting.

So, Klink removed his clothes. Then, to his less than pleased surprise, Klink was subjected to a ruthlessly careful and intimate body search before being allowed to climb into the tub.

That he almost refused to go along with. But again, why make things harder for himself? He knew that Reiner would make certain the rules of his hunt were obeyed. So, Klink submitted to the search and then climbed into the wonderfully soothing bath.

The little man left, taking Klink's clothes with him. Subjecting them, Klink was certain, to another thorough search.

Tempting as it was to linger in the hot water, Klink resisted, and left the bath quickly. There was a toiletry kit on the counter;

## Scene Two

he shaved and put on his clothes which been returned a few minutes earlier.

The still wordless man returned and beckoned to Klink. This time, Klink was led to a paneled room. A room filled with every conceivable weapon he could possibly want. The man held up three fingers.

“Three?” Klink said. “I can take three weapons?”

The man nodded; he walked back to the door, watching Klink closely.

Klink walked around the room, peering closely at the weapons. He rejected the rifles as too large and bulky. His tastes had always run to smaller weapons. He finally chose a handheld gun known for its deadly accuracy and a shoulder holster. He picked up a dangerous-looking knife, an American knife known as the Bowie. That should be useful in the woods. He belted the knife around his waist.

One more weapon. Klink stopped before a display case holding a variety of small knives. That one. Well balanced, almost impossibly sharp, and small enough to conceal easily. Klink picked it up, along with its holder, a holder that was strapped to his right forearm. It would only take a flick of his wrist to throw the knife.

That left only the ammunition for the gun. Klink filled his pockets and a small leather bag that the man handed him. Then he was led back to the entry.

The little man picked up a folded piece of paper and handed it to him. Klink opened it; it was a map of the estate with the castle clearly marked. The castle was near the far end of the estate, not quite in the middle of it. The map had no distinguishing landmarks or topography. But from the surrounding countryside, Klink was certain that the estate had several streams and valleys running through it. And Klink was certain that Reiner had also placed traps around the estate. Getting to the castle would not be easy. Klink folded the map and placed it in his breast pocket. The little man held out a canteen; Klink took it.

“Anything else?” Klink asked.

The little man shook his head, and pointed to the door.

## Scene Two

“I have a question,” Klink said. “Is Reiner starting from the castle?”

The man hesitated for a moment and then shook his head.

“Another gatehouse?”

The man nodded.

“Danke.”

Klink walked to the door and stepped out into the cold morning air.

The hunt had begun.

## Scene Two

– Fifteen –

Eyes, German and Allied, watched the two men standing apart from all the others near the back gate. Except for a very few, no one knew what was going on. And no one could remember either man acting this way before. Even the new men knew something was wrong. But what? What?

\* \* \* \* \*

Schultz paced back and forth, as if walking a post. He counted his steps. *Eins . . . Zwei . . . Drei . . . Vier . . . Fünf . . . Sechs . . . Sieben . . . Acht . . . Neun . . . Zehn.*

Then he would turn and begin again. *Eins . . . Zwei . . .*  
Over and over the same circuit, with strict military precision.

*“I have something to tell you, Corporal Hans Schultz.”*

*“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.”*

*Now what did Klink want? It was bad enough that he wanted to go on this ridiculous drive to nowhere in the middle of the night.*

*“I have compiled a rather extensive dossier on you, Corporal Schultz. Your military record is . . . Well, let’s say you mind your own business.”*

*“I do my duty, Herr Kommandant.”*

*“Yes, you do. Do you love Germany, Corporal Schultz?”*

*A startled, honest answer. “Natürlich, Herr Kommandant.”*

*“Do you love Hitler?”*

*A much less subdued, much less honest. “It is my duty — ”*

*“That’s not what I asked, Corporal.”*

*Cold sweat rolled down his spine. “Natürlich, I love — ”*

*“You’re lying, Schultz. I can always tell when you lie. And you lie to me quite frequently, don’t you?”*

## Scene Two

*“Herr Kommandant — ”*

*“The question is, Corporal, how proficiently can you lie? More important, how proficiently can you act?”*

*Schultz was now totally confused. “Kommandant?”*

*“Your dossier is full of interesting information, Hans Schultz. You took over a small toy store from your grandfather when you were twenty and turned it into the most successful toy company in Germany<sup>25</sup>. That shows a great deal of intelligence and business acumen, Corporal.”*

*“I was lucky, Herr Kommandant,” Schultz said carefully.*

*“Perhaps a little, Schultz. But there was also skill and intelligence in your success. Skill and intelligence sadly missing in your military career.”*

*“I am not a soldier, Herr Kommandant,” Schultz said slowly.*

*“No. But I have no need of a soldier, Schultz. I have need of a man who is resourceful, intelligent, who can follow orders, but who can also think for himself. I need someone I can trust implicitly. Someone like you, Corporal Hans Schultz.”*

*“Herr Kommandant — ”*

*“Not ‘Herr Kommandant’, Schultz.” A very soft voice. “Not tonight. Tonight, you are to call me ‘Stage’.”*

*Hans Schultz’s stunned eyes turned to the man sitting in the back of the car.*

*“And I need your help, Hans Schultz, to succeed at this camp.”*

*“You . . . You are joking, Herr Kommandant,” Schultz said weakly.*

*A very soft, “I am?”*

*Schultz looked at Klink, seeing him, really seeing him, for the first time. The mask Wilhelm Klink showed the world was missing. The strength, the determination, and the intelligence, Schultz could now see. Awe lit Schultz’s eyes.*

*“Congratulations, Corporal Schultz. Only six others in Germany know who I am.”*

*“But why?” Schultz whispered.*

*“I told you, Schultz. I need your help to succeed here. I need*

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<sup>25</sup> “War Takes a Holiday”

## Scene Two

*you to keep an eye on things for me. I need to know what the prisoners are up to, and the guards. I need to know everything, and I need you to see everything. More, I need you in case there is trouble. I need someone who can help me when I need help. And I need someone," a grimness invaded his voice, "who will make a very important telephone call when it all falls apart. I want you to be that someone, Schultz."*

*"Herr Kommandant . . . Herr Stage," Schultz began slowly. "I am not a soldier, I cannot do what you, and others like you, do."*

*"I am not asking you to, Schultz. All I am asking is for you to be my eyes and ears. I will not involve you in any of my missions or my organization. But I need you, Hans Schultz, very much."*

*Schultz was silent.*

*"I know I am asking a great deal, Schultz. I will not pretend that there will not be any danger to you. But I do promise you that your name will never escape my lips. Torture — " Schultz shuddered at his casual use of the word. "Torture is effective only so far. Even the Gestapo cannot read a man's mind to see what he is still concealing. Think about it, Schultz."*

*"And . . . And," Schultz said hesitantly, "if I do not agree . . . You have told me your secret . . ."*

*Klink nodded. "I can arrange for you and your family to go to Switzerland, Schultz."*

*"You are asking a great deal."*

*"Yes, I know. However, I believe Germany is worth a great deal. Do you?"*

*A slow, "Yes."*

*There was silence in the car for a long time.*

*Schultz remembered the pain he had felt as workers he had known for years were denied livelihoods because of their religion, the pain he had felt as his factory was confiscated to produce weapons of war, the pain he had felt as he walked past humiliated, beaten Jews and others who had dared to resist the Nazis. And the shame he had felt as he realized that he was not brave enough to fight the Nazis. Now, this man was offering him a way to fight them. Schultz knew he would take it.*

*He had to.*

*"I . . . I . . ." There was fear in his voice. "I will help you,*

## Scene Two

*Wilhelm Klink.* ”

*A faint smile from the man behind him, and Klink held out his hand.*

*Schultz clasped Klink's hand solemnly, restraining the shudder that went through him.*

*Dear God, suddenly he was so very frightened.*

It had started with that conversation. Klink had kept his word; Schultz knew very little about the Stage's organization. Sometimes Schultz wished that he did know a little more, but Klink always refused to tell him.

Time went on. A new prisoner arrived in camp, a brash American, Colonel Robert Hogan. Schultz was drawn to the man. Hogan was intelligent, charming, with a way about him. He organized the camp well and the men trusted him.

And he despised the Kommandant of the camp.

The months went by, turning into years. Hogan and his men ran the camp very well, far better than either Schultz or Klink had expected. There were no escapes — officially. Schultz learned to keep his eyes and ears open, learned how far to go with the prisoners, learned how to treat his Kommandant to earn the trust of the prisoners. That was the part Schultz hated the most. That, and those hours when Klink returned, needing his help.

*“Schultz!”*

*“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant!” With an audible sigh, Schultz followed Klink into his quarters.*

*“I think I wrenched my shoulder,” Klink was saying. “I'd like you to look at it.”*

*Schultz caught the amused look on Hogan's face as he closed the door. And the contempt beneath the smile.*

*Schultz followed Klink into the bedroom and closed the door. He turned.*

*And nearly cried out. The shirt beneath Klink's jacket was soaked with blood. By the time, Schultz reached him, Klink's shirt had been pulled off, a wound in his right shoulder.*

*“I need your help, my friend,” Klink whispered through*



## Scene Two

*clenched teeth as he sank down on the bed.*

That had been the first. Schultz grew to hate the nights when Klink left. And he learned all too well how to treat the various wounds that Klink sometimes received. And he watched with sorrowful admiration as Klink emerged the next day, sometimes the same day, with no trace of his pain evident.

And Schultz watched with a pain of his own as day after day Klink had to endure the contempt and insults of a man who should have been his ally. How he wished that Klink had told Hogan! There were a number of times when Schultz almost said something. However, the fear that he might be jeopardizing the man he had grown to care for so very much kept him silent. And so, for years, Schultz watched and waited.

Then came that horrible day when Hogan and he had walked into Klink's quarters and found Klink, beaten, on the floor. Then even more horrible days when Hogan had wished Klink dead and later betrayed him to the Gestapo. Schultz, in his anger and hurt, had nearly told Hogan what he had really done. But he hadn't. Instead, he waited.

And watched. Watched as both Hogan and Klink retreated into their own personal hells. Watched as in that hot, cramped, filthy cave, Hogan finally admitted the truth about how he felt about Klink. Watched as, slowly, the two men grew closer even as the camp's population grew bigger. And Schultz had smiled as he watched their friendship grow.

Then came the horror of that day when Klink disappeared. Schultz had disobeyed orders along with Colonel Hogan to try to rescue Klink. Beyond all hope, they had succeeded. And Klink came back.

But now, he was gone again.

Tears stung Schultz's eyes. Klink was already dying when he left camp. Was he already dead? Or would that sadistic major have other plans for him? Schultz didn't know.

A tear slipped down his cheek. The horrible truth was he might never know what happened to Klink.

Oh God, he was so scared for his friend. So very scared.

## Scene Two

\* \* \* \* \*

*"I couldn't do what you've done," Hogan said quietly, his eyes on the chess pieces in front of him.*

*"You've done a great deal of it." Klink moved a rook.*

*"I don't mean the sabotage or the missions," Hogan said, his hand reaching for a bishop. "I mean the rest of it. Your kommandant character, the way you've cut yourself off from people you care about, the way you've let yourself become a man held in ridicule and contempt by most of the people who know you. I couldn't do that."*

*"I have always been a solitary man, Robert, with few friends, fewer people that I've loved," Klink said quietly. "I trusted them to love me still, despite everything. There have even been some," a smile at Hogan, "who managed to care despite the fool they saw every day. As for the rest, well, I always thought I'd make an excellent hermit."*

*Hogan laughed. "Did you ever think you'd make an excellent actor?"*

*"No. But it is amazing how well fear can motivate you."*

*Hogan stared at him, admiration in his eyes. "You're amazing, you know that?"*

*A smile. "Yes, I do."*

*Hogan laughed again. "And modest."*

*"Modest?" Mock outrage in Klink's voice. "I don't have a modest bone in my body. I never have."*

*And so, it had gone on.*

*Hogan's eyes were on the hills outside the camp. Somewhere out there — he had no idea where — but somewhere, Klink was fighting for his life. And there wasn't a thing Hogan could do to help him.*

*To the . . .*

*Hogan shook his head.*

*Don't think. Don't . . .*

*Klink screamed.*

## Scene Two

*Hogan, shaken, held on to his hand tightly.*

*"Why are you doing this?" Klink demanded.*

*A joke. "I have nothing better to do."*

*"No! Not good enough. I mean nothing . . . "*

*Nothing. It didn't matter if Klink was hurt or if he died. It didn't matter . . .*

*"You and me, Kommandant . . . All the way to the end. Do you hear me? You and me . . . "*

*"I'm sorry," Hogan whispered.*

*"Do it quickly, Colonel Hogan."*

*The tight muscles tensed even further under his fingers. The forceps touched the raw wound. Blood stained his fingers. Odd. He didn't notice it before.*

*"You haven't begun to suffer yet, Klink . . . Your screams will end only when I tire of them . . . And it will be a very long time before I tire of them . . . "*

*The scream cut off the last word.*

*Hogan watched as the man he had grown to care about struggled to fight the scream welling up in his throat, watched as tears slid down Klink's face, watched as a stain slowly wet his pants, watched as the sweat poured down his racked, exhausted body. The fingers, those long dirty fingers that had clutched Hogan's shirt, had curled into a ball, biting into his palms. The head arched back, the mouth opened . . .*

*The screams echoed in the stone room.*

*Hogan shook his head to clear it.*

*Again.*

*The hills echoed the screams in his mind.*

*Another shake of his head.*

*The fingers bit into his hand.*

*"Why are you doing this?" the hoarse whisper demanded.*

*Why? Why . . . ?*

*Because you're the friend, the brother, I never had. Because I*

## Scene Two

*love you.*

A tear slid down his cheek as he finally admitted it.

Hogan's head leaned against the fence post as another tear slipped down his cheek.

From a distance, Captain Witton saw Hogan and shook his head. *Dear God, what was going on? What?*

Captain Edward Martin walked over to Witton as his eyes stayed on Hogan.

"John," Martin greeted with a nod.

"Hello, Ed."

"Uh, John, tell me if it's none of my business, but what's going on with the Colonel?" Martin asked.

Witton shook his head. "I don't know."

"Ever since Klink left," Martin murmured. A look at Witton. "John, tell me the truth if you can."

Witton glanced at him.

"There's a lot more to Klink than any of us thought, isn't there?"

Witton met his eyes. A soft, "What do you think?"

Martin nodded, understanding a little. "I hope it ends soon."

"It's going to end, one way or another, in a couple of days," Witton said grimly. "One way or another."

## Scene Two

– Sixteen –

He was dying. He would die. He knew that. He had known it ever since yesterday when the pain hit. When he lost his chance, his only chance, for besting Reiner.

After escaping a couple of Reiner's traps, Klink had decided to conserve his energy and let Reiner find him. He'd located another trap, a hidden wire near a large depression. He would use it, use it to trap Reiner. It was difficult working in the dark, but he had done it. Shortly before dawn, it was ready. Now, all he had to do was wait.

It hadn't been a long wait. Reiner appeared, wearing safari clothes — the conceit of the man — and carrying a deadly rifle. Klink was well hidden, and he had covered his tracks. He knew Reiner couldn't find him, unless he wanted to be found. Just a few more minutes, and . . .

The pain drove him into the ground, his mouth crushed against the hard soil, trying desperately to keep from crying out. Hochstetter's tortures were nothing compared to this agony. He was going to scream, he couldn't bear it. He was going to . . .

His teeth bit into his arm, through his sleeve, drawing blood. He was going to . . .

The scream welled up in his throat . . .

The pain obliterated all coherent thought. Reiner, the war, his safety, nothing mattered any more. There was only that pain. Pain . . .

His mouth opened, the sound growled in his throat, he was going to . . .

The pain eased.

The release drove him into the ground again, tears streaming down his face. The scream became a strangled sob as he bit into the soil. He was still in agony, but now he remembered Reiner. Remembered the horrible danger. And the fear of what Reiner could do to him if he were caught.

He could take the pain. He had to.

## Scene Two

And he had. But he had lost his only chance of capturing Reiner.

Long, slow minutes filled with agony passed. Reiner had left, and Klink continued to lie there, trembling with fear and pain.

Finally, that initial agony subsided, leaving behind a dull throbbing ache over his entire body. This kind of pain, he was used to. In time, it would increase, but for now, he could function.

And he knew that he would die. Reiner could continue his hunt; Klink was through cooperating. He had but one thought. And that was to find a way off the estate. Barring that, to find a hole to curl up in where Reiner couldn't reach him, and die. It was his only chance of beating Reiner's hunt. His only chance.

He rested for a while longer, and then he began creeping cautiously away.

The day grew colder. His fatigue grew. His pain grew. Both were wearing him down, affecting his vision, his judgment.

The minutes, the hours, passed. He was crawling through the brush on the cold-as-ice ground. The leafless woods swam before his eyes, peopled with faces and voices.

*"Mama?"*

*"Willi? Mein Gott, what a mess you are! Is this any way for a little soldier to behave?"*

*"You will be a soldier, Wilhelm! It is your duty. Your duty!"*

*"But, Vater . . ."*

*"Your duty! We Klinks have always done our duty. To God, to the Fatherland!"*

*"Mama, why doesn't Vater understand? I do not want to be a soldier. I do not like it. I want . . ."*

*"Nein, Wilhelm. You will obey your father. You will do your duty. You must do your duty. "*

And his dreams died. And a part of his soul.

*It was a glorious day to be in the air, to be flying. Not a cloud*

## Scene Two

*in the brilliant blue sky. He felt free, freer than he'd ever felt before.*

*Until the reality intruded.*

*"Klink, what do I do now?" asked von Richter's panicky voice.*

*"Ease up on the stick. Slowly!" Silently Klink cursed his luck in having von Richter as his partner during this training flight. Von Richter had a reputation among the other air cadets for panicking. One he'd managed to hide from the instructors. Or rather one that was covered up by the instructors. After all, von Richter was a baron. What did it matter if there had been a few problems with his training? It was the title that mattered. And the influence that title bought.*

*"Richter, you fool! Ease up! We're too low. We're too . . ."*

*He had been lucky; he had only minor injuries. Von Richter would have a permanent limp. But he had been blamed for the accident, thanks to von Richter. He'd tried to protest. But no one listened to him. He was a nobody; von Richter was the baron.*

*It had hurt his standing in the class. He had been near the top, but after the accident, he was placed near the bottom. And it had hurt his career for years. Von Richter had gone on to acquire a reputation — he became the famous Blue Baron<sup>26</sup>. A reputation made over the dead bodies of other pilots who'd had the misfortune of flying with him.*

*He was standing in formation, standing along with thousands of others, tens of thousands of others throughout Germany, and he was mouthing words, words that almost choked him. Words pledging loyalty not to the Germany he loved, but words pledging loyalty to a man, a man he loathed — Adolf Hitler. He said the words, as did the others. But in his soul, he made another vow. He would do whatever it took to bring about the downfall of that man, and those who followed him. Whatever it took.*

Faces swam before his tearing eyes. His parents, his brothers, Therese, little Wilhelm, Dieter. They blurred and danced and

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<sup>26</sup> "Will the Blue Baron Strike Again?"

## Scene Two

swirled, their loving words echoing in his mind.

Harsher words, harder faces. Burkhalter, Hochstetter, Reiner, and others. Too many. They beat down his spirit, his soul. The hate, the madness — he cringed away, he curled up into a ball. He was so tired of it. So very tired of it all. He longed for, ached for, an end.

*“You and . . . ”*

Another face, another voice, intruded. A cave. A hand holding his.

*“We’re in this together, Kommandant. All the way to the end. You and me . . . ”*

The end. A ragged, sobbing breath.

A face, yes, it was a face. Somewhere behind the pain, he recognized it. Someone he knew. Someone who had made him a promise.

Robert.

*I’m sorry, Robert.*

The face blurred, danced away. Replaced by . . .

Smaller, softer. Someone he knew. Someone he should know. Someone . . .

*“Wilhelm.”*

A voice. He tried to retrieve the face, the memory, the promise it held.

A hand on his face, fingers tracing his eyes, his lips . . .

A cry.

His?

The softness faded, and became harsh.

*“You will scream and scream and scream . . . ”*

The pain welled up, driving away all thought, all memories.

He staggered to his feet.

The pain . . .

He tore at his clothes. He was burning . . .

He fell into an ice-cold stream. He was dying . . .

*“NO!!!”* A voice from the woods, a voice in a cave. *“Kommandant!”* A hand in his. His fingers dug into the muddy bottom, grasping the hand. *“This isn’t the end, Wilhelm,”* the voice said harshly. *“This isn’t . . . ”*

*“I am sorry it will not be to the end . . . ”*



## Scene Two

The end . . .

*"Wilhelm?"* A whisper on the wind, a pale figure in the woods.

The pain eased.

*"Wilhelm."*

He pushed himself to his knees, to a rock. He stood, swayed, staggered, toward the voice.

Leaving the gun behind.

He had blundered into a trap. A simple animal trap. But it was enough. It had closed around his ankle, cutting through the boot, into his flesh. It didn't hurt. Nothing could penetrate that sea of pain he was drowning in. Nothing this simple, this crude. But it had stopped him. He had fallen to the ground, unaware for countless moments of what had happened.

Finally, he stirred. He stared at his ankle, at the trap. The trap swam before his tearing eyes, weaving, dancing. He struggled to sit up; he didn't know why. His hand touched the cold alien steel around his foot. He should feel something; he didn't. He should . . .

His eyes lifted.

And for a moment, for an instant, his vision crystallized into astonishing clarity. Into a man.

Reiner. A few meters away. A smile on his face as he started to lift the rifle.

Hate, fear, survival, the voices screaming at Klink, pleading with him, shattered the pain for an instant, for less than an instant.

It was enough. The being that was the Stage took possession of his arm, his hand. A flick of his wrist.

The knife embedded itself into Reiner's chest.

In his short unlamented life, Reiner had never known true surprise. Until this moment. It was the last emotion of his life.

The Stage looked down at the trap encircling Klink's ankle. A moment later, the trap lay open. A moment later, the pain returned.

He couldn't walk. His fingers dug into the ground, breaking a nail, two, leaving faint streaks of blood. He wasn't sure why he was crawling, wasn't sure why he didn't just close his eyes and

## Scene Two

die.

The voice. The voices. Two of them. Insistent, badgering. They forced him to continue.

Klink crawled, tearing open an earlier wound.

He crawled to rid himself of those voices. They pounded with each heartbeat, coursed through every vein, filled every nerve, every cell, every breath. They moved limbs that had grown numb, pulled him along using bleeding fingers. They drove him over the frozen ground, over the rocks that dug into his unfeeling flesh. They lifted him, goaded him, between the throbbing bits of agony. Pushed him whether he willed it or no.

And Reiner lay before him.

That unreal clarity seized him again. He was frozen between those moments of agonizing pain; he stopped breathing, the voices stilled.

His bleeding fingers found a bottle, small, capped. The cap fell off. A needle. He rammed the needle into his arm. The bottle fell from his lifeless fingers.

The voices screamed their triumph.

He didn't hear them.

The pain blossomed into a blinding light that ended in darkness. Wilhelm Klink fell forward.

Onto the knife embedded in Reiner's chest.

## Scene Two

– Seventeen –

It was nearly midnight.

Hauptmann Fritz Gruber sat at the Kommandant's desk, his eyes on the clock. The deadline was nearly up. A letter, no, two letters were on the desk before him. One letter was addressed to him, the other to General Burkhalter.

Gruber was frightened. He didn't want to open either letter. He didn't want to run this camp. Especially since he knew Hogan and his men were leaving. He didn't dare call it an escape. He knew it wasn't. Somehow, he knew that Hogan could have gotten away a long time ago but had chosen not to. And somehow, he knew, it was all tied up with the Kommandant.

He wet his lips nervously. *Please, Kommandant*, he found himself praying. *Come back. Please, come back.*

Sergeant Hans Schultz was just inside the camp at the gate. He glanced at his watch. Nearly midnight. In a few minutes, he would walk outside the camp to a car waiting around the bend. The packet of precious letters that had been entrusted to him lay hidden under the folds of his coat.

He had said his goodbyes to Hogan and his men. He had little hope that they would ever meet again. And he was filled with sadness at their abrupt farewell. But their path was a different one from his. As for Wilhelm Klink . . .

Tears were in his eyes. He prayed that Klink was on his way to Switzerland where Schultz could join him. But the grim reality was that Wilhelm Klink was, in all probability, dead.

A tear slipped down his cheek; Schultz brushed it away. He couldn't afford tears now. His friend and commander had given him a mission to carry out. And Schultz would. Later he would grieve for his friend.

Sergeant Richard Baker, Sergeant Andrew Carter, Sergeant James Kinchloe, Corporal Louis LeBeau and Corporal Peter

## Scene Two

Newkirk sat soberly at the table in the common room of the barracks, waiting for the seemingly inevitable moment to come.

They had made their farewells to those whom they considered friends in the camp. But it was not as easy to leave as they had always thought it would be. A rather ironic joke. They had spent so many months, years, here, years that they had hated with a passion. And now that they were finally leaving, it was with decidedly mixed feelings.

Perhaps the real problem was the reason for their departure. They weren't leaving because the Allies had arrived and they could go home. They were leaving because a man they had admired tremendously as a hero, a man they had finally learned to respect for himself, was in all likelihood dead or dying. And it also hurt because a man they had always respected was hurting badly himself. And there was nothing they could do to help.

Captain John Witton and Captain Edward Martin, the two ranking officers in the camp, along with the others who lived in the barracks, waited quietly for the fatal hour. As of now, none of them knew what had happened. Perhaps in time, they would. But they had served Hogan well all of these months and knew they couldn't ask. But the men who had lived in such close proximity to Hogan had seen, more so than the others, what Hogan was going through. And while they didn't understand it, it affected them deeply.

Witton glanced at the door to Hogan's office, feeling Hogan's pain and wishing he could relieve some of it.

Colonel Robert Hogan stared at the letter in his hand. It had "Robert" written on it in a firm hand.

He was afraid. Afraid of what it said. Afraid of what it meant when he opened it.

Klink couldn't be dead. He couldn't. Not after all these years.

But if Hogan opened the letter, he knew that's what it meant. That Wilhelm Klink, the Stage, the hero he had always admired, and the man he cared for so deeply, was gone.

*You and me. To the end.*

Hogan dropped the letter, his hands lifting to his face. The

## Scene Two

words haunted him every waking minute. And the dreams haunted him every sleeping minute. Dreams that had started when Martinelli died. Dreams that increased after he betrayed Klink to the Gestapo. Dreams that invaded his nights when Hochstetter had taken Klink. And now, the dreams since Klink had left that night.

His words and his dreams mocked him. He had made a promise to a man nearly buried in a cave. A promise he couldn't keep.

Tears gathered in his eyes. *Come back, Wilhelm*, he found himself praying. *Please, come back.*

Hogan, his face unnaturally pale, came out of his office, carrying a bag. His waiting men stood slowly, their eyes on him, worrying about him.

Hogan walked over to the table. "Are you ready?" he asked them soberly.

They nodded.

Hogan turned to Witton and held out his hand. "Well, Captain. The camp is now yours. I've left you a letter explaining what happened. You can share what you want with the rest of the camp."

Witton nodded, taking his hand. "Colonel, I —"

He was interrupted. "There's a car turning in the gate," Hammond said softly from the door.

Hogan spun around, hope and fear on his face.

"I think it's the staff car," Hammond continued. "It's heading for the office."

Hogan was at the door. He could see the car nearly at the office building. Behind it, he could see Schultz running toward it.

The car stopped. Hogan's heart stopped as well.

A man got out.

"Oh God!" Hogan was out the door, heedless of the searchlights panning the compound. Somehow, none of them caught him.

As the others watched, he sprinted to the office and reached it just as Schultz puffed up to it.

Together, they went inside.

## Scene Two

Gruber heard the car drive up. He heard the outer door open, then the inner one to the Kommandant's living quarters.

Slowly, Gruber stood and walked to the door. He opened it. Hogan and Schultz came in from the outside. The three men looked at each other, sharing the moment. Then Hogan opened the inner door and they walked inside.

Wilhelm Klink lay on the floor in the middle of the room.

Hogan and Schultz ran over to him. Hogan turned Klink over, his heart pounding loudly, feeling for a pulse.

"He's alive," Hogan said in a choked voice.

"I will take him," Schultz said firmly, picking up his Kommandant like a baby.

Followed by Hogan and Gruber, Schultz carried the Kommandant to his bedroom. Schultz laid the unconscious man on the bed. Then, as Gruber watched from the door, Hogan and Schultz began removing the Kommandant's filthy clothes.

Gruber watched impassively as the two men undressed the Kommandant. He noted old scars on Klink's body: the one on his right thigh from the cave-in; the one in his right side from the knife, it bled slightly; odd, on his left shoulder, what appeared to be an old bullet wound; on the back of his left shoulder, what appeared to be knife wounds and maybe, he wasn't sure, some fainter older scars.

But there were new wounds as well. Something had stabbed Klink's right forearm; it bled as the sweater was removed. There were jagged tears around his left ankle; some odd looking wounds on his left arm — teeth marks? And all over Klink's body, there were cuts and bruises. And the Kommandant looked exhausted beneath the dirt on his unshaven face.

Schultz went into the bathroom for towels and water while Hogan found the medical kit in Klink's closet.

Schultz came back.

"Please, Colonel Hogan," Schultz said firmly. "I will do this. You will only be in the way."

Hogan meekly did as he was told, walking to the foot of the bed.

As Hogan and Gruber watched, Schultz expertly cleaned and

## Scene Two

bandaged the wounds on Klink's body. As he was finishing, Klink's eyes slowly opened.

"Colonel Hogan," Schultz said softly.

Hogan went to stand beside him.

The bloodshot eyes barely focused on them. A wan smile. Then Klink's eyes closed again and his breathing grew more settled.

Schultz was pleased. "He will sleep now. I will stay with him."

Hogan nodded, knowing better than to argue. Another glance at Klink and he left the room, trailed by Gruber.

Gruber broke the silence. "I will walk you back to your barracks, Colonel. If you do not mind."

Hogan shook his head. "No, I don't mind."

The two men left the Kommandant's quarters.

"I do not understand what is going on, Colonel," Gruber finally said. "And, to be frank, I am not certain that I want to. But —"

"He'll tell you, Captain," Hogan said. "If he thinks you should know. If he thinks you're ready to know."

Gruber nodded.

They stopped before the barracks' door.

"Until later then, Colonel."

"Good night, Captain. Sleep well."

A thin smile. "I think tonight I will sleep well. Good night, Colonel."

Hogan opened the barracks' door. Anxious eyes greeted him.

"He's back," Hogan said tonelessly to the assembled men. "He's sleeping now."

"How does he look, Colonel?" Carter asked hesitantly.

"He's had some wear and tear," Hogan said. "Schultz is keeping an eye on him." A glance at his men. "You might as well unpack. We're not going anywhere yet."

Sighs of relief.

"Best news we've heard in days," Baker said.

Hogan smiled faintly. "Yeah. You guys get some shut-eye. I'll inform London of our change in plans."

"Right, sir," from the others. "Good night, sir."

Witton and Martin followed him into the tunnel. They would use the tunnels to return to their own barracks. Sensing that Hogan didn't want to talk, they said their good nights in the

## Scene Two

radio room.

Hogan's message to London was short and sweet. He didn't bother waiting for a reply, signing off immediately.

Silence in the dark tunnels.

Air. He needed air; he needed to be out of here.

Hogan found himself at the tunnel exit. A cautious look outside and then he was up the ladder.

He ran. He didn't know how far or even where. He ran until he collapsed.

Then he broke down.

It was nearly dawn when he returned to the barracks.

Up the ladder.

Unseen eyes watched him as he entered his room.

Silence from his room.

And the barracks was quiet.



## Scene Two

–Eighteen–

Hogan slept most of the day, Gruber excusing him from the roll calls. The first normal night's sleep he'd had since Klink left. And the first dreamless sleep he'd had as well.

In the afternoon, Schultz sent them a message. Klink wanted to see all of them after dinner. So at seven, they walked into the Kommandant's quarters.

Klink, looking tired and wearing a robe, was lying on the couch, waiting for them. He greeted them with a faint smile.

Hogan.

Their eyes met and clung, Hogan's filled with emotion. He walked over to Klink. For a moment, their hands clasped. Then, with a smile, Hogan sat across from Klink.

Gruber, after a formal salute, sat stiffly in a chair just behind the couch. The other men, after greeting Klink with somewhat embarrassed smiles, sat scattered around the room. Schultz hovered protectively near his Kommandant.

Drinks had been passed around. Now, they waited.

In a low firm voice, Klink began to talk, "I had no trouble on the drive down. About an hour from the estate, I stopped and slept for a few hours. By dawn, I arrived at a gatehouse on a back road to the estate.

"At the gatehouse, a small, grim looking man waited. He never said a word during the entire time; I am not even certain he can talk. He indicated a chair at a table and served me the biggest breakfast I have seen in some time. I found myself thinking about that old saying about a condemned man eating a hearty meal." A thin smile. "That's exactly how I felt at that point."

There were nervous smiles from the others.

"After the meal, I was led to a bathroom with a steaming bath in it, stripped naked and searched, far too thoroughly for my comfort. After the bath, I was led to a room with an arsenal

## Scene Two

worthy of an arms dealer. I was allowed three weapons. I chose a rather deadly gun and a couple of knives. One was very small; I strapped it around my right wrist.

“Then the hunt began.”

The men grew tenser as his soft voice continued, “I really didn’t know what to expect or do. I am not a hunter; I have been on a hunt only once in my life and I didn’t like it. I knew I had to get to Reiner if I were to stay alive. But other than that . . . ” His head shook. “Reiner, on the other hand, had too many options. He knew I had to go to him. He could wait in one place. Or come after me. Or set traps.

“I was given a map of the estate. It covered several hundred acres, most of it heavily wooded and hilly. Near the south end was the castle. I decided to make for it. I knew Reiner was probably expecting that, but I had little choice. There was always the chance that I could get to the castle without Reiner finding me. So I took it.”

“Why the castle, sir?” Newkirk asked.

“I was guessing that I would find the antidote there. If I could get the antidote, finding Reiner would be irrelevant. Once I had taken the antidote, I would have the upper hand. Reiner would be forced to come to me, not the other way around. And he wouldn’t have been confronting a sick, dying man. The odds would definitely have been in my favor. So, I concentrated on getting to the castle as quickly as possible. But Reiner, as I’d expected, had set traps around the estate and I had to watch for them constantly. It made for very slow progress and I was fighting a deadline all the way.

“I received this,” he indicated his right forearm, “after getting away from a couple of other traps. I’m still not certain what triggered it but before I realized what happened, a thin blade had impaled my arm.”

The listening men shuddered.

A humorless smile. “It sounds worse than it actually was. Fortunately, it didn’t strike the bone or an artery. And while it was painful, it didn’t damage the muscle. The worst part was pulling the blade out. Luckily it was a straight blade and wasn’t jagged or an arrow. Once I was free, I used my handkerchief to

## Scene Two

bind the wound and continued on my way.

"The day dragged on and I knew I was running out of time. Once night fell, it would become much more difficult. I knew I couldn't blunder around in the dark; I had enough trouble with the traps during the day. And I had started to notice signs of Reiner's presence.

"I began to think there might be a way to trap him. And I did find a way, using one of his traps. I spent the night, planning and getting ready. By morning, it was ready. I waited for him and shortly after dawn, he showed up. He was almost within reach when the pain hit.

"Reiner had been right. The pain was . . . incredible. It came without any warning. And it was everywhere — my head, my limbs, my insides; I had never felt such pain in my life."

The Allied men shuddered. That pain was worse than Hochstetter's tortures? Another shudder. They still remembered his screams.

"I crumpled up," Klink said, "and just lay there, trying to keep from screaming. If I had, Reiner was close enough to hear me. And it would have been over. Finally, the pain eased. But by then, Reiner had disappeared.

"The pain settled into an enveloping ache all over my body. But I had lost my only advantage. I knew I only had about twelve hours so I decided to stop trying for the castle. I decided to stop trying for Reiner as well."

"But, Kommandant," Carter objected, "he had the antidote."

"Yes, he did. But he had too many options to choose from. I had only one. To go after him. I didn't like the odds. Dying was a more pleasant alternative than being found by him.

"I surprised him; he didn't expect that. He thought that once the pain started, I would be desperate enough to get out in the open and find him. That was his biggest mistake. Believe me, I didn't want to die. But I accepted the possibility of death a long time ago; I think I've even stopped being afraid of it. I don't know. But there are far worse things to be afraid of. And at that moment, the worst was having Reiner find me.

"So I tried to find a way to stay out of Reiner's hands. I really didn't think I could make it off the estate. But I was hoping to

## Scene Two

find an isolated corner of it, possibly a sheltered cave, a place that I could booby trap before the time I lapsed into a coma. I believed Reiner about the coma; I didn't believe him when he said it was irreversible. And the only way I wanted him to find me was dead.

"Reiner suddenly found himself in the position of having to hunt me after all." A grim smile. "I'm afraid that Reiner wasn't quite the hunter he thought he was. It is one thing to locate a desperate, dying man who is looking for you. It is quite another to start tracking a man who is determined to stay away from you.

"But he did have one big advantage. The pain. It was wearing me down. That and my fatigue. And I had a long way to go. As time went on, I could barely see straight or think clearly. I was even hallucinating. Because of that, Reiner nearly won.

"I had blundered into a trap. Not a very original one. It was just a simple animal trap but it was enough. It fastened around my left ankle, cutting through the boot into the flesh. He found me, trying to get out of it.

"By then, my vision was blurred, I was drenched with sweat and the pain clouded everything. I wasn't even certain that I was seeing him. Then I saw him smile and raise the rifle." Sweat beaded his forehead as he remembered. "That smile scared me more than the rifle. By then, I had lost the gun and the survival knife. I'm not sure how, but I remembered the knife I had strapped to my wrist. And I threw it. It was nothing more than a desperate move.

"I don't know who was more surprised that it succeeded," Klink said quietly. "But the next thing I remember was the astonishment on Reiner's face as the knife buried itself in his chest. Even as he fell, I don't think he believed it.

"Somehow, I managed to get the trap open. Somehow, I am not sure how, I crawled over to Reiner and turned him over. By then the pain was unbearable. I couldn't see, couldn't think. The next thing I remember clearly was finding that small bottle in his pocket. There was a needle on the end of the bottle. I jammed it into my right arm. Then I collapsed."

There was silence for a while, each man thinking about the

## Scene Two

life and death struggle Klink had come through, wondering if he had the courage or the strength to survive such a struggle.

“I came to a few hours later,” Klink’s soft voice began again. “The first thing I remember was the cold. The temperature had dropped; it felt like snow. If I had been unconscious a few more hours, I might have died from hypothermia. There was still a trace of the pain. But it was nothing compared to what it had been before. After my head cleared enough to think properly, I decided to make for the castle.”

“Why, sir?” Kinch wanted to know.

“I needed to know what Reiner knew,” Klink said. “Who he told about me, what kind of papers he had. The castle was the only place that would have that information.

“I searched his body again. As I suspected, he had a map with the locations of the traps. Since it was still dark, it took a couple of hours to get there. That little man was there, waiting for him.

“I don’t think I’ll ever forget the look on his face. Joy is the wrong word. Maybe incredulous gloating is a better one. At any rate, he was not disappointed that Reiner wasn’t coming back.

“He served me what would have been Reiner’s dinner and then disappeared. I could hear him ransacking the rooms. When I finished eating, he showed up again and showed me Reiner’s study. Then he went back to his plundering. I went in, not really knowing what I’d find.

“I found files.” His voice was quiet. “Organized, voluminous files. On people I had heard of and several I hadn’t. Fortunately, he had an index to them. Once I found my name, it was easy to find where I showed up in other files. By the way, Schultz, Captain Gruber and Colonel Hogan rated their own files. I brought them back if you’re interested.

“Schultz, the top folder on the table. Please give it to Colonel Hogan.”

“Jawohl, Herr Kommandant.”

Schultz went over to the table, picked up the file and walked over to Hogan. Hogan took the folder from Schultz. He glanced through it and looked at Klink in puzzlement.

“I marked a few of the entries. Why don’t you read them aloud? Just ignore the dates. I think,” he smiled, “everyone’s

## Scene Two

German is good enough.”

Hogan managed a faint smile as well. “Okay. ‘H’,” Hogan began. “Hochstetter?”

Klink nodded.

“‘H was here again. Complaining about his favorite topic. Seems K — Klink? — did something once again to set him off. The more I hear about K the more interesting he seems. I think I will have to do some checking on him.’” Hogan looked at Klink. “Seems you piqued his interest.”

Klink nodded. “That file of his had things in it I don’t even remember any more. He was more than curious. Go on.”

Hogan turned back to the entries. “‘K seems to be everything H thinks he is. Incompetent, naive, a vain, stupid bore . . . ’” Hogan was smiling as he read off the description. “‘And more.’” He lost the smile with the next entry. “‘Or is he?’” Hogan glanced at Klink. “That’s quite a jump.”

Klink nodded. “Go on.”

“‘S . . . ’ S?” Hogan looked at Klink.

“It will make sense later on. Keep reading.”

“‘S is back once again. The descriptions of him almost defy counting. H has apoplexy every time he talks of S. I do not understand H’s obsession with S. S has rarely crossed his path. But H is very ambitious and capturing S would get him as far as he wishes. He also resents having to deal with fools like K. My interest in S is more personal . . . ’”

Hogan glanced at Klink’s controlled expression before continuing, “‘K seems to have found a streak of courage which no one suspected. An escaping prisoner had beaten K and K defied him. H, of course, treats it as an aberration. I think he would do well to keep an eye on K . . . ’”

“‘K was trapped in a cave-in and seemed to show remarkable fortitude during the ordeal. This makes two incidents of courage from K in a short time. It is decidedly out of character . . . ’”

“‘H is furious. K has defied him once more. This time, H has vowed vengeance on K. Poor H he hates too hard. As for K, I am convinced that he is not the fool H thinks he is. If I were to hide, what better disguise would there be than out in the open and with a reputation such as his. But there is nothing linking K to

## Scene Two

any treasonous activities. Much as H would love to find any, even he has to admit there is no evidence . . .

“S continues to strike around the country. For years, he has defied us. His ingenuity has become legendary. And his courage. He continues to take incredible risks. His organization appears to have grown to what may be an unmanageable size. This may be the mistake that defeats him. He may not break before dying, but his followers are not as strong as he. Ultimately, they will betray him . . .

“H called. He mentions no names. But it appears that his fondest dream may finally come true. I warned him to be cautious. His eagerness may yet be his undoing . . .

“K appears to have gone on a mission for H that no one seems to know anything about . . .

“H called, gloating. He has his prize. H thinks it will not be long before he breaks’.” A slight tremor in Hogan’s voice. “H underestimates him again. He will not break that easily. I cautioned H to be patient. If he is not, H will make a mistake that will kill, not break, his prisoner. H swears he will be patient. I doubt if he will . . .

“Berlin has not heard from H in days. Nor have I . . .

“H is confirmed dead; his supposedly secret base a burning ruin.

“K has returned to camp. I am most interested to hear how he explains his absence . . .

“K and those with him have been interrogated. Their story is confirmed. K has been vindicated. I wonder why he returned . . .

“Poor Hochstetter. I hope he died happy knowing . . .” Hogan broke off, glancing at Klink.

“Go on,” Klink said evenly.

“I hope he died happy knowing that the incompetent Wilhelm Klink is the all too competent Stage.”

Gruber’s head lifted in astonishment; he stared at his Kommandant.

“That’s quite a jump for him to make,” Hogan complained.

Klink shook his head. “You’re reading just a few key entries. The others are far more detailed. With the amount of research Reiner did, he was able to link certain episodes. Based on what

## Scene Two

he had, it was not that far a leap. By the way, at that point, the Stage and the Klink files become one. But keep going.”

Hogan continued, “S is back. Rumors are that his organization is much smaller than before, and more efficient. I think the time is approaching for us to meet . . .

“K has broken character again. A fire in which he took charge. I saw Burkhalter. He thinks that K has usurped the glory due others. That is one explanation. I think that K found himself in a situation where he thought he had no choice. His concern for others is laudably stupid. I do not think he will be able to survive one more incident like this. It is time to carry out my own plans for his future . . .

“Today, I delivered my present to K. He will come; he has no choice. He will be my last victim; it is getting too dangerous to stay in Germany. My escape plans are set. The date I leave will depend on K.

“As K, he was everything I expected him to be. As S, he was more. His tolerance for pain,” Hogan swallowed nervously, “is the highest I have encountered. He should be able to retain his sanity longer than anyone else. But he has undergone more ill usage in the past few months than in the past few years. That and his age may reduce his tolerance slightly. Otherwise, I judge him to be in superb condition. It is fitting that I end with him. I may not find him until he lapses into the coma. But that will be no problem. It will make him easier to handle. I will give him a few days to regain his strength. Then . . .

“I wonder how long it will take him to die.”



## Scene Two

– Nineteen –

Hogan's voice faded as he read the last sentence. His ashen face lifted to Klink. "He," Hogan's voice shook, "he wasn't planning to kill you during the hunt."

Klink shook his head. "No, he wasn't." His voice held a rare grimness. He gulped his drink; Schultz filled the glass again. "There was a hidden panel in the study. It led to a room . . ." His voice was almost inaudible. "It was filled with books. Books such as . . .

"You don't live in an army for thirty years without encountering pornography, some of it rather disgusting pornography. But those books were filled with every obscene torture a sick mind is capable of devising.

"And there were pictures . . ." His voice shook now. "I regretted the meal then. I had thought I'd seen horror before, but I was violently ill when I saw those pictures of his victims. Mainly men, a few women. Still alive despite horrific physical and sexual mutilation."

The listening men, their staring eyes wide, looked ill themselves.

Klink shook his head, trying to rid it of the memory. When he spoke again, his voice was a bare whisper. "There was a staircase leading down to another level from that room. It led to a dungeon filled with every conceivable device for inflicting physical and sexual pain on a human being. It reeked of blood, vomit, excrement and death. I doubt if hell could be any worse than that room."

He drained his glass again, scarcely noticing as Schultz filled it.

"I knew I had to destroy that hellhole before I left. Luckily, he had his own personal arsenal in the castle. But I had to go down into that hell again to set the explosives. Everywhere I stepped, there was evidence of the tortures he'd inflicted. I was sick again before I got out of there.

## Scene Two

“I set more charges in his library and then all over the first floor. By the time I finished, the little man had finished gathering what valuables he was taking. I put the files I wanted in Reiner’s car and used his car to get back to mine. The charges exploded just about the time I reached my car.

“After I put the files in my car and destroyed his, I did something I haven’t done in a very long time.” His voice was very soft. “I panicked. Completely, totally. I drove without really knowing where I was going. All I knew was that I had to get away from there, as far away as I could. I kept driving until I reached the Bodensee<sup>27</sup>.

“The sun had come up by the time I reached the lake. The first clear memory I have was that of the sun sparkling on the lake with the mountains in the distance.

“The panic gradually faded, replaced by fear and, finally, an overwhelming sense of relief. I stared at that lake for a very long time and cried like a baby.”

There was silence for a long time as the ashen men fought their own horror.

Finally, Hogan broke the silence, his voice harsh, “Why on earth didn’t you keep going?”

Klink stirred. “I nearly did. I could have made it across the border; I’ve done it before.” A tiny smile. “If I had to, I think I could have swam across the lake.” A pause, and then a sigh. “I’m not really sure why I didn’t cross the border. I once said I wanted to finish what I started. Part of that is true.

“Maybe it was the way I would have left. Panic is such a useless emotion, without any thought behind it. I have always thought of myself as a rational man. Most of what I have done with my life has been carefully considered. Crossing the border because of that panic would have negated a good part of the way I’ve lived the past eleven years.”

“You had more than good reason,” Hogan said quietly.

“Maybe.” A faint smile. “Then there was a promise I made.” His eyes met Hogan’s. “It may be stupid of me but I always keep

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<sup>27</sup> On the German-Swiss border.

## Scene Two

my promises. Especially those made to friends.”

“I’m beginning to regret that promise,” Hogan said softly.

“No,” Klink countered in the same tone. “No matter what happens, don’t ever regret it. I would not trade it for all of the safety of the past few years.

“At any rate, here I am.” A smile. “And it is nice to be home again.”

“You’re still taking a hell of a risk,” Hogan said angrily. “He could have told — ”

Klink shook his head. “All Reiner cared about were his sadistic games. He told no one; his journals confirm that. Whatever else he was, he was extraordinarily meticulous. Almost every word and thought is recorded on his subjects.

“I will admit that until I found that room, I was afraid that the hunt was just a ruse to get me there.”

“And hand you over to the Gestapo,” Hogan finished.

Klink nodded. “It is rather ironic that his sadism will serve to protect me in the end.”

“Sir,” Baker asked, “if you thought that, why did you go down there?”

A thin smile. “Because I was still dying. Though I don’t fear death, I am not anxious to experience it either. Going there was still the only hope I had.”

“But he almost got you, sir,” LeBeau said with a shudder.

“He just thought he had me,” Klink said softly. “If that rifle bullet had not killed me instantly, by the time he reached me I would already have been dead.”

Startled looks from the others.

“He is not the only one who knows poisons. I was not going to risk capture by the Gestapo again. Not that way. I had secreted a poison capsule in a hollow tooth. Though I was a bit surprised at the body search, the little man wasn’t thorough enough. Fortunately. Otherwise, I would have stopped him and left immediately. Which would also have meant that I’d now be very dead.” A humorless smile. “If I were not already dying, I doubt if I would have considered suicide. But I didn’t trust Reiner; he enjoyed his work with the knife too much. A quick death would have been out of character. His eyes told me that he liked

## Scene Two

torture. And I was not about to become his or the Gestapo's victim.

"But if I had known about that room . . ." His voice faded. Then a whisper, "God forgive me, but I do not have the courage to risk that kind of death again. I would have killed him here in cold blood if I had known what he really planned to do, regardless of the consequences." A short pause. "At any rate, somehow, I pulled it off. Though when I collapsed, I wasn't at all sure I was going to wake up."

There was a long silence in the room.

With a wince, Klink swung his feet off the couch and stood. His muscles still felt all too stiff. He walked over to the table. He was not surprised to see the unopened letters lying there.

"Kommandant?" Gruber's voice was hesitant.

Klink turned to him. "Yes, Hauptmann?"

"Are you . . . That is, Reiner said you were. But . . . Are you the Stage?" Gruber asked with a nervous gulp.

Klink looked soberly at him. "Yes, Hauptmann, I am."

Gruber swallowed the tightness in his throat as Klink looked at him. He managed to meet Klink's eyes bravely.

Klink smiled faintly. "Congratulations, Hauptmann. You are one of the few people in the world I have ever said that to. Not even Hochstetter or Reiner. Or even," his smile grew slightly, "Colonel Hogan."

Gruber didn't know what to say.

"Now what, Herr Kommandant?" Schultz asked.

"We wait," Klink said. "The Allies are not that far away. We wait for the end."

Hogan looked at Klink and seemed about to ask a question. But he thought better of it. Klink would talk to him later if he needed to.

"And that is all of it, gentlemen," Klink said soberly.

"I still think you're crazy for coming back here," Hogan said.

Klink smiled, not insulted. "You need someone to keep you in line."

"Keep me in line?" Hogan managed to sound outraged. "What about you?"

Another smile. "Schultz has managed that very well all these

## Scene Two

years. Right, Schultz?”

“That is correct, Herr Kommandant.” A very normal Schultz voice. “And now it is time for you to go back to bed. Good night, gentlemen.”

The men rose to their feet, the tension in the room receding thanks to the banter.

Hogan’s men left first, their good nights sounding in the room.

Hogan walked over to Klink and asked softly, “Do you want to talk?”

Klink shook his head slowly, his eyes meeting Hogan’s. “Thank you, Robert, but no. The panic has long gone. The horror,” a shudder, “that may take a little time. But for now, I can deal with it.”

“If you find you can’t — ”

A thin smile. “I know where to find you. Thank you.”

Hogan nodded. “All right, Wilhelm.” Neither Gruber nor Schultz was surprised when Hogan embraced Klink. “Welcome back anyway.”

“Thank you, Robert.” Klink’s hands stayed on Hogan’s forearms for a moment.

Hogan stepped away and walked over to the door. A glance back at Klink. “I still think you’re crazy.” A parting smile and he left.

Now only Gruber remained, still standing beside his chair.

Klink’s eyes went to him.

Gruber took a step toward Klink.

Klink waited.

After a long while . . .

“Why?!” There was anguish in Gruber’s voice. “Why the charade, the sabotage, the treason?”

“Because I love Germany,” Klink said softly.

“But you help her enemies! You fight against her — ”

“No!” Klink shot back. “I do not fight Germany. I fight only those,” an obscene word, “Nazis! I want my country back, Gruber. Free from the terror that haunts it.”

“I still do not understand,” Gruber whispered.

“Do you want to?” Klink asked quietly. “Do you want the truth about those madmen that run our country?”

## Scene Two

*No!* His mind screamed at him. *I don't. I . . .*

Gruber fought through his panic and looked at Klink. Since the fire, he had many questions about the man he'd thought he'd known. Gruber had always thought that Klink was, in many respects, a fool, though he was wise enough to keep such thoughts to himself. After all, whether he liked it or not, Klink was the Kommandant. He had also always thought that Klink, despite his blustering, was far too soft with the prisoners. Though Gruber had to grudgingly admit that Klink appeared to be successful in keeping them here.

After the fire, Gruber's doubts about Klink had forced him into that fateful confrontation. That confrontation where he suddenly found himself facing a man he didn't know. A man who had also trusted him to keep his word.

Then Reiner showed up. The knife, the poison, the man who had said goodbye to him in this very room — Gruber had been badly shaken by it all. And he realized he wanted Klink back in this camp, back so that there was some semblance of normality left in his suddenly insane world.

Then Klink's story. He shuddered as he remembered it. His world grew even more insane when those papers said Klink was the infamous Stage.

The Stage. For years, there had been rumors about him. Stories of his exploits were whispered throughout Germany. A man of mythic courage and intelligence.

And here he stood, within reach of Gruber's arm. Gruber could kill him and be a hero to the Fatherland. Or he could have the Gestapo arrest Klink. After all, the Stage was a traitor. And traitors deserved death.

By torture?

Gruber shuddered again, his eyes meeting Klink's. He couldn't turn Klink over to the Gestapo. He knew that; he had always known that.

But why? What would make an intelligent, resourceful man deliberately turn into a fool, a man who had inspired nothing but contempt and ridicule for years? Why?

"Yes," he said slowly. "I want the truth."

Klink smiled, but there was no humor in his eyes. "Then have

## Scene Two

a seat, Hauptmann Gruber. And I will tell you.”

They talked far into the night about many things — about the truth behind the rituals and slogans. About the evil behind the rumors and the intimidation. About the camps, the torture, the deaths of millions.

Fritz Gruber refused to believe. He couldn't. It was too incredible, too impossible, too horrible.

But slowly, as Gruber looked the man before him, and listened to the man he was beginning to respect, Gruber also came to believe.

The Fritz Gruber who left Kommandant Klink's quarters in the dead of that cold night was not the same man who had entered those quarters a few hours before. He left a sadder, much wiser man. A man who would do whatever he had to do to end the evil infecting his country. And a man who would do whatever he had to do to protect the man who had talked to him for so long. Fritz Gruber didn't consider himself a brave man. The truth was he'd always been afraid that he was a coward. But now, he was a man who had sworn loyalty to the Stage, to Wilhelm Klink. A vow he knew he would honor with his life.

Wilhelm Klink watched Fritz Gruber cross the nearly deserted compound.

“I should have told you earlier, Hans,” Klink said quietly.

“I . . .” Schultz choked hoarsely.

Klink turned to a pasty-faced Schultz. Schultz had stayed silent, sitting in a chair, nearly forgotten, as Klink talked to Gruber. From the corner of his eye, Klink could see Schultz getting paler, and older, with each word. Gruber had looked ill as Klink spoke, but Schultz . . .

Several times, Klink had thought Schultz might become physically ill. But he hadn't. Instead, he physically shrunk into himself, something that would have seemed to be impossible for a man as large as Schultz.

“I knew things were bad,” Schultz whispered. “Everyone knew things were bad, even if they didn't want to admit it. But what you said . . .

## Scene Two

“How?” There was anguish in Schultz’s voice. “How could we become so evil?”

“How?” A humorless smile. “If I knew that . . .” Klink sighed. “Perhaps because beneath our veneer of civilization, we are evil.”

Schultz shook his head. “Nein . . . I cannot believe . . .”

“Even after the truth, Hans?”

Schultz stayed silent.

Klink turned away from him and looked out the window again. “I don’t want to believe it either, Hans. I know there is good in the world and beauty and even love. But . . .” His head shook.

“Maybe because it is simply too easy for man to be evil. Most people aren’t evil. But far too many are. And if the evil ones happen to be popular, or rich, or powerful, the rest of us are too easily swayed by them. Or we are too weak or too frightened to resist. Or think we are.

“People like Hitler or Stalin know how to control the rest of us. They play on our fears, our emotions. We stop thinking, stop feeling for anyone other than ourselves. Especially if we have real injustices of our own to contend with. Here, it was the Jews who were responsible for our defeats, our pain. Then the Communists, the intellectuals, the priests, the ministers, later, the Poles, the Slavs, the Russians, the gypsies, the ill, anyone who was different. So millions were imprisoned, millions were killed.

“In the Soviet Union, it was the nobles, the capitalists, the landowners, then the peasants, the Ukrainians, the religious, anyone who opposed the state. Stalin isn’t any different from Hitler; he is also responsible for the murder of millions. But he had the good sense not to invade other countries. At least, so far.

“But we’re not the only ones, Hans. Though after the war, we will be told we were. France will have to face its sins one day. Far too many Frenchmen embraced the power, the hatred, that the Nazis preached. As did other countries. Including the United States. Even here, we have heard prisoners ridicule other prisoners who were the wrong skin color, the wrong religion or from the wrong ethnic or social background. Every country,



## Scene Two

every race, has to look at itself and see the evil that it is capable of. And admit to the evil that it has done.

“I’ve never been a very religious man, Hans. But I now find myself realizing just how badly we need religion. Not what often passes for religion among most people. But religion in its highest sense. The one that demands we look at ourselves and know, and admit, the evil that we are all capable of. The one that demands accountability for our actions, no matter how small or insignificant they seem to be. The one that demands that we go beyond our petty fears and problems, and demands a higher standard from each of us. The one that says, no, man is not the ultimate arbitrator, the ultimate judge, the ultimate authority. That there is a higher law, a perfect law, a perfect being. One that demands that same perfection from us as well. Or rather,” a twisted smile, “that demands we at least try to be perfect.

“For the past few centuries, we’ve pretended that we don’t need God or religion. That we are better than God or religion. That the only laws that matter are those that we decide are right. That there is no objective morality. No absolute right or wrong.” A twisted smile. “Well, we’ve now seen what happens when we decide that we’re God. I hope that we, that the world, realizes that now. But I very much doubt it.”

There was a long, heavy silence.

Finally, Schultz asked, “Does Colonel Hogan know?”

Klink shook his head.

“You must tell him, Wilhelm,” Schultz said.

“I know.” A sad smile. “The truth is, I’m afraid to.”

“He will find out, Wilhelm,” Schultz said quietly. “Sooner or later.”

Klink turned back to the window.

Sooner or later. And when he does, then what? Can their friendship survive that horror? Or are there some horrors, some sins, that can’t be forgiven?

Well, he’ll find out soon enough.

As will all Germans.