

## Breakout

A disconsolate David Bronski sat at the Officer' Club bar, staring into his drink.

"Heard about the decision, Tough luck, Dave. He sure didn't give you much to work with." Sidney Greenbaum slid onto the stool next to Bronski. "I know it's tough to lose your first case, but in this case, I can't cry too many tears."

"I know, I know, but somehow, he ... well, he got to me. Is giving all you have to your country really so wrong?"

"Come on, Dave, a Nazi is a Nazi. Don't get maudlin. He wants to die for Deutschland, well let him." Sid reached for a pretzel. "Hey, Dave, where are you going?"

"To file an appeal."

The steel gate to the cell block the Guards referred to as "Death Alley" clanged open, then slid closed behind the three men. Two large MPs, an tall, older man whose white coat and stethoscope identified him as a doctor. "Doctor to examine 566 788 3!" barked the shorter MP. So they really were going to hang him, thought the guard, as he led them to the solid door of cell 8-3. Funny custom, we only hang healthy men. Get 'em well, then hang 'em. What sense does it make?

The guard opened the small port. Werner was sitting on the

bunk, staring at the wall. "On your feet, back against the wall!" Wearily, Werner complied. The two guards each inserted a key. The cell could only be opened with the two keys. The cell was small, about four feet by six, dimly lit by a single recessed ceiling bulb which burned constantly. No window, just a small sink, an uncovered sanitary bucket and a narrow bunk.

Impatiently, the doctor pushed by the guard. "Lets get this over with. Take off your shirt." he commanded.

With an ironic shrug, Werner mutely lifted his manacled hands. "Unchain him", ordered the doctor, sighing with annoyance.

"Sir, we're not supposed..."

"Are you refusing to obey a direct order, Corporal? I said, unchain him NOW. Stop wasting my time. Unchain him, then get out. I need room."

"Sir, yes sir, but..."

"Lock the damn door, if you must. I'll call you when I'm through."

Yielding to the doctor's preemptory command, he removed the cuffs from Werner's wrists and ankles. He slammed the door, thinking Well, if the damn fool wants to be locked up with the most dangerous prisoner we have, let him. It's his neck.

"Werner, listen to me and speak softly." The doctor made a pretense of applying the stethoscope to the man's back. Very softly he said "Do you recognize me? Just nod if you do."

Werner looked at him for the first time. Surprise, then shock. " Sturmbannfuhrer! I didn't know you were a doctor."

"I'm not. We're going to break you out, Schmidt. You and

your men. I don't have a lot of time, so listen carefully. I'm going to give you two capsules. They will make you miserably sick for about six hours. You'll run a high fever. I'm also going to cause a nasty rash. I will then tell them you look to have a highly communicable disease, and I have to move you to isolation fast before anyone else is exposed to it. Since I have already been exposed, it makes sense for me to take care of you. I'll tell you more later. Now, swallow these quickly. Try to groan convincingly while I poke about."

Very soon, Werner wasn't acting. Doubled over with cramps, retching, he felt as miserable as he looked. Icy chills, symptomatic of a rapidly rising fever, shook him. His chest burned like fire, blistered from the chemical the "doctor" had applied.

The man in the white coat banged on the door shouting, "Open the door, damnit. Why didn't you tell me he was sick?"

The guards unlocked the door. "He was okay this morning, Sir."

"Then it's worse than I thought. He must be moved to isolation immediately." The guard peered over the "doctor's" shoulder.

"Jesus! Is it catching?"

"Probably. If it's what I think it is, it is highly contagious. He must be moved at once." The guard backed away. "Order a gurney and isolation gear. Move! I'll stay with him till you get back."

"Yessir! Right away, Sir!"

"Wait! Before you touch anything, scrub your hands well, then

wipe your hands and face with this alcohol sponge." White faced, the guard took the proffered packet. He fled down the hall, fumbled the gate open. Alarm bells exploded.

"Close the door, doc! Quick, please sir." Trying hard not to laugh, the "doctor" complied.

He knelt by the narrow bunk. "Hang on, Werner, I know it's rotten, but it will pass. I wouldn't put you through this if there were any other way. Once we get upstairs I'll give you something to help with the nausea. We have to make this look good. No one will argue with the fever you'll be running."

Looking up with pain filled eyes, Werner gritted through clenched teeth "Well, you have me convinced, Sturmbannfuhrer Stange."

"Call me Herr Arzt, Doctor, or something medical for now. As far as they are concerned, you have never seen me before."

"I thought you were dead, Sir. When you disappeared from the penal battalion, we all thought..."

"I nearly was, Schmidt. It's a long story and we'll have plenty of time to catch up on the boat." He broke off as a crashing outside the door heralded the arrival of the gurney.

The boat? The BOAT? Werner's head spun. He tried to organize his thoughts. Two masked, gloved men, dressed in bright yellow isolation gowns burst in. They wrapped him in a yellow isolation blanket and half lifted, half shoved him onto the waiting gurney. His world became a whirl of jolting motion, banging doors, a mask slapped over his face as they hurried down the corridors. Between spasms he thought, Could anything be worth this? Better

than hanging, I guess, but not much.

He was lifted onto a bed. Masked yellow gowned forms prodding at him...High fever, muscle spasms, convulsions...The world spun and mercifully he lost consciousness.

Something was bothering him, pulling him back to reality, pushing away the comfort of the black nothingness around him. He stirred irritably. "Werner, Werner, wake up." Something cold on his face. "Werner..."

Reluctantly he opened his eyes. Erich Stange was leaning over him, sponging his face with a cool cloth. "Wake up..."

Werner groaned. "Go 'way." He tried to crawl back into the friendly darkness.

Stange's voice was more urgent. "Werner, wake up." He shook him gently by the shoulder. "You've got to wake up, it's nearly time to go."

The second time he opened his eyes, he tried to remember where he was, and what had happened. He saw the relieved look on Stange's face. "Werner, try to sit up very slowly. I'll help you. Stop if you get dizzy." Stange slipped an arm around Werner's shoulders, supported him gently. The room tilted dangerously. He moaned inadvertently. Stange pushed a pillow behind his head, "Take it easy. You'll feel better soon." Something cool at his lips. He was suddenly ragingly thirsty. He drank. "Easy now, not too fast."

Gradually, Werner's head cleared. He did feel better. No longer nauseated nor racked with spasms, he felt light headed and feverish, but more able to function. He felt the sting of the

needle when Stange removed the IV cannula from his arm.

He tried to sit up. Better. "Well, so far so good, " Stange said as he helped him turn to sit on the edge of the bed. "There isn't anyone here who will willingly come within fifty meters of this room. They are sure you have some kind of virulent plague."

Are you sure I don't? thought Werner. Aloud he said, "What now, Sir?"

"We've got about an hour before it is full dark. You need to get dressed, perhaps eat a little soup, walk around a little to get your legs back under you. You're still a bit feverish, so don't rush it. Things are progressing nicely. We go at twenty one hundred hours. I've talked with your men. They'll be ready."

"How...?"

"There's going to be an illegal torchlight demonstration in front of the building. There will also be an equally illegal counter-demonstration. The whole thing is staged, of course, but there will be lots of shouting, pushing and shoving. In the confusion, we're out the window and gone. Our comrades will be waiting for us. In a few hours we will be aboard the SS Alberta headed for Argentina."

"Please don't think I'm not grateful. Just confused. Why me, and how...?"

"Werner, you know SS don't leave their comrades. For the last few months I've been working with Skorszeny's ODESSA, rescuing as many of our men as I can. My cover is badly blown now, and he has ordered me to go with you. Our main plan is to take the ten of your boys who are in most danger. Those born after 1928 are



scheduled to be released because of their age. Older men will probably face execution. So we will bring the younger ones along later, take the ten who were born before '28 now."

"Then what?"

"Frankly, I don't know. This will buy us time. Where we go from there will depend on a lot of factors which I don't know and don't want to know now. What I don't know, I can't tell if I'm captured." Stange paused, hesitated, then continued "Werner, I don't want to sound melodramatic, but I don't intend to be taken alive. I carry one of these " he held out a rubber coated capsule. "It's something the Abwehr developed, they call it an L-tablet. It's harmless unless the coating is broken, then it's very fast. You can hold it in your mouth, even swallow it without danger, but if you bite into it..." Stange looked away. "Anyway, I have to ask you...do you want one?"

Werner held out his hand. "Please. Anything is better than being hanged." The two men looked at each other for a long moment.

Then Stange grinned, and said "Well, let's get on with it." He rummaged in a duffle bag, tossed some clothes and equipment on the bed. " Time to get dressed." Quickly the two men donned dark sweaters and jeans. Black watch caps and some camo paint added for effect, and two scruffy, sinister characters looked at each other and burst out laughing. "What a pair we look! I wouldn't trust either of us for a moment."

"Beauty is only skin deep," intoned Werner sententiously. "But who wants to be skinned?" Stange tossed him a P-38 and a box of ammunition. Werner loaded the clip, slipped it into the pistol,

then loaded the spare clip. He shoved the rest of the rounds into his pocket. He clipped the pistol holster to his belt, slipped a slim knife into the pocket in his boot, then he fastened a short, serrated blade to the back of the collar of his shirt, concealed by the heavy sweater.

Stange, similarly equipped, stood at the window, peering intently. Werner joined him. In the distance they could hear shouting, singing, yelling. Soon the flickering torches could be seen. Although he could not make out what the placards said, evidently it was suitably inflammatory. As the procession rounded the corner of the building, they were evidently met by an enthusiastic opposition, for the shouting intensified, there were blasts of police whistles and sirens. Stange stared into the darkness. Two flashes. He opened the window, answered with three quick blinks from the small flashlight he held. Then he quickly uncoiled a length of rope which was clipped to the leg of the heavy table he had pushed against the window. He quickly climbed out on the wide ledge. "Piece of cake" he whispered as he held out his hand to Werner. Quickly the two men descended the rope hand over hand.

Shadowy figures rose around them as they reached the ground. "This way, sir, quick" whispered one of the black garbed men. Werner and Stange were hustled into a waiting truck, which moved off, slowly at first so as not to attract unwelcome attention, then accelerated to Autobahn pace. They became aware of other men in the truck. Stange watched, smiling, as the young soldiers greeted their sergeant.



"We knew you would get us out, one way or another, sarge." Werner demurred, but they would not hear it. The truck rolled down the Autobahn filled with laughing, singing soldiers. They were on their way.

As his trimly efficient secretary, or, as she liked to be called, administrative assistant left his office, closing the heavy walnut door behind her, Dave Bronski looked about with satisfaction. The postwar years had been good to him. He was a full partner in the law firm now, married, with three children, nice house in Connecticut. His investments were doing well, and he liked his work. He gazed with satisfaction at the tastefully framed photographs of his wife and children, his degrees, and finally at a small cherry frame which contained a postcard picturing a view of Buenos Aires. When asked, he told people that it was a souvenir of his first case. He thought of the message on the back. Unsigned, it read, in neat German script, "Thanks again for the water." He lifted his eyes and smiled, an unspoken toast to the man who, in other circumstances, he could have called friend.

Carla von Keltner

185 Elmerston Rd

Rochester, NY 14620