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The Password Is Courage.**

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It should be noted that, where distress might otherwise be caused, the real names of some of the people mentioned in this book have not been used.

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but for his friend waiting in the ante-room. The adjutant barked a stream of German and the interpreter translated.

"The adjutant says you will suffer for having caused the German Government so much trouble and expense. He says that if you have nothing to say he will sentence you straight away."

Coward tut-tutted and the clicking of his tongue seemed to act on the adjutant like a goad on an oxen. His face swelled.

"But I have something to say," Coward began, relaxing and leaning forward a little. "Private Connolly and I have been subjected to grossly inhuman treatment at the prison camp at Stuttgart. We have been kicked, punched, starved and spat at, contrary to the Geneva Conventions and in direct opposition to the terms of The Hague Treaty of 1926, of which Germany is a signatory."

Taken aback, the interpreter gaped at him. It was not usual for prisoners on trial to make any defence; as a rule they were only too content to accept their punishment, generally two or three weeks in solitary confinement, and let it go. But this was not a usual prisoner: Coward had rehearsed his lines for two days and had it off pat. The little man translated the speech to the adjutant who burst into a roar like a bull and rose to his feet, babbling in his anger until Coward cut him short with an imperious gesture.

"Furthermore," continued the Britisher imperturbably, "it stated distinctly in The Hague Treaty that all prisoners of war shall have the right to escape if they should wish to try to do so, and that when recaptured the holding Power should in no wise attempt to treat them in an inhumane manner, meting out only summary justice, viz., a term of close imprisonment not exceeding one month." He paused for breath while the interpreter gabbled nervously to the adjutant. "Now, I intend as soon as possible to exercise my rights as a British prisoner-of-war and inform the trustees of the Convention of Geneva of my treatment and that of my comrades at the hands of the Germans. I shall ask for an immediate and full inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the whole affair. Unless, that is," he said, leaning farther forward until he spoke into the adjutant's inflamed countenance, "unless you undertake to dismiss the charge against Connolly and myself."

As the interpreter conveyed this ultimatum, light gradually dawned on the officer and his expression became positively murderous. But caution was mixed with anger and he must have known that Coward's position was unassailable. Try as they would, they could not stop a

prisoner from eventually getting in touch with Geneva, and the Germans were very shy of any investigations into their treatment of Britishers. They were afraid that reprisals might be carried out against their own men in British hands and knew that this would go down badly with the German people. Slowly he drew himself up to his full height and in German spoke at length and with great volubility to Coward. He traced his ancestry from a she-goat to the present representative of the family now standing smiling before him. He dwelt lovingly on the probable fate of that member and hoped fervently that he would suffer a thousand unpleasant deaths. At the end of his long discourse he hissed with outstretched arm, "*Gehen Sie!*"

"The *Herr Hauptmann* wishes you to go," stuttered the interpreter. "He says no charge will be made against you and that you and your friends will suffer no penalty. But he warns you never to cross his path again."

"Thank the gentleman for me," said Coward and walked out of the office. Connolly was waiting for him anxiously.

"What happened, Charlie?" he asked apprehensively.

"Happened? Nothing's happened, Wally. We're okay—no charge against us."

"No!"

"It's straight up. The adj. and I had a little comfy chat and made quite a nice bargain. I won't tell Geneva about Stuttgart and he won't interfere with our sleep."

"Well, if you're not a flaming beaut—"

Coward modestly agreed.

"You're a real gem, Charlie," enthused Connolly delightedly.

"Wait till we tell the boys about this. But for Pete's sake, how did you do it?"

"I have my methods, Watson," Coward murmured. "Cigarette?"

A week later Coward was summoned to the office and handed a cable from Geneva. Apparently his wife back in England had not heard from him for several months and had written to the British War Office, who in turn had communicated with the authorities in Switzerland. The cable read:

Welfare report requested on Sergeant-major Coward.

A polite *Unteroffizier* passed him a blank form on which to compose his reply, He wrote:

Pleased to report am in fairly good health. Cause of not writing through escapade. Treatment after recapture very good.

He returned the form to the soldier, who read it carefully.

"Thank you, Mr Coward," he smiled.

"Don't mention it, cock," said Coward, and walked back to the peace of his barrack-room.

skeleton of the beast was tossed out of the compound, picked clean. It had provided a welcome meal for the Russians, and the probability is that had the guard shown his face at the barrack door he would have undergone the same fate.

In spite of their suffering, the Russians were pleasant enough and seemed to be perpetually smiling. Chances to fraternise with them were rare indeed, yet a genuine *camaraderie* existed between them and the British, manifesting itself in a dozen different ways. From time to time the men of VIIIB held a whip-round for tins of food to be passed over to them, permission for this having been surprisingly granted; however ravenous their own appetites the British could always find something to contribute, if it were only a biscuit per man. In the heat of summer, when appetites were low, a great pile of tins awaited transport by cart to the camp across the fields.

At this time Wing Commander Bader of the R.A.F. was brought to Lamsdorf; although an officer, he had made himself such a torment to the Germans at the R.A.F. Officers Camp of *Luft III* at Sargen, near Breslau, that he was sent to VIIIB as a punishment. Coward managed to have several conversations with him and learnt much that he was able to use later on; indeed, one of Coward's closest friends, Cecil Sklan, was in due course to help to organise one of Bader's most sensational escapes, an attempt that was to ring round the world and hearten everyone serving the cause of freedom. The indomitable courage and fiercely uncompromising energy of the crippled hero who, without legs, continually rallied the prisoners to attempt new methods of escape, were not always popular in camp, but they brought out the best in everyone with whom he came into contact, and to Coward's spirits provided a badly-needed fillip.

With agonising slowness the months of 1942 drew to a close, and with the year's end the news from the war fronts became more hopeful. Thoughts turned to Christmas and the theatre began to resound with preparations for the grand Christmas pantomime. In November came word that the Red Cross in England were sending special parcels containing such luscious items as Christmas pudding, a tin of stewed beef and a tin of dehydrated egg. This was good news indeed and the festive season was welcomed enthusiastically. As the time approached, each barrack sported paper-chains contrived from the labels round the tins of food in Red Cross parcels and Coward's hut boasted a small twig of Christmas tree scrounged from a co-operative guard. The special

parcels duly arrived and on Christmas Eve they were distributed; as a festive gesture the Germans forbore to puncture the tins, well knowing that the luxuries they contained would be scoffed without delay. With the ration issues of bread and potatoes increased for the occasion, the Britishers looked forward to a royal feast.

Coward sat in his hut with his pals, Digger and Connolly on one side and Dickie Spring of Liverpool on the other. They had heated their tins of beef and ate them with the potatoes, following up with plum pudding and hot tea. It was a good meal and left them uncomfortably full, for like all prisoners their stomachs were incapable of holding a meal of normal size. Coward leaned back with a sigh and lit a cigarette. He looked round at the crowd of chattering men who filled the room, feeling as expansive and replete as a highly satisfied business magnate surveying fellow-diners at the Savoy Grille.

"By God," he said, "that was good."

"I'll say it was," said Dickie Spring. "Makes you feel like a human being again. Not quite what the folks will be having back home, but good enough for us to be getting on with."

They fell silent, each occupied with his own thoughts of home. Coward conjured up a mental picture of the scene in the dining-room of his house in North London: the crackling fire, the holly and decorations, the Christmas cards standing between the ornaments just as he had left them. Then the entry of his wife Florence with the plates of steaming food, the excited shouts of his four children and presently their silence as they bowed their heads while a simple grace was said. He knew that as his wife offered a thank you for the food they were about to eat, her thoughts were of him and how he was spending his Christmas, hoping he was not too desperately hungry and aching with all her heart for his presence at the table. His mind's eye lingered on the image, then tried to thrust it aside. It was not often now that he allowed himself the painful luxury of private thoughts. Men in his position learned soon after capture that to indulge in too much dreaming of home and loved ones was a sure way to acute melancholy and mental destruction; they managed to shake off the thoughts that came crowding in during each unguarded moment, and turned their minds to other things. That is not to say that their loved ones were ever forgotten—life would have been unendurable if they were—but they were relegated to a quiet corner of the mind and only brought out for reunion on special occasions: ones of particular personal danger, or when mail

arrived, or on a birthday, anniversary, or, as now, Christmas. It was an exercise of sheer will-power to keep one's hopes and dreams under such tight control, but every prisoner whose duty it was to lead others had to make the self-denial and enforce it rigidly; the other way lay weakness and indecision.

Coward pulled himself together with a jerk as a gangling raw Scotsman scrambled to his feet and made them jump with the noise of his voice.

"Listen," he shouted, raising his mug of tea. "Listen, all of you. Here's a toast for ye all to drink. We haven't any whusky, more's the pity, but we can give a health to everyone at home—all our wives and our wee ones, our sweethearts and our parents. I say God bless 'em all!"

The murmur came back to him from over a hundred throats.

"God bless 'em all."

"And another health to His Majesty and all his blasted meenisters. And here's one to Churchill—may he soon think up something big to get us all out of this bloody hole and speed us on our way home."

"To Churchill!"

"Good old Winnie—he'll never let us down!"

"And eternal hell and damnation to every bloody Hun on the face of the earth!" roared the Scotsman, quaffing the remainder of his tea and launching forthwith into a heartfelt rendering of "The Road to the Isles". It was the tonic all needed; soon everyone was singing lustily and as chorus followed chorus the strained look left the men's eyes and they began to enjoy themselves.

Then, in the middle of a bawled chorus relating the amorous adventures, much to be deprecated, of one Eskimo Nell, a shout was heard from the end of the barrack.

"Water's on!"

Abandoning the song, one and all rushed out to queue for a turn at the broken stub of pipe from which dripped the water supply. Tins were washed and wooden knives cleaned. Coward and Digger filled their can with water for tea time and returned to their bunks to chat about past Christmases they had known.

That evening was a gala night in the theatre, for it saw the first performance of the great panto, specially written for the occasion and entitled *Treasure Trove*. But as the converted hut held about three hundred men out of almost twelve thousand in camp, Coward and his

friends were not successful in getting tickets. Instead they visited the barrack next door in the compound and saw a play performed on a small stage constructed by the simple expedient of pushing six tables together and covering them with a couple of blankets. The play was Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and the Chocolate Soldier in it was a young airman who had newly arrived at Lamsdorf, a sergeant-pilot named Denholm Elliott. His acting was superb, even in that confined space and with a heroine who laboured under the handicap of a baritone voice and revealed muscular arms beneath her "dress". It was the perfect end to a fine evening; they went to their bunks and snuggled under their blankets, shouting Christmas greetings to each other down the length of the hut, confident and happy in their comradeship. For an hour or so it had been good to be alive.

Christmas morning revealed a fall of several inches of snow and still more floated thickly down as they were roused from their beds and prodded out on to the parade ground by the bayonets of the guards. Huddled in their greatcoats they waited while the counting game began, longing for the end of the farce so they could scamper back to the warmth of the bunks. But it was not to be. The Australians and South Africans whooped with joy at seeing snow for the first time and very soon a great snowball battle had developed. Coward and a few Britishers who were only too familiar with snow gathered at the door of the barrack and watched rather patronisingly the sight of fully-grown men making asses of themselves. One little South African, a mere five feet in height, was actually rolling in rapture on the ground, making a human snowball of himself as he turned over and over. Shouting invitations to come out and fight, a party of Aussies made a sortie into the compound and bombarded a crowd of their fellows who were busy building a snowman.

Coward sneered to the Scotsman standing beside him.

"Damned fools—look at 'em. Like a pack of kids, mucking about like—ouch!"

A well-aimed snowball caught him full in the face, sending him staggering back. He rushed out breathing fire and fury.

"Want to scrap, do you, you lily-livered sons of sin! Right, you asked for it!" and swiftly gathering up enough snow to make a nicely firm missile, he let drive at the nearest Aussie. Then the fun really began. With an ear-splitting war-cry the Scotsman doubled to the rescue, making a commotion that had not been heard since Culloden.

"Come on, ye Sassenach brutes, I'll learn ye!"

In no time the other compounds had entered the fray and hundreds upon hundreds of men pelted each other as fast as they could scoop up the snow. Hastily formed platoons carried out sorties into enemy country, while enfilading fire covered their rear. In the excitement the little South African was captured by Coward's side and put to work collecting ammunition, which he promptly sabotaged in an effective, if disgusting, manner.

It was perhaps unfortunate that at this precise moment the adjutant was descried approaching along the road, together with the *Kommandant* and two guards, all laughing heartily at the battle and clearly taking it as an illustration of the feeble intellects of the prisoners. As they drew near the exchange of snowballs suddenly stopped dead and the *Kommandant*, who knew his British well, stopped and spoke to the adjutant. The latter shook his head in obvious disagreement and made as if to walk on, only to be stopped again as the *Kommandant* remonstrated with him. The fellows watched breathlessly. They could almost hear the conversation of the two officers. The *Kommandant*, in as many words, was saying, "I shouldn't go past them, if I were you, *Herr Hauptmann*. They'll chuck snowballs at you," and his junior was equally obviously replying in indignation, "They wouldn't dare!" Then the *Kommandant* was seen to shrug his shoulders and the two men continued slowly forward, the elder raising his collar in wary anticipation of the onslaught. As they entered the road dividing the two compounds a voice rose loud and clear in the frosty air.

"Let the bastards have it, boys!"

A perfect barrage of snowballs descended on the wilting officers and their hapless bodyguards. Forced to run the gauntlet until they were out of range, the adjutant's face was empurpled with fury and the *Kommandant's* shaking with suppressed mirth. He waved a hand to the lads, now cheering triumphantly, and drew the adjutant away, leaving the battlefield to resume its previous dispositions. Barrack-room discussion that evening was decidedly pro-*Kommandant*. He was quite a decent old stick, it was agreed; almost a pity, really, that he was German. The men realised that had he not been present they would have fared very differently from the hands of the adjutant; he was a nasty bird to cross at any time, and would probably have used his revolver with some effect.

By New Year's Day the snow was so thick that walking in it had

self to be led inside. The hall seemed rather austere for such a large block of flats, but before he had time to ponder this he had been shown into a ground-floor room and found himself gazing at a score or more policemen.

To the moustached official at a long desk the woman said simply:

"Hier ist ein Kriegsgefangener!"

Coward whirled round. Confronting him from just inside the door, a faint smile creasing his hatchet face, stood the man in the rain-coat.

"Christ Almighty," he exploded. "A bloody police station!"

The barrel of a pistol covered him from the other side of the desk. He turned angrily to the woman, but she was already on her way out.

"Sorry, sweetheart," she said softly.

Surprisingly, the police were quite decent to him. He enjoyed a bowl of hot soup and a hunk of dry bread, then, wrapping himself in three blankets, settled down for the night in a fairly warm cell, sharing this luxury with a Viennese gentleman who had managed to get gloriously drunk. The policemen's questioning had been brief and to the point. It had been a short trip this time, he reflected ruefully, but well worth it; at least the ending had been less painful than the last.

In a mere two days he was back at Lamsdorf and once more stood before the adjutant, staring obstinately into that worthy's red and gloating features. Through the omnipresent interpreter, the German remarked:

"Not again, Mr Coward? Good treatment this time, eh?"

He agreed cordially. "Very nice trip. Saw a lot of lovely country—might spend my holidays here after the war if I can get over the smell. And I was entertained most hospitably—I think your police force is wonderful, straight I do!"

This took a little time to sink in after it had been diplomatically translated.

"You'll have a nice long rest here this time, I can promise you, Mr Coward. But first you will do one month in solitary confinement and I shall be most interested to see you wriggle out of that."

certain suicide. No, the best idea would be to give them to the Jews inside the camp at Auschwitz so they could attempt a mass break or at least die fighting, taking with them as many Germans as they could. He resolved to contact the optician without delay. Meanwhile, Clatterbridge's pain in the side was quickly disposed of and he was despatched with a guard to rejoin his companions at the Auschwitz digging site.

Once again that evening, when Coward prepared to turn in for bed, he congratulated himself that a fair day's work lay behind him. The expected consignment of Jews had not yet arrived, but he felt thankful for that. In addition, he had stumbled on a vitally important secret, one that opened up magnificent opportunities. Just before the lights were turned off at the mains, he caught a glimpse of Clatterbridge. The bloodthirsty man of God was up-ended on his blanket spread over the cold floor. He was praying almost upside down, in Eastern fashion. Who can say what personal god or gods listened to his entreaties? That he derived comfort from his supplications was enough.

Tragedy struck the next day, suddenly and without warning. Coward had marched down with the men to the site outside the wire of the buna factory and stood there chatting with some of them as they prepared for the day's toil. A hefty *Unteroffizier* moved slowly up and down the ranks, growling at them to begin work. Reluctantly, the men started, some digging, some shaping the ditches and shoring them with planks, some manhandling large cable drums. At the foot of a newly-erected pylon a little group gathered, arguing. Coward walked over to see what the trouble was about; as he approached he was joined by the *Unteroffizier*, a sullen lout well known by the working-party for his ferocity.

"*Die Verfluchten Engländer*," muttered the German to Coward. "They are lazy pigs. I will make them work—you will see."

Coward said clearly, "You lay a hand on one of those men and there'll be trouble, *Unteroffizier*."

The man sneered back and elbowed his way into the men. Three Britishers, one of them a young English corporal named Reynolds, were angrily refusing to climb the steel pylon in that cold weather unless they had rubber boots and sufficiently thick gloves. A German

private bawled at them to start climbing, and fast. The *Unteroffizier* added the weight of his bellow.

"Climb! Climb! *Raus*, pig-dogs! I will shoot!"

Reynolds turned a white face to Coward.

"For God's sake," he appealed. "We're supposed to climb this thing to fix cables without proper gloves or climbing kit. In this weather, too. It's suicide to go up without them, and I'm damned if I'm going."

"Climb!" shrieked the *Unteroffizier*. "Climb!" A foam flecked his lips.

Reynolds shrugged. "I'm going back to the other chaps," he said quietly.

"Watch it," warned Coward. "I don't like the look of this rat—he's dangerous."

The corporal laughed grimly. "It's only bluster. He wouldn't dare."

He began to walk away from the group; Coward saw a pistol appear in the German's hand and shouted "Look out, man!"

Reynolds turned and stared with open mouth as the gun thundered. He stood quite still for a moment, a small dark stain appearing on the breast of his khaki tunic. Then he cried, "Christ, he's shot me!" and crumbled in a heap on the frozen ground.

The Britishers rushed forward to where he lay, but he was dead. Coward knelt beside him, then looked long at the *Unteroffizier* who now stood with the smoking pistol in his hand, clearly shaken by the results of his choler.

"You yellow, dirty swine," said Coward deliberately.

Quickly surrounding the body, the German guards let no one near until a doctor had been summoned and pronounced the man dead. The Britishers stood in shocked groups, heedless of the shouts of the guards to recommence work. A great anger possessed them all. Poor Reynolds had been a gentle man, popular with all his comrades. To such a man the cold-blooded murder of a defenceless prisoner would have seemed inconceivable. But he underestimated his captors and had paid totally for his protest. Some of the men, remembering what he was and how he had lived, said a simple prayer for him in the corner of the field. Coward stood unseeing through the humble offering, utterly choked. This was the last straw: the final seal on his contempt and detestation of Germans.

In due course the men were allowed to carry the body into a nearby barn; there it lay until a rude coffin had been made at the town of

Auschwitz. Two days later it was lifted on to a cart for burial in an adjacent cemetery. The entire working-party, their mixture of uniforms achieving an astonishing smartness for the occasion, paraded and followed Coward as he led the pall-bearers to the last resting place. A Union Jack draped the coffin, infusing the ceremony, so renderingly personal to all present, with the dignity of a soldier's grave. A true friend had gone, and with him part of themselves.

Accompanied by a guard, Coward returned immediately to Lamsdorf, ostensibly to collect letters and parcels but really to report the murder to the British authorities via R.S.M. Sheriffs, together with the name of the *Unteroffizier* who was responsible. He also wrote the details to his wife, suitably camouflaged in a code he had used the previous year and which had evolved as a result of his escape to Ulm. He had wanted to complain officially of several things and had sent a letter, worded as if talking of family matters, addressed to "Charles Coward Snr., c/o William Orange" at his own home in London. The surprise of Mrs Coward was great—indeed, when, in reference to the strange missiles he chanced upon and which later proved to be the dreaded V.1s, she read obscure descriptions of birds and bees, she began to fear for her husband's sanity. Then she realised that William Orange, a gentleman of whom she had never heard, must be none other than the War Office. So Coward's messages reached their destination; he followed the method consistently and after the war M.I.9 acknowledged his excellent work in an official commendation.

Having thus done his duty to the dead soldier he visited some of his old Lamsdorf pals and enjoyed a yarn. While there he checked on the suspected stooge at Auschwitz, finding that the men's doubts were justified. No man by the name of Miller had been sent by himself to join the Auschwitz working-party: conclusive proof that he was a German "plant." Coward's lips tightened as he heard this news; he mentally repeated the gipsy injunction, "An eye for an eye". One man had died, killed treacherously by a German. Now a German must die. It would be rough justice.

Returning to Auschwitz, he approached the town in the rickety old train with a thrill of anticipation. Soon things were going to hum in the factory, he hoped. He was so cheered by the thought of Clatterbridge's supply of arms that he felt positively benign and offered his guard a cigarette with an air of lordly benevolence. The man accepted it gratefully and began to talk; Coward found the staccato rattle of remarks

difficult to understand, but gathered that the German people were sick and tired of the war and all its suffering. The guard had lost his home in Hamburg to the bombs of the R.A.F. and had arrived on leave to find his father killed and his family evacuated to Dresden.

Coward nodded sympathetically, but his mood underwent an instant change when the train drew in at Auschwitz. The expected Jewish draft had just come; a long train of box cars was standing at the platform and thousands of the miserable creatures were making their way down ramps into the stockade. Coward stood with the German guard and watched, his heart sick within him. The compound was certainly for cattle, but human cattle.

Before him waited a great sea of filthy, underdressed Jews in all stages of emaciation and privation. It was impossible to guess how long their train had been held up on its journey but the toll in human life was only too evident in the pile of bodies stacked on the platform. There lay men, women and children, awaiting the final degradation of the carts to bear their remains to the furnaces.

Attached to the large compound was a smaller one, and in it stood a group of Germans. Among them was a *Stabsarzt*, several army officers, a *Gestapo* agent and a number of civilians: the civilians, Coward's guard explained, were comprised of local farmers and the managers of the buna factory. A trickle of Jews passed from the *lager* into the smaller compound, kicked and hustled by the soldiers attending them. The Germans looked them over. The stronger-looking men and children were motioned to stand to one side by the farmers and periodically herded out to waiting carts. Others, of both sexes and including older children, who were at least standing fairly erect, were selected for the factory; one of the managers consulted from time to time a sheet of paper in his hand, as if checking the numbers required. The factory workers were marched outside and lined up on the road leading to the main camp.

Eventually about a thousand remained, old men and women or younger women carrying children.

"What happens to those?" asked Coward.

The guard shrugged.

"*Tod*," he said. "Death."

Appalled, Coward struggled to assimilate the fact. God in heaven, were these poor wretches to be butchered in cold blood? The guard pointed along the road. In the distance could be seen the long building

with the white concrete roof that Coward knew were the gas chambers. Evidently this consignment were not to await their turn at the working camp. Already people were filing past, some stumbling in their exhaustion, some walking firmly, but all on their way to provide a Roman holiday for their captors.

Coward insisted that his guard take him a little way along the road, until he could clearly see the entrance to the chambers. Before the building was a gate and on reaching this the Jews were ordered to remove all their clothing. Old men with thin matchstick legs stood in the icy air convulsed with trembling; several women fell into the snow and were heaved up by their friends or relations. Coward saw one young girl, naked and marble white with the cold, clutching a child of a few months to her breast while the infant attempted to extract some nourishment from her pathetic body. She led by the hand a small girl of about five, crooning a song as she went along. The song became louder as she entered the gate of the death-house; it was taken up by others and despite the kicks and blows aimed by the guards swelled in volume until it assumed the last gesture of this proud race. The Jews seemed to walk strongly once more, ignoring their grotesque nakedness. They steadied themselves, the infants ceased whimpering, and in their song they became again the Children of God, marching to their last Canaan.

Coward watched fascinatedly as the gates closed behind them and the song grew fainter. He was conscious of a feeling of pride that men and women could bear themselves to their doom with such courage. Their religion was not his, to be sure, but they typified the eternal values, so elusive to define yet so overwhelmingly right when demonstrated in the face of unimaginable disaster.

It was with no sense of pity or shame, but rather one of considerable satisfaction, that he gathered the camp leaders together in the evening and confirmed their suspicions of the stooge. He noticed the men's faces harden in the dull light from the swinging electric bulb and hoped that the die was cast.

He was not disappointed. At the next morning's roll call one man was missing, the foul swill in the cesspool just a little higher.

EARLY IN March the opportunity came for him to investigate Clatterbridge's scheme. By then the plan for arming some of the Jews had taken definite shape in his mind; whatever the outcome of a mass attempt to escape, the fact that they would be able to repay favours to at least a few of the Germans was a delicious prospect. But he would have to act carefully. A brawny guard had been detailed to accompany him when he went abroad on his business and with the German constantly present it was a ticklish job to smuggle anything into the camp; to bring arms through into the barrack would be a brain-teaser indeed.

He decided first to spy out the land and to this end informed the guard that he wanted to go into nearby Berkenwald to have his eyes tested, and the German made no objection, assuming that his British charge had obtained permission from the *Stabsarzt*. They set out early and caught the bus that ran past the British camp at Monowitz, seating themselves among the country people going to work. For the purpose of short bus journeys Coward was allowed a certain amount of German money, as distinct from the camp *Lagergeld*; he paid their fares with calm indifference and waited for Berkenwald to show up, meanwhile inspecting his fellow travellers with interest.

They were the usual nondescript crowd of women and elderly peasants. No young men were to be seen except two soldiers: all those eligible had long since been called into the fighting services. Beside Coward sat a fat old *frau* who regarded him with undisguised contempt and did her best to push him off the seat with her capacious rump. Opposite sat a personable girl of about twenty, eyeing him as malevolently as all German girls eyed foreign prisoners; they all seemed to be trained to spit upon other nationalities, and this one was no exception. As the bus rattled to one of its stops she arose to alight, turning as she did so to launch a wad of spittle in Coward's direction. This mark of attention he had experienced many times before, but never so blatantly

outfit and we have no intention—at the moment—of depriving you of his services.”

Coward threw back his head and laughed.

“I’m sorry I blew up,” he said, after a minute. “I’m glad, though, that things are going to be smartened up. Well, I must be off to work.”

Fritz followed him out. “Ze Count is ready?” he asked with portentous gravity.

“Yes, whistle up the carriage,” grinned Coward. “And button your collar, you big cheese.”

Inside the factory, he waited his chance, then again slipped down to the cellar, passing Hecke some bread and meat in addition to the arms. This time he was aware of a number of corpses sprawled near them on the damp stone floor. Hecke merely pointed to them and said, “Die today”.

While in the factory he paid a visit to the “Personnel Manager” of I. G. Farben to complain of the food given to his working-parties. The official, a sleek, well-fed German from the upper classes, shrugged his shoulders.

“We do our best, Mr Coward,” he protested, “but conditions are bad. Food is hard to get. I will see what I can do, but cannot promise.”

Coward glared at him truculently, seeing in him the cause of all the suffering in that foul place, blaming him personally for all the atrocities of the Germans.

“Try to make it better, *Herr Direktor*,” he snapped. “I shall put in a full report to the Red Cross authorities about the bad food here, and about other things too.”

The plump German smiled bleakly, tapping his fingers on his desk. “What other things. Mr Coward?”

“The beastly killings that go on by the thousand here every day, the Jews and other people gassed and burnt, the slaves beaten to death, and God knows what else!”

“God knows, perhaps, but I don’t. Gassings? Killings? You must be out of your mind. Don’t talk lightly of such things, Mr Coward. It might be dangerous for you to make such wild statements about the Government and this company.”

Coward choked back the angry words that rose to his lips. Already he had said too much. He must go easy.

“All right, sir. You don’t know anything about them. You probably wear dark spectacles when you walk round your factory.”

The manager chuckled. "Exactly. I wear dark spectacles. May I advise you to do the same, Mr Coward?"

Coward strode out, raging inwardly against this fat German, against the ghastly factory, against himself. His tongue ran away with him too easily. For other people's sake beside his own, he must be on his guard and keep a still tongue in his head.

That evening Otto the photographer arrived at the camp and, accompanied by an *Unteroffizier*, took pictures of the men in groups.

"I shall only be able to get through half the work tonight," he announced to Coward. "But next week I shall come more." His English had noticeably deteriorated, probably to impress the *Unteroffizier*, but when they were left alone for a moment he took the opportunity to whisper quickly, "Go to the optician's for more polishing rags." Here we go again, thought Coward.

In a couple of days he returned to Berkenwald, ostensibly for another eye test and to take Clatterbridge's spectacles for adjustment. This time he really was accompanied by a new guard, Fritz having left on a short leave, so he padded out his blouse with paper, hoping that when he came back with the guns any added size would not attract interest. It was a dangerous game, but by now his original fears were beginning to evaporate and he had in their place a strange exultation, a keen excitement such as a hunter feels in the chase. He was met as before by Jan, who carried out the necessary examination of his eyes and slipped four pistols into his blouse while so doing, literally under the nose of the German soldier. To keep him occupied Jan had given the man a book of nude photographs; it did its job so well that Coward had almost to tear him away in order to catch the bus.

By the time this little load had been safely smuggled into the factory and delivered to Hecke in the cellars, Coward had begun to wonder when the show-down would come, and it was nearer than he imagined.

One question in his mind was answered when Otto came to complete the taking of the photographs. The Pole contrived to steal a few minutes alone with Coward in his tiny cubicle office and immediately drew several little bundles from out of his professional case.

"Hide these. Get them to Hecke as soon as possible," he said urgently, then seeing Coward's puzzlement, hurried on, "Be careful how you handle them. They're sticks of dynamite from the German army stores at Breslau."

Removing the section of floorboard and gingerly placing the bundles

an interview with the Farben administrators, demanded it afresh when no response appeared to be forthcoming, and eventually was summoned to the canteen in the German staff block. He found himself facing several Farben officials and S.S. officers who were seated at a long table. An interpreter was present and he asked Coward to proceed.

"The most important thing that concerns me," said Coward, "is this. Is it true that thousands of civilian prisoners are being gassed and cremated?"

There was silence for a moment, then a Farben official laughed. Immediately all at the table were chuckling good-naturedly.

"Utter nonsense," said the man who had laughed, through the interpreter. "A crematorium is necessary to serve such a large area as this, in which many prisoners fall sick and die. It is hygienic, you must understand."

"What about the gassing of people who are alive?"

"Fairy tales. Where a great number of workers are gathered together, one must expect the wildest rumours."

You swine, thought Coward; you only agree to see me because you know I put in official complaints to the Red Cross. That isn't too healthy for you, although they can do nothing for the slaves. Now you'll admit nothing because of those S.S. brutes at your elbow. "You mentioned prisoners who fall sick," he said, not daring to make a direct accusation, and fighting down his anger. "Everywhere, including the Polish camps and the camp for Russian girls—even in the brothel for those who can go there—you display notices saying that sick personnel will be 'transferred'. What does this mean?"

"Naturally, that they will be removed to hospital or camps for lighter work."

"Do you know that the notices are interpreted as a threat—that sick people who are 'transferred' are believed to be taken to Birkenau and are not heard of again?"

"We have told you we cannot accept responsibility for stupid tales, Mr Coward. Do not waste our time."

"I am disturbed by shooting which I often hear at night."

"You are mistaken. One worker did attempt to leave camp against orders recently. That is all."

"But surely, with all the guards and dogs you have, that would be suicide?"

"Nevertheless, an attempt was made."