

NAKED AMONG WOLVES

by

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Chapter 2

Hofel pressed his hand to his forehead. "Little kids get frightened, and then they scream... Oh hell...!" He stared at the child. For a long time. He took hold of the child by both shoulders and shook it gently. "You mustn't scream, you hear? Otherwise SS comes." Fear suddenly altered the child's face. The boy pulled himself back into the suitcase and shrank together, hiding his face in his hands.

"It knows," Pippig exclaimed.

"He'll keep quiet all right," said Hofel hollowly. He clamped his lips together. Again the three men looked at one another. Each expected a decision from the others in this unusual case. Hofel, worried that Zweiling might notice their absence, pulled Pippig along with him. "Come on, we have to go up front." To Kropinski he said, "Stay here till we get back."

By the time Pippig came back to the corner with some coffee and a piece of bread, Kropinski had succeeded in calming the child enough to make it open its eyes. Kropinski sat it upright and handed it the aluminum cup. Pippig encouragingly held out the slice of bread to it. But the child did not take anything.

"It's afraid," said Pippig, and put the bread between the little hands. "Eat," he nodded in a friendly way.

"Must eat now and sleep and not be afraid," whispered Kropinski. "Good brother Pippig watching out, and I too, and I take you, and I take you back to Poland with me," He pointed to himself, smiling. "I got a little house there." The child looked up at Kropinski, its face tense. It opened its mouth a little. Unexpectedly and nimbly as an animal it crept under the coats. The two waited a few moments. Carefully, Kropinski raised the coat. The child, lying on its side, was chewing the bread. Kropinski gently covered it up again, and they left the corner, whose entrance they concealed with a stack of sacks. They listened. Behind them it was still.

In the clerks' office, the prisoners crowded curiously around Hofel and wanted to know details, for Rose had blabbed. He defended himself noisily when Hofel reprimanded him.

"I don't go in for this funny business."

The prisoners were talking excitedly all at once.

"Where is the child then?"

"Quiet!" Hofel urged and turned to Rose: "There isn't any funny business here. The child is just staying here with us tonight, tomorrow we take it away."

The prisoners wanted to see the child. They stole to the corner. Kropinski carefully raised the coat. The men looked over one another's shoulders at the little thing. It lay rolled up like a cockchafer's grub, and s l e p t. The faces of the prisoners lit up, it was so long since they had seen a child. It was amazing! "Like a real little person..."

Hofel let them look their fill. Kropinski beamed over his property. Softly he laid the coat over the breathing child, as the prisoners left the corner on tiptoes. That evening they sat around idly in the clerks' office and at the counter and were happy without knowing why. The happiest was Kropinski. "Is a little Polish child," he laughed again and again, and was as proud of it as could be.

THE ILK

In the course of time, the International Camp Committee had become the centre of the resistance. Originally, the Party comrades had joined together as representing their countries in the International Camp Committee, the ILK, in order to form an association among the thousands herded together, to establish understanding between the nationalities, and with the help of the best among them, to awaken a feeling of solidarity, which had by no means been present at the beginning. Among the German prisoners alone there were some blocks consisting of so-called professional criminals. These included a great many prisoners who, for the sake of personal advantage, had degraded themselves to willing subjects of the SS; they were in cahoots with the block and commando fuhrers and became their errand boys and stool pigeons. Even among the political prisoners, in all the blocks and in every nationality, there were shaky elements whose fear of their own lives outweighed the welfare and the security of the community.

For not everyone who wore a red triangle was really a 'political', that is, a conscious opponent of fascism; grumblers and other objectionable people picked up by the Gestapo got the red triangle of the politicals, so that the composi-

tion of the political blocks ranged from 'unstable' characters to latent criminals, and some of their inmates should really have been wearing the green triangle of the professional criminals.

At the beginning, due to language differences or other obstructive reasons, no understanding could be effected between the German blocks and the blocks of foreigners, of Poles, Russians, French, Dutch, Czechs, Danes, Norwegians, Austrians and many other categories of prisoners. The comrades who had come together through the ILK had to overcome many difficulties before they succeeded in dispelling the distrust of the foreign prisoners, who found it very difficult to get used to regarding German prisoners as comrades.

B O C H O W

In every block the comrades found people they could rely on, and gradually the ILK established itself among the prisoners, without a single one of them suspecting the existence of any such secret link. None of the comrades in the ILK occupied an exposed position in the camp or stood out in any way. They lived simply and unobtrusively. Bogorski in the shower commando, Kodiczek and Pribula as professionals in the optics barracks, van Dalen as an ordinary attendant in the infirmary, Riomand as French cook in the SS casino where he was highly regarded by the gourmets, and Bochow as a subordinate block clerk in Block 38.

Here (Block 38) the former Communist Party representative from Bremerhaven in the provincial legislature had created a refuge for himself and his dangerous task. His skill in using a script pen and printing neatly had made him valuable to the ridiculously stupid block fuhrer, an Unterscharfuhrer (non-commissioned SS officer, of rank between corporal and sergeant). Bochow had to letter dozens of cardboard signs for him with edifying mottoes such as My honour is loyalty - One people, one empire, one Fuhrer. The Unterscharfuhrer peddled these specialities among his acquaintances, making a lucrative sideline out of them for himself. It never occurred to him that his handy block clerk could be anything else but a 'harmless' prisoner.

It was Bochow who, at an ILK discussion, had proposed Andre Hofel as military instructor for the resistance groups. "I know him, he's an old, good buddy, I'll talk to him."

W E A P O N S

That was a year ago, and since then everything had gone well. Meantime Hofel had learned where the weapons came from,



which Bochow had not wanted to talk about at the time, Cutting and stabbing weapons had been secretly fashioned by the prisoners in the various workshops of the camp. Soviet prisoners-of-war produced hand grenades at the lathes of Weimar ammunition factories where they had to work, and smuggled them into the camp. There, skilled men who worked in the prisoners' infirmary and the pathology department of the camp were able to make explosive charges for the grenades out of chemicals they spirited away. Hofel knew all this now, and when he taught the comrades in a secret place how to handle the weapons, he was especially happy to be able to demonstrate with a 7,65 millimeter Walther pistol. This weapon had been swiped from the second in command at the camp, Kluttig, during a booze party in the SS leaders' club. Yes, swiped, by one of the prisoners who had had to wait on the drunks. No one ever found out who did it, for not even the dogged Communist hater Kluttig would have given a prisoner credit for such daring. He suspected one of his drinking companions. Hofel felt icy cold every time he held the precious weapon in his hand, every time he took it out of its hiding place and concealed it on his body to go through the camp for the half-hour of instruction, past friends greeting him unsuspectingly, past many an SS man. He could feel the cold metal on his body.

And it had always gone well!

But suddenly a little child had come into the camp! Just as clandestinely and dangerously as the Walther 7,65. There was no one he could talk to about it. The only one was Bochow. For Hofel it was only a few steps to Block 38, and yet it was a long way.

"A FINE STRATEGIST..."

Block 38 was one of the one-story brick buildings which had been built years after the first wooden barracks were put up. Like the other brick blocks it included four mess halls with an adjoining dormitory. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the Kapo of the effects room in one of the blocks, and the prisoners consequently paid no attention when Hofel came in. Hofel made his way through the densely crowded room and went up to Bochow at the desk. "Can you come out a minute?"

Without speaking, Bochow rose, pulled on his coat, and they left the block. They did not speak with one another outside. Only when they had reached the wide road leading to the infirmary, where a number of prisoners were still walking back and forth, did Hofel begin: "I've got to talk to you."

"Is it important?"

"Yes."

They talked so fast, so that no one would notice them. "A Pole, Zacharias Jankowski, brought a little kid with him..."

"You call that important?"

"The child is with me, in the effects room."

"What? Why?"

"I hid it there." Hofel could not make out Bochow's face in the dark.

Bochow stood still. "Man, have you gone crazy?"

Hofel raised his hands. "Let me explain, Herbert..."

"I don't want to hear it."

"But you must hear it," Hofel insisted. He knew Bochow, he was always hard and uncompromising. They walked on further, and a hot feeling shot through Hofel. Absolutely without thinking he said, "I have a son at home myself, he's ten years old. I've never seen him."

"Sentimental rot, you have the strictest instructions to keep out of everything. Did you forget that?"

Hofel defended himself. "If the kid lands in their clutches up there, it's curtains. I can't drag it to the gate. Here, we found this in a suitcase."

"Herbert! Haven't you any heart in your body?"

"And that isn't sentimental rot?" Bochow had been incautiously loud; he accordingly stopped himself short and then continued softly: "No heart in my body? It isn't a question here of one child, but of fifty thousand people!"

Hofel walked silently alongside Bochow, deeply agitated; Bochow's objection took the wind out of his sails. "All right then," he said, after a few steps, "I'll bring the kid to the gate tomorrow."

Bochow shook his head: "Will two stupid things make one smart one?"

Hofel lost patience. "Either I hide the kid or I give it up!"

"A fine strategist you are..."

"Then what should I do?" Hofel pulled his hands out of his pockets and spread them helplessly. In order to calm Hofel down and not to appear agitated himself, Bochow said, casually, "I heard in the clerks' room that a transport is leaving, and I'll see that the Pole is included in it. You let him take the child with him."

Hofel winced at the hard decision. Bochow stopped walking, stepped up close to Hofel and looked into his eyes.

"What else?"

In the balancing of necessities, the obligations here in the camp weighed the most. Could Bochow, whom the ILK had appointed as responsible for the resistance groups, permit the group's military instructor or even the group itself to be endangered because of a child? Or the whole painstakingly constructed apparatus? In addition the camp patrol, outwardly a quite legal fixture, but in reality a first-rate military organisation? You never could tell how much might come of a harmless affair. A little child starts the snowball rolling and all of a sudden it's an avalanche bringing down ruin on everything and everybody.

This was what went through Bochow's mind as he looked at Hofel. He turned to walk on, and said almost sadly: "Sometimes the heart is a very dangerous thing! The Pole probably knows how to manage with the kid. He brought it this far and he can bring it further." Hofel kept silent. They had turned off from the infirmary road and were now standing between the barracks. Here it was deserted. The cold and penetrating rain made them both shiver. They separated.

K R A M E R

In the room beside the clerks' room, where the camp senior, Kramer and his deputy, Proll, had their headquarters, the evening's business was already over. Proll was busy in the clerks room. Kramer was putting together the attendance list of the camp for the next morning's roll call on the basis of the individual block reports. Aside from him only a few block seniors and block clerks were present. They had already handed in their reports and were standing about gossiping. Bochow walked in but he seemed hesitant to hand his report to Kramer. The camp senior recognised that the block clerk from 38 had something on his mind.

Kramer also belonged to the circle of the knowing and the silent. His installation as camp senior had been managed by the comrades of the ILK. A dependable comrade had to be placed in the important position which was previously occupied by a hardened criminal, an appointee of Kluttig; he had abused his post for personal advantage and had therefore been removed. The members of the ILK had accordingly proposed the block senior, Walter Kramer. By skilfully playing on the contradictions between Kluttig and the Camp Commandant Schwahl, the comrades of the ILK succeeded in 'making' Kramer camp senior.

Everything that happened in the camp revolved around his person. He received his orders from Schwahl, from the camp fuhrer, and from the report fuhrer. The orders had to be carried out. But always in such a way as not to endanger the lives and security of the prisoners. This often required

cleverness and smart manoeuvring. Kramer, a compact, broad-shouldered coppersmith from Hamburg, was serenity in person. He could not be so easily shaken. He performed the duties of his difficult post in discreet co-operation with the Party comrades. The underground party in the camp confronted him in the person of Herbert Bochow.

"Don't ask about it, Walter, it's better for you," was often his objection when Kramer wanted to know the reason for some instruction which Bochow brought him. In many cases it would have been better if Bochow had asked Kramer's opinion, spoken more openly. This was true now, too, after he had got rid of the superfluous visitors with a friendly growl. He looked at Bochow challengingly.

"Something stupid," began Bochow.

"What's wrong?"

"You putting a new transport together?"

"Suppose I am?" Kramer asked back. "Proll is making up the list in there."

"A Pole came in with the last batch. Zacharias Jankowski, his name is. He's certainly in the Little Camp. Can you fit him in with the transport?"

"What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing." Bochow replied darkly. "You must get in touch with Hofel. He'll have something for you to give to the Pole."

"What?"

"A child."

"A what???" Kramer threw down the pencil with which he had been making the entries. Bochow watched Kramer's amazement. "Please don't ask me. It can't be helped."

"But a child? Herbert! The transport is going God knows where! You know what that means?"

Bochow became nervous. "I can't tell you anything more."

Kramer got up. "What kind of child? What's the story on it?" Bochow warded off the question.

"Nothing, that's not the point."

Bochow warded off the question. "Nothing, that's not the point."

"I can imagine." Kramer snorted. "Listen, Herbert! I don't usually do much asking, because I always rely on..."

"Then don't ask."

"Sometimes you make it damned hard for me, Herbert."

Bochow laid his hand conciliatingly on his shoulder. "No one else can handle this thing but you. Hofel has already been told. Tell him you're coming from me."