

*Złudne nadzieje! Próżno uchem mężę  
pytają ziemi. W ziemi spokój głuchy.  
Czasami zda się, że dźwięczy oręż -  
nie, to niewolnik potrząsa łańcuchy  
I wiele rzeki, wiele wód uniosły  
lecz ani flota, ni zbawcze zastępy.....*

## **Chapter 4. The concentration camp.**

*Perfect robbery: reject people, taking everything that remains - behind the barbed wires – sense or absurd of persistently prolonged struggle – the overwhelming majority prefers to await passively the French soldiers – is it possible that a future traitor may look so ordinary?*

November 11th, 1939. They came late. It was about 11 pm. It was already two days – or at least one and a half – too late to save Angus' reputation. He had proclaimed – to his mother, the neighbors and all living souls he could find to speak to – that all tenants from their house and the other houses on the block would be arrested on the 9th of November. Or perhaps the following night. Nobody took this seriously, nobody believed him.

And then nothing happened on the predicted night, nor on the next. Angus felt so silly, so full of shame that he dared not speak with the befriended elderly women, living in the same house in the flats above and below – let alone other, possibly less forgiving, acquaintances. His information had proved wrong, ordinary nonsense. He probably hadn't understood the papers seen in the black Mercedes and had made a bad guess. It was good, in fact, that the people had ignored his words, let's hope with time they would forget it.

Today, after his older, already mature cousin Stephanie had left (to be able to reach Podłoziny before the curfew), he and mother had debated for quite some time about all and nothing.

Mother was busy unpacking the heavy suitcase full of the nonperishable food that Stephanie had brought from Podłoziny, as much as she was able to carry.

"Angus, do eat a little of it. We already have too much now, we will not be able to eat it all till the end of war, even if it takes months now."

Mother, pessimistic by nature, talked about months, but Angus like most people firmly believed the war would end within weeks.

"But Ma, I swear I can't. We already had supper, and then with Stephanie visiting you insisted on making tea and some more sandwiches. I am full already. Besides, this is long-keeping food, it will not spoil for years and we can as well eat it after the war."

For sure the ham, sausages and all sorts of meat, heavily smoked and dry, the best homemade for the farm's own use, could last. Some of the meat was so hard, it would be formidable work to cut it with a knife, easier to crush with a mallet.

"But we have other supplies in stock, too, that won't keep so well. As we have now so much of the excellent long-keeping supplies, you could eat a little more of the regular food. I think you look worse now, you should get more strength, eating."

Angus absolutely could not. And this was typical of Ma; she always overfed and in every way over-cared for him. Anyway, his main interest was war, and with conversation drifting to this subject, his mother explained from her own experience that hunger always follows wars, lasting long after. So it is better to eat well, while possible. Unpacking the supplies took much time – not an easy task, with the whole apartment overfilled because Mother remembered the hard time of World War I. In the last week's she had been constantly buying like crazy, not only food. There were mountains of soap, cleaning and washing powders, yarn, materials, all types of supplies in every corner and cubbyhole. The Germans, rather scratchily fed and unaccustomed to so much plentitude, were competitive in buying. (They believed in "guns, not butter" in Germany; and by the way, Ma melted butter, washed it several times with warm water and then put it into clay pots, where it could keep for years.) But the stores for a longtime remained full of commodities, overflowing with goods.

So it was long past his regular bedtime when he heard it first, as he was falling asleep, the noise of many motors.

Putting out the light, he uncovered the window and looked onto the street, crammed with many cars – a long column – and many soldiers. They opened with loud banging on the front doors of the houses.

"They came for someone" – Ma did not yet catch the purpose of this night's assault.

There followed a much louder banging on the doorway of their house, next to the door of their apartment. So they did finally come, for all of us. How lucky, that cousin Stefa had already left. Despite the shock, he felt a certain satisfaction that he was right, his information

now confirmed. But it was not the time to think about this. He had already started to dress.

"Aufmachen! Schnell! – Open, quick!" There were three soldiers, one petty officer and one civilian holding some papers.

"Name? Ja, es stimmt – in order. Is anybody else here? OK, you have fifteen minutes to dress, you may take a few personal belongings, but let's remember, you have a long way ahead and if you are not able to walk, it will be worse for you. So quick now, get out on the street – to follow further orders. Move!"

"But what we have done? What are we arrested for?"

"You are not under arrest, only temporarily detained. This is a "Geheime Reichssache" – State business, you have to obey German orders, any violation will be mit dem Tode bestraft – punished by death."

Angus' mother translated this to her son and told him to dress as quickly as possible. Then there was further talk that Angus could not understand, and Ma could not translate, because the Germans took her to the neighboring chamber, demanded some papers, asking questions. More talk, already the fifteen minutes had passed, the next fifteen and more, and finally they dismissed her, shouting "Los! Schnell! Los! – Fast! Move!" In fact, they were already late on the street, most of the people already in the buses, some helped not too gently at all with gun barrels. A vehicle door opened nearby, it was luckily not a truck but a bus, so Mother managed to board quickly enough. Angus, ready to defend her if necessary (a natural, but not clever idea), jumped after her. The soldiers closed the door, secured it with a padlock, and the column started to move off.

In the dark interior of this bus, driven by The Enemy to the dark destination, for the unknown terrible purpose – absurdly Angus was feeling deeply, intensely happy, on the brink of euphoria. For almost two months now he had feared most of all that his mother would force him to crawl into the safe hole she was busily preparing – to stay there free of any danger until the end of the war. After all, being only a woman – she could never understand, that a man could under no circumstances, could on no-account do this, would prefer death not once, but many times to such disgrace. It was a time of a great national emergency. The Homeland was in need, like in the books, but this time for real and perhaps even more critically. It was an exceptional privilege to live in such historic times and it was important for him to do his duty – like everybody else. If he did as his mother expected – he would be a rat, a louse. Yet how could he explain this simple truth to her?

In the background there remained one more sinister prospect. The only danger Angus was deadly afraid of was cowardice. Being a young boy with too much imagination, he lacked self-confidence, he lacked self-reliance. He wanted to be a hero, but in the night he awoke sometimes in panic from a dream in which he proved really to be a coward, the creature he despised most. For some time he examined himself, exploring if there were evident marks of fear.

So it had been on the evacuation, under the hail of bullets, but after all he did not so bad, he managed to regain his self-control in time; and so it was again, back in Poznań. What if he was, deep inside, ready and comfortable to accept Ma's directives? Was he not faking excuses for himself, keeping up the appearances for his conscience's sake? Sometimes he felt so bad, he considered seeking out a high building, seizing one of the German banners and throwing himself below, or attacking any German on the street and getting killed, to prove himself no coward. He managed to reason this to be, if there happened no other exceptional occasion, worth it. But he vowed, if he ever noticed the marks of changing into a spineless worm, a worthless parasite, he would not wait a minute longer, would take his life this very moment, before losing the rest of resolution. Before anybody else might find him out – before his miserable cowardice could become known and denounced by real, brave men.

But this November night The Enemy had solved this problem for him and his mother.

There could not be any hiding, any search for personal safety. They were arrested, captured, would probably be sent to a prison. Now remained only one possibility: to fight back. If earlier some people – his mother, for example – had not been ready to take this path, now they had nothing to lose anymore. Dispossessed and imprisoned, they could only fight for their lives. Only if the Germans failed, could there be any future, any hope. And perhaps God himself had arranged this course, had heard his prayers, had decided to end his distress and misery.

Probably they would not be shot straight away. If this were the plan – there was no need for so much ceremony and expense – the column of cars, transport. Also, when they were still in the apartment they had heard a short salvo and some single shots from the back window, probably from the space between the park and the old Hugger brewery. The petty officer said to Ma something like – this was the way to proceed with individuals who did not obey German orders and tried to run. Execute them without further ceremony.

The prisoners discussed this episode afterwards among themselves. There were rumors that some people not living on Śniadeckich Street – maybe visiting acquaintances or relatives – were not able to reach their own quarters before the curfew, and were hiding or running away. Between five and nine people had been executed on the spot. But with the bodies taken away, there was no way to learn the exact details.

The Germans cleared the corpses and cleaned all the apartments before the arrival of the new settlers, their compatriots. Angus heard after the war that these new colonists amazed from delight, finding everything magnificently prepared for their arrival. They got not only the basic needs, but all accommodations, with full larders, even milk and rolls, if not exactly too fresh (on average two days old). Beds made up with linens and more bedclothes prepared in drawers, even suits and clothes – absolutely everything, they thought it the tip of the best German organization. A special delegation delivered thanks to the local Nazi management.

The delegation received a standard answer: "All this you owe to our Fuehrer and Germany and surely you shall remember this and pay back your debt in the war, with your work and if necessary, on battlefield. After the victory you shall get not only this but also much more of other people's property. As it was not possible to know earlier who would go to which flat, maybe some clothes don't fit your family; if so, change them between yourselves."

Angus, meanwhile, traveling through the dark, felt a surge of deep personal sympathy, unity with all the known and unknown people on this bus – on all the buses and trucks, in the entire column. They were his own people, almost family. The sole objects he had taken from the house, besides the clothes on his back, were a blanket in one hand – and a pound jar of hard candy in the other. This was not exactly to eat, as he had never liked sweets, but he thought they could be of use on the way. He started to propose them to his neighbors, and then round the bus. After the Germans orders and shouts, after the doors closing and the bus starting – all within sat as dazed – no words, no movement, deadly incommunicado. Immersed in themselves, as if they were out cold. Now they took sweets and gave automatic thanks - perhaps unwillingly, only to be left in peace. Nevertheless the spell broke; they came out of shock, started to live again. The first words fell.

They did not understand what had happened to them. Were they all arrested? But all the blocks, the whole street – what for? They could not realise being suddenly robbed of all private property. The neighbor

from the next flat over – a lawyer working in the district court of justice – explained authoritatively that this must be some misunderstanding. Impossible, after a few hours, in the worst case a day or two, dismissed they would return to their houses.

“Maybe with some exceptions, if the Germans are seeking some concrete person or anyone. But there exists still some measure of law and order, the civilian population of the occupied territory protect the international resolutions which Germany accepted and must respect. Whatever wrong the Germans may do, perhaps even making some wrongful laws – they are always strict in applying the existing law and order. In short, whatever one may say – they are not wild people but at least have a certain degree of civilization – and such an action would be impossible. It would mean anarchy, a breaking of all laws and all order. Perhaps they had some grounds for speedy police action and some inexperienced young magistrate or local administration overreacted but will be put in place by a higher authority or by the German government. The matter is not a simple one and they will learn this the hard way. Even if they back out this minute, they have already placed themselves in an uncomfortable position regarding the legality.”

He was certain of this and gave his professional opinion that in a short time the issues would clarify.

### **Capsule: Views of a silly greenhorn about the history of the German-Polish conflict.**

Angus listened in silence; being only a kid only he could not interfere in adult men’s conversation. Nevertheless he found this all a stupid, absurd, bizarre chatter. What is it – impossible, never done? For him the events of the night were natural. He knew from history and from his readings in serious scientific books – not to mention the adventure novels – that many tribes of Western Slavs living on the territory between Poland and Germany became exterminated. Murdered to the last man by every possible means from war to treason, from sword to poison, in time of wars and in deep peace. If some few managed to save their lives – it was exactly these survivors who, fleeing to the closely related Polish tribes (for Poland was only just forming in those days) sounded the alarm. Next it was Poland itself which came under attack. Only after many years of bitter and cruel war, the greatest of Polish kings, Bolesław Chrobry – Boleslaw the Brave – would be able to stop the German onslaught by desperate efforts. It was mostly luck, granted, but also clever reasoning; the first Polish kings found a powerful ally and protector in the Pope and a Roman Curiae. Mutual interest as well as

very expensive protection, but this paid off, both at the time and in the future.

However, the flood stopped only temporarily. If the Germans never made such an all-out effort as in the first twenty years of the eleventh century, the "Drang nach Osten" (the east drive) continued, at least by a part of the Germans. The Germans, divided now, fought busily between themselves. Nevertheless even a fraction of the German power was now too much, because the Poles themselves were enmeshed in similar internal struggles. In result Poland lost all its western provinces, not to mention two kings (to be exact, one king and one senior prince) murdered in deep peace by hirelings directed from the German territory.

And then the situation became critical again because of a specialized death force, considered by Angus to be an equivalent and forerunner of the SS, the Crest Society of the Teutonic Order. It most effectively restarted a mass genocide and exterminated whole nations, the most impressive example being the extinction of the ancient Prussia. The nation of Prussi, or Borussi, was one of the most astonishing particularities in Europe. This was a people who first realized the now-so-fashionable style of living in full harmony with nature and besides developed a form of maximum democracy, a form now called a primitive democracy, with full civil rights. In fact, such a full liberty it was on the brink of almost full anarchy. Still, they created a mature, developed society, in fact so specialized that it lost the potential to react elastically in a crisis and perished in a confrontation with the unexpected. Despite Angus' efforts, he could not get enough information and learned too little about this early democracy – nothing strange, considering few people had ever heard much about it. Alas, because this was a curious and scientifically interesting evolution of society, a unique study of sociology. For example, there is an analogy with the historic development of institutions in Switzerland, notably the use of the referendum. But also it did have a negative aspect, excluding women – it was a democracy restricted to men. As any contact between the tribes of Balts and Helvets seems rather unlikely, the only assumption is there must be some natural way for development of democracy in isolated societies. Angus had no special knowledge, but considered the ancient Prussi as somehow halfway between the American Indians and contemporary Tarzans.

In fact, they were formidable men – they might indeed have been models for the supermen in popular comics. The Poles of the time learned this the hard way, in the wars. Coming several times with a bigger, better armed and organized and disciplined army – they had

always to recede with bloody noses, if seemingly meeting almost no resistance. A strong army could always invade and occupy Prussia, but was always unable to keep it. It would be unhealthy to remain there and a hard business to come out in one-piece. And this although even in time of war, the Prussians respected their private liberty first, with no discipline at all, only goodwill. Everyone had the right to decide for himself – even in this, if he wanted to fight at all. They did have some chosen or natural leaders – but in rather an advisory role based on experience and personal authority. Nobody had to obey them and could quit any time, if he preferred. Each family had its own territory, separated and fortified according to natural obstacles, and there was not one constant site, but several diffusely placed and secret semi-dugouts with different roles. All were hard to find, almost invisible, because always the natural environment remained intact. The kitchen might be a kilometer away from the bedroom. Bathrooms, there might be several of them, also some distance away (so much care with hygiene astonished the people of the Middle Ages). Several stockpiles of food in separate accommodations, and so on. They knew every animal and plant on their territory, and took care of them, if for their own benefit, but did not use much agriculture. Yet the life standard was unexpectedly high.

However the death forces of the Teutonic Order wiped out these tribes of superhuman Tarzans, destroyed them so completely, that now only the name remains. But by some inhuman irony the name applies now to the descendants of the exterminators. Or of the German colonists, who came after destroying in full the men with their forests and environment, destroying almost all living creatures, except the fish and birds. Next they build from the ground up, first the castles and then all the basic structures of functioning of the destroyed area.

After taking possession of Prussia, the Teutonic Order turned against Poland. Never before had wars been led in so cruel a manner – it even surprised the contemporary peoples. Surely the recent invasion of the Mongols had been an example of planned terror – but one organized with some order and reason – the Mongols' purpose was the paralyzing of the defense. They considered terror as a rational means to success and it ended there. But the raids of Teutonic Order were special; to kill all seemed the sole purpose – death to the warriors, as well to the unarmed civilian population, women and children. The raiders killed even their own wounded to be able to move with speed. The killers, although nominally Christian monks, spared neither the churches nor the priests. It is because of this the events are all so well documented – Curia of the Catholic Church several times conducted independent investigations,

sending their own delegates, who have left us shattering reports. This time Poland lost not only the external provinces – the inner core of central Poland was deeply invaded. One part of the primary foundation of Poland, Kujawy, taken and lost – the other, called Great Poland, penetrated and destroyed. Luckily this extreme danger met with desperate means temporarily stopped. After a bad crisis Poland united again, was slowly gaining strength – and an all-out appeal of the Church and the force of opinion of Christian Europe helped a little too.

With Poland now able to better defend its territory, the Order turned next to Lithuania. The Lithuanians were close relatives of the Prussi, but living in a different social order. The Prussi had developed, as we have seen, a stable social pattern, based on extreme personal liberty in a primitive direct democracy, a near institutional anarchy. As well, an intimate coexistence fully integrated with the natural environment. This society was almost hermetically sealed, developed to perfection and not interested in change. The Lithuanians, meanwhile, were a young strong nation of expanding warriors. Recently they had pushed into the vast territories subjected by the Tatars and firstly held by the Slavic tribes.

These Lithuanians now faced a crisis similar to that of the Poles – refugees from Prussia who had the luck to escape alive gave the alarm to the Lithuanians, speaking almost the same tongue. Nevertheless, with time the crisis became so severe the Lithuanians held a public debate like a referendum. Wondered if it would not be better to leave their native land altogether and seek a new one, perhaps in one of the newly taken provinces. But they were able to hold out for a time, fighting with changing luck, and finally the logical solution resulted: the Lithuanians and the Poles, both nations badly oppressed, united against the Teutonic Order. They carried out this by a marriage of the ruling Lithuanian Prince with the Polish Queen, and in many years of bitter struggle they stopped the offensive against the central Lithuanian territory. They defended the capital, Wilno, and then beat the hell out of the greatest army the Teutonic Order was ever able to raise, in the greatest battle fought for many centuries in central Europe.

The united nations, not prepared for such a decisive victory, did not put an end to the Order, only to its further expansion, and war returned several times after. But it was the start of a rapid development of the new union state that became one of the first-class powers in Europe. A liberal, multinational and multireligious organization emerged, which attracted many people and nations – one could say on lines similar to the USA now. As an example, the German population of the Teutonic Order decided of its own will to stop its harsh rule and come over to

Poland. The people attracted by the liberties and – for these ages – progressive laws and order, with minimal interference into the lives of the subjects (and low taxes). This, in the end, caused the final liquidation of the Christ Order State. The German people never had cause to regret this decision and remained to the end of the union state its most loyal citizens. This was nothing exceptional – in fact for a longtime everybody who could do so, from single men to many little nations or fractions of big ones, tried to come and live in this free and liberal country. But eventually it degenerated because of the stupidity and extreme egotism of the ruling class – the Polish nobility first and main, but the others as well; the Lithuanian nobility did not act any better. In short, it ceased to be a good place for everybody. With growing nationalism, the end of tolerance, oppressing religions and minorities, the union state came down. Now the flow inverted, as people tried not to come in, but to emigrate. The case of the Jews may serve as an example. Through the ages, over nine tenths of European Jews had come to live in Poland. Now started the drift back; at first only the richest, the most educated, emigrated back to Germany and Austria and next to the rest of Europe. Another example is the fighting in the Ukraine, where the cause was oppressing the common people by the Ukrainian gentry. The religious disturbances followed a flush of bigotry in a state which was famous for religious liberty, although the scale of the conflict was still incomparably smaller than in the rest of Europe.

It is a natural sequence for every society to have a time of decline.

But the final disaster followed exactly when Poland was beginning to regenerate. For a longtime the Polish-German border was stable, and the relations between these nations improved. Now the Germans, to be exact the expanding rapacious Kingdom of Prussia, offered guaranties and a treaty of common defense against Russia that was a direct provocation and a false play followed by treason. In fact, making a common cause with Russia, this Prussian king invaded and captured all of Poland, with Lithuania taken by Russia. This division changed after the Napoleonic wars – the Germans, no longer able to hold all of Poland, decided to divide it with Russia, which gained a great part including Warsaw. The Germans held the richer and densely populated first former Polish territory with the historical capitals Poznań and Kraków.

The Poles, however, managed to survive as a people and keep their identity – probably less a result of patriotic feeling than because of their extreme individualism or insubordination. This is what is perhaps the essence of their character, the spirit of their personality. Parallel with the pressure grew the resistance, generation after generation fighting –

only to be cut down – and the next continuing from the same place; silly, impractical suckers. For a longtime the position remained hopeless, with only some impact made, as we have seen, on the conscience of the people, on world opinion. But finally they profited, after the First World War changed the state of affairs and the revival of Poland became considered rational and necessary. Members of Angus' family had in fact fought in the last – the only – effective and victorious uprising in 1918/19 (one had even lost his life), so this was for Angus something personal. Not to mention that he had eagerly read the many books about latest one and a half centuries of captivity – these were for him the heroic times, the times of his daydreams. The times in which he would have wished to live and to fight.

The comical aspect of Angus' knowledge was, there was a foregone conclusion to any struggle in which he might now take part, if he were to believe the books; he took indeed the position of Don Quixote. But this was not a funny time.

Obviously Angus' beliefs on the history of Polish-German relations, strongly one-sided, were only true in part (some truth but not the whole truth), badly biased and twisted. And a lie is most dangerous if it includes some truth, because such an ingredient supplies the persuading power. It was not to be until the last year of the war that Angus would realize there were, now and before, ever – some fine and proper Germans, also some who were unhappy and oppressed, no less than the Poles. Some, probably many, had the heart on the right side, great men and noble, and this was their bad luck. This came as a shock to Angus, as if all worlds flipped inside out. It was still war, with the eventuality to kill or to be killed, but the Enemy became human.

Nevertheless if his early judgment was unfair, nationalistic in the extreme – even worse, chauvinistic – we must remember that Angus was a boy of eleven and in the existing situation many adult men shared this black and white, simple picture. This was like what the scientists call a working theory; for years it was in good accordance with all observations and provided a rational explanation for events. That being so, it was a logical assumption the Nazi leaders must believe so too – be sure, the "Drang nach Osten" (conquer of East) is a higher need. Hitler after failing to win over Poland, his first bad mistake, was to effect this program radically by most inhuman means. Ideas influence ideas, they work both ways and the German racist propaganda made a temporary impact on Angus' mind, with one correction only – he considered the Poles the superior race, and Germans the inferior, subhuman.

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Therefore Angus considered the lawyer's lecture about law silly, absurd, almost bizarre. This was not an ordinary war – not only because never properly declared – this was clearly an armed robbery, with mass murder in prospect. To apply any law it was necessary to bring the criminals to justice – but the criminals themselves were the victors and judges now. Nevertheless, if naive, this talk had a soothing effect on the shocked people.

"Dear counselor," asked one of the women, "I hope you are right and we will come back to our homes, but do you think I shall recover my jewelry? They demanded all gold and foreign currency, they said if I do not give it all, if they find anything hidden, they will shoot me for breaking German laws."

"Well, now, this is another and difficult matter. I presume you do not have any paper, any written evidence for that?"

"No, I don't. I demanded a written signature of confiscation, but the commanding officer took the gun in his hand and said, he can give me a receipt better than written on paper."

"There you are. And you probably don't have any witness, or only family members, which they would call subjective – and besides you would not put members of your family in jeopardy. We may consider all this carefully some other day, after we are back in our houses – but you must be realistic. In a war there are sometimes cases of extortion or plain robbery which are difficult to prove, and even a take on to get proof may be dangerous."

Curiously enough, this opinion further persuaded and encouraged the people. Here spoke a man who was clever and experienced indeed, presenting not a cheap optimism, but a sound, balanced juristic opinion. A touch of cynicism only added weight to his former judgment. If some losses had to be expected, so a total loss became less probable. The travelers began to talk more freely, more readily, drifting now to the possible destination of the journey. The windows covered with metal, or possibly only painted, restricted the view – but there were some gaps in and it was feasible to take a look out by holding an eye to them. Nevertheless it was dark and the column moved with dimmed lights, the headlights also partially covered with paint, so the bearings were not easy to recognize.

"I think there is not a prison where we are going. Yes, it seems we are already leaving the city limits. Perhaps they are driving us to the old fortifications? But it is not the direction of Fort 7." (This Fort 7 already

had won the worst possible name as provisional prison and place of many murders.) But the speculations ended in short time. The bus halted, turned; armed men in uniforms, probably soldiers, opened the doors and there sounded a command:

“Alle raus! Schnell! Schnell!”

Angus jumped out one of the first and helped his mother, then stood for a second blinded with the glare of many brilliant lights after the darkness. More soldiers came, “helping” with cuffs and kicks, some with rifle butts. As his eyes adapted, he became aware of the many trucks and buses, the people herded together in the center of a broad yard.

“Frauen and Kinder nach Kolumn links! Men and boys over fourteen form to the right!”

Naturally with all the older people knowing the German language, there was never any problem with understanding, as there may be in other parts of Poland. And the younger ones like Angus could guess or get explanations readily enough. Nevertheless the Germans did have some interpreters, from the people taken before – and a good thing it was now. The segregation alarmed the crowd.

“We will not separate! If to die – better together!”

But the translators were already busy, persuading:

“This is not for execution. We are Polish people taken yesterday – like you now – and still alive. This is only one of the German rules – separate barracks for men and women. Anyway after 7 o'clock in the morning you will be free to walk around in the enclosure – so families will find one another, but now better obey and be quick. If you delay, the Germans will beat you up and separate by force.”

And so the two columns started forming. Meanwhile Angus had had a better chance to cast an eye around. The beams shining on them were not car lights, these all were dark now. The lights were overhead, some hanging on cables – and some installed on curious constructions, like great boxes or small kiosks on high legs of wood, exactly like the hut of the bad witch. There were black outlines of men with round hats holding in their hands something like short pipes, pierced with multiple holes. Along one side low buildings, on the other trucks and buses, and behind them a barrier, no, a hedge of high stakes with wires between (in fact it was the barbed wire, but he could not see it distinctly). And the lamps on the constructions were moving – yes – now he had it! This was a concentration camp – exactly as he had read about! The constructions were watch turrets with soldiers and machine-guns!

Angus looked at the column of men with envy. Being a boy of eleven years only – he had to go with the women and children. If only

he was – say, a whole thirteen years old! Anyway, his mother might need him now indeed – so it was better there was not a question of separation. She was still a little dazzled, not fully understanding the new situation – not even aware of the total loss of all assets, possessions, all belongings. She was still thinking on small details, he could tell.

Now they were moving – the column of men further – the women and children directed to the nearest buildings and divided between two of them. Angus with his mother and others came into a long, low barrack, dimly lit by a few weak electric bulbs hanging in one row along the long axis of the building. The floor was plain cement, but on both sides along the walls lay planks, making up long platforms less than two meters wide and divided at intervals of about seven meters, forming sections for ten people to sleep. That first night there was no need to follow a strict order, for many spots remained free. Only as more prisoners came afterwards, the barrack crowded fully and the sleepers had to double up – eventually even to roll over at the same time. In the middle there was a long table with two rows of benches, all from rough wooden planks, and two narrow passages. That was that and they were told not to sit now, but lay down and be quiet, best to sleep. After seven thirty they could go out without risk – but in the night anyone outside could be shot on sight, especially if found out near the fences.

There was nothing to do but to obey. The wooden planks, if hard indeed, were better than cement – at least forming some separation from the floor. Mother laid the heavier bedroll she carried on the wood; she and Angus would sleep under their coats and the light blanket. Mother started already to complain – why did not anyone remember to take some pillows – if only a small one – she had, hmm, fourteen of them in her apartment – or was there one more? Could not Angus think of this, having nothing important to do? She kept on and on explaining, why she had been unable to do it herself.

“They told me we had fifteen minutes to get out of our flat – but they demanded I show them all currency, gold and valuables.” Mother in sheer terror of the armed soldiers, even more so of the armed civilian, gave up for their inspection the large envelope, or rather portfolio with all the bonds, loans and actions she had. They started to get busy with this, only to receive finally a disappointment. Actions and bonuses of the Polish enterprises, obligations of the Polish State, even of the Polish Bank – these they considered of no value at all. Anyway these companies, enterprises, this all was already taken in German trust with a prospect of confiscation by “das Reich.” But they became mighty excited about the pages of the so-called “dolarówka” that were in fact bonds of

the Polish State as well, only named in American dollars as the standard world value. These loans happened, before the Polish złoty proved itself as in fact the most stable currency in Europe and almost the whole world – during the time between the wars. Nevertheless they could not understand this – it took some explaining. As they finally grasped the situation, they got so angry they eventually tore up some of the papers. In the end they took Mother's rings only, and allowed her to take the rest of the papers in the portfolio – the papers were indeed worthless in the days to come.

But examining the papers and all that followed, took time – exceeding the allowed quarter hour useless wasted by the German demands. Afterwards it was a blur, a couple of minutes only she had to dress and for everything else. Because of this she didn't take any more than did her son. Besides the portfolio with the useless papers – she took one heavier blanket covered with cotton and a little cold meat and bread (matching the blanket and tin of candy taken by Angus).

Yet there was something else, but she had the sound common sense not to mention a word about this to her son, nor to anyone else. Despite the danger and the threats she managed to hide and smuggle secretly her gold – one-piece only, but the most valuable piece of jewelry she owned – a large locket medallion set with stones, many small diamonds. It contained a photo and a little wisp of hair of her other son, dead now in early infancy, a brother George known to Angus only from parental reminiscences. It was not possible to hold on to this material bit of memory long, but when she sold it, she created the possibility to survive some of the most critical months of the war. The photo and the lock of hair she kept to her death and took with her to the coffin.

Angus did not know well his own mother, it took him many more years to realize there was a second person behind the common, average surface toward which he felt a protective superiority. More so, with time he realized that he could never understand her fully. First, although rather talkative, she never said a word not intended, involuntary. Angus could not hold his tongue quiet even after the passage of years. Even when he considered himself a fully grown and experienced conspirator he could not control himself; if nothing more, at least to throw out some mysterious remark, some dark hint. Not so his mother, she never said anything unnecessary, anything contrary to her best interest; it was as if

she entirely forgot anything she did not want to know. Perhaps Angus should have suspected this, hearing her reminiscences of those first days of the war, of the evacuation. She always "forgot" to mention the moment, the plane machine-gunned her making three turns, hunting for her alone. If someone else mentioned this fact, she referred to it shortly and in a matter of fact way, changed the subject. Now, Angus in her place would have boasted over the incident to the max.

Another example might be some documents she burned after the German army occupied Poznań. Angus in surprise took a look at them at the last second – they were thanks and acknowledgments from the People's Council and the Military Command of the uprising in Great Poland, dated 1920. Angus was curious and kept asking questions but she never answered, not even after the war. He was all the more curious after he worked out that at the time of the uprising his mother had been elsewhere – still in the evacuation train from Russia. All he could glean through the years was that, after the fighting was over in 1919, she had frequently visited Berlin and Germany up to the border with France, also part of France with Paris included. But this was his guesswork taken from her reminiscences told in old age to her grandchildren, rather neutral and mentioning minor matters only. For example how the small gardens by the house were kept in France and what French people preferred for breakfast. Or, what a Berliner would like for dinner, what living conditions were in Berlin after WW I.

To the age of almost one hundred years she would only answer any specific question about her own doings in these places with "nothing important there, only mere trifles." And after that she started to lose her memory.

In emergency she was able to hold a remarkable cool head. If the facts above are not enough to uphold this conclusion, here is one more example taken not from "the first life" but rather from the "second," under the Soviet occupation. In May of 1945 when the security office sent men to arrest Angus and laid a trap in the house, she managed, living there for two days under close surveillance, to send out the message to him. This enabled him to make an escape, never return to this house. Probably a life-or-death matter; some of Angus' colleagues, soldiers of the former underground Home Army, never came back in similar scenarios.

On the other side she did not like any emergency and would go a long way to avoid it – not an enterprising spirit at all. And she isolated herself from people, was in fact rather misanthropic. It was because of this, as we have seen, that Angus became such bad mixer. Started new

acquaintances with difficulty – and lived much of the time in an imaginary world, not understanding a good deal of the real one nor of the people. His mother isolated him also to keep him away from what she considered bad influences – a clear case of over-protectiveness.

Now, hearing out her part of the story, Angus closed his eyes. He wanted not to sleep, but somehow sleep was exactly what happened.

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The next morning was dark and misty, though the days remained still sunny. But never mind the weather, the important matter was to get out and see the concentration camp. The immediate area was simple and rather Spartan: near one side of the barrack were primitive latrines, on the other a long overhang covering several taps with cold water. Taking off his outer clothes and shirt he washed as well as possible without soap, walked a little to get dry and came back to the barrack. His mother had already got a breakfast, something called “coffee” –not genuine, a dark but at least warm liquid. He could have a small satisfaction as his tin from the candy proved useful after all – it would have been impossible to get the “coffee” in bare hands. Later they were able to buy a second tin, their money was still good in the camp if the price a little expensive. They were told later there would be a piece of bread for the day, soup for dinner and again hot water for supper.

Naturally Mother commented again:

“Why didn’t we take some cups from the house, or some bowls, or spoons?” – and so on.

“But Ma, we sure can hold out a few days of discomfort? This all is interesting, even a little funny – and after we are back again in our home it will be fun to remember our adventure.”

“Yes, but who can tell when we shall be back – and what we shall find at home.”

“Even if we should find some losses – the Germans are responsible for them and there must be some remuneration after the war. This cannot take much more time; the French are ready by now and will beat the hell out of the Germans quickly. We were honest in our part of the deal. I really cannot understand what is taking them so long to do this, but maybe they are already over the Rhine without us knowing it. There is still splendid weather, ideal for an offensive.”

An example of wistful thinking – but not an isolated case – in fact shared almost by all and not without reason. The best moment for the French Army to win the war already passed – at the start of the Polish

campaign it outnumbered the German forces on the Rhine about by twenty to one, at the finish by ten to one. The Germans had some serious losses of men and more so of heavy equipment. Still more of the equipment needed immediate repairs or remained displaced in deep country, not to be extracted and transported for some time more. Little more than twenty percent, never as much as twenty-five percent, of tanks remained in-service. It was because of this that Hitler was not able to launch an offensive on the west front till late spring of 1940. The air force too needed time for regeneration and replacements.

The French Army was never any worse armed and equipped than the German. There was never, as in Poland's case, a task to fight with carbines against cannons or with a few pieces of artillery against tanks and planes. After bloody fighting the Germans had lost several times more men, had spent supplies and were badly positioned, while the French army had a full freedom of movement. A free potential to chose the time and place. In November they could surely still take, with the good weather, about half of Germany – and the rest could not hold out for long without the heavy industry lost in the Rhine area. But arms cannot fight alone – and there were not men of spirit and courage in command.

And so through the rest of the year stood the heavily armed French Army against the much worse armed Germans, doing nothing. Hitler not only had the opportunity to repair his tanks, but to double the Panzer Divisions, in fact with the superior Czechs tanks build for fighting the Germans.

Nobody in Poland suspected – no – nobody would believe – more, if anyone were to say something like the French simply want not to fight and will not fight at all – such a statement would be equal to blasphemy, like sacrilege. Such a person, if not directly lynched, would be treated as a traitor to the Germans.

Yet it is a fact, the treaties and alliances with Poland the French made with bad faith at first, only to use the Poles as first shock troops and to channel the German aggression in another direction, at least temporarily. The Allies never considered any need to act straight and proper; after the Poland catastrophe they looked only for the next candidate to take the beating. But France lost all credibility and the next in queue, Rumania, after such an example chose to come to terms with Hitler.

The British, if at the end of the war they acted even more dishonorably, at least used reasonably the time bought by treason, profited from it. But the French, acting not only unworthy but also

stupid, doing nothing, didn't profit for long. In fact they brought on themselves willingly the next year's calamity.

There is not much reason to admire Hitler's determination, considering what low sort of men (if men at all) he expected to meet as opponents. Holding at first most of the aces, and then for a longtime a stronger hand, the French lost the play miserably. The best strategist Germany had, the former Chief of the General Staff, General Ludwig Beck indeed presented the same opinion: there would be no way Germany could avoid disaster. If the French had started their offensive in time, they would have won the war in 1939.

They missed and Hitler took a gamble, a calculated risk, claiming the Allies had cold feet and would never move till he was ready for them. He was right so far, but this is not exactly a proof of superb intelligence, otherwise every nasty dog able to smell the sweat of fear on his victims would become a genius.

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By the provisional wooden overpasses near the ruptured bridges, across the river, flowed a thin but constant stream of people with bags, packages and bundles. The trams allowed transport only to the Old Market and from this place the townsfolk had to travel on foot, carrying food supplies and whatever they had to offer to the prisoners. The way lead first to the Śródka, next along Główna Street to the city border and further towards Czerwonak. There at the left side of the road stretched the Concentration Camp.

By the third day after their arrival Angus and his mother were already familiar with the place. Designed just the same as all concentration camps, it had the typical appearance, with three rows of barbed wire, watch turrets with machine guns and armed patrols. At night the patrols walked with dogs. Yet there was one basic difference: the guards consisted not of SS, but of temporaries from a secondary battalion of Wehrmacht, elderly soldiers. They were neither bloodthirsty nor brutal toward the prisoners. They acted strictly according to orders received, but avoided any problems with the principle "live and let live." In short, this made the camp indeed a concentration camp, but not a death camp. As before during the evacuation, Mother and Angus had some luck in their disaster, they hit an almost quiet niche, no imminent danger of death, except perhaps in the long run by hunger.

Theoretically the food for a prisoner should contain a minimum of a thousand calories, but the Germans lowered the norm to eight hundred.

In the first days it could have been no more than five hundred; one loaf for every eight people and a cup of thin vegetable soup for dinner, the warm water for breakfast and supper having only mechanical calories. In a long run the bad nutrition leads to decline of the body functions, and a drop in immunity. Up till now hunger had been the main cause of the high mortality in the camps. The average lifespan was about twelve months, depending on the energy expense, temperature and heaviness of work. But for a short period, there should be no bad effects. Angus declared to his mother that for up to one month on a low diet they would be not any worse, he had read so in many books. Ma answered, before a fat one goes thin, the thin may die twice and that's exactly what she had had in mind, encouraging Angus at home to eat.

Nevertheless the whole time it was a nonstop, mutual pressure from one to the other and back who should eat the scant supplies taken from the house, a bit of bread and some meat. Mother did all possible to feed it to her son; Angus declined to touch it. Finally they ate it together, because if it should rot and in the end not be good for anybody, that would indeed be an act of stupidity.

But before the midday cabbage soup a boy arrived with a message. Two women were waiting for Angus' mother – her sister Francesca and her niece Stephanie – in a small building occupied by the Camp Committee, near the guards' quarters. He was authorized to lead Mother to them; as for her son Angus, he could go with them to the enclosure, but must wait outside, because nobody mentioned him. Now this needs some explaining.

As mentioned, the camp was in an early stage of construction, which demanded solving many problems. The commanding officer temporarily accepted the norms of POW camps, which included some internal self-administration (normally performed by a prisoner of the highest rank). The purpose is the convenience of the guards; such internal organization is more efficient.

In this case, the commanding officer allowed forming a Camp Committee from the prisoners of higher social status and civic authority. He delegated to them the power to organize the work teams, to seek out the professionals and the "gold hands." But the Camp Committee did even more, solving on the first day two of the problems most urgent for the camp: a supply of timbers and other materials, and financing. The commanding officer had orders to build the camp, but not the necessary materials, at least not shortly and there was also a delay in getting the financial means. For him the successful achievement of this task was

only a question of ambition, but the most distressed parties would be the prisoners.

The ordinary people (including Angus) did not know all this. What they noticed was that after two nights of sleeping on hard planks they got some straw and the loose boards, hammered together, formed pallets which could be covered with the straw. Yet for the German Commander the most important fact was, he got the materials for free, without any payment needed. A gift of the still free to the prisoners.

After the successful solution of the first economic problem, the German Commander was ready to hear more suggestions. So on the territory of the camp a second committee formed, a Help Committee, cooperating closely with the Camp Committee. This was a curiosity; the Help Committee could act only in the camp; outside, in the town, it was illegal. Formally it had no right to exist, only here the command tolerated it. Yet it consisted of still-free men, some of them allowed into the camp temporarily to meet the prisoners. The agreement was, the prisoners might receive food and such personal things as clothes and blankets from their relatives or friends, almost without limits. Half of the small building which housed the Camp Committee served now for the imprisoned receivers and their visitors. The visitors naturally must first present the packages for inspection by the guards and gain permission and a temporary pass; after this they could meet their people in the detached room. Now, being part of this control was indeed a desirable work. It was a common practice for the soldiers to receive some part of the products. To be just one must say, at first they were not greedy and they never divided it by halves, which would be the most natural practice. Most often they took about a quarter, and sometimes they put aside demonstrably only a small part. In fact, they were neither able to eat all the food, nor send to their scratchily fed families all the big and heavy packages. (There was no direct hunger in Germany; however... "Kanonnen statt Butter.") One might say, for the common soldiers it was like the Biblical manna in the desert, or baked pigeons falling from the sky. They became tolerant and many times covered their eyes in order not to spoil such lucky chance.

Simultaneously and independent of the individual packages, using the detour over the Naramowice came horse wagons packed with bread from bakers and food from butchers and storeowners, offered to the Help Committee. And again, after control and inspection, the great part arrived in the camp kitchen or for direct distribution among the prisoners. The Germans took some for themselves, but what remained was enough to keep away the hunger. The Polish community, badly

shocked by the Concentration Camp and the arrests, was eager to show extreme solidarity by offering what they could to the prisoners.

Sure it was blatant corruption, the officers and Camp Commandant must have been aware of this. But what the hell, the Nazi "Fuehrer Haupt Quatier" and following thus the Army not only allowed, but also directly encouraged taking of the personal profits by the soldiers and officers, with the highest commanders included. In fact, the Germans went into war reluctantly, unwillingly, without enthusiasm and Hitler decided to tolerate robbery, corruption, in fact anything that did not negatively affect his orders. In about one year, the soldiers decided that war is not bad at all, rather a profitable business. They became dedicated, even enthusiastic towards their supreme leader, who this way bought their full loyalty, to the bitter end. It reminded devotion of a gangster-mob to a successful bandit chief. A part of the officer corps, especially the older ones, kept a high moral standard, but they must hold their mouths shut. Others willingly accepted the opportunity to get rich quick, such as in shooting hostages, or taking one's share in the general robbery of all possessions in "die geheime Reichssache." On the other hand, the small-scale, secret corruption saved many lives.

Unfortunately, this period of humane relations ended with the year. After the Wehrmacht battalion successfully finished construction of the camp and returned to Army duty, the fiends of specialized police forces took over supervision. The relations worsened rapidly and the mortality of the prisoners rose violently, up to the concentration camp average of roughly six to ten percent a month, despite a short stay in this camp.

The bulk and number of gifts decreased for obvious reasons. The Polish society remained united and generous, but the capacity fell while the number of victims grew. Trade, production and gastronomic enterprises ceased to work under Polish management, taken under German control, then German management and finally became German property. The former owners needed help themselves, since many were imprisoned in the same concentration camp. There would be not much sense in robbing the poor. The Germans interested themselves first in taking over the property of the rich or well-to-do people; and these became more and more the victims, needing the help, not able to provide it. At the same time, Great Poland was no longer a province with a surplus of food, since Germany siphoned off more and more. In 1940 there already were signs of lack of food, even hunger, not yet significant, but gradually getting worse. So the individual packages contained only what remained, but with the amount and quality dropping, and the German guards stopped acting moderately and now

took a lion's share for themselves. The cold winter and much harder workload increased the energetic needs of the organism.

In fact, Mother and Angus had some luck in their misfortune, thrown into the camp just at the beginning. Was this an unusual lucky case? I think not, rather a logical sequence of events. If they had arrived at their destination during the sharp winter in one of the cattle wagons, full of frozen corpses – to say it short, if the author had not survived, he could not have written the book.

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However, coming back to the present moment, the boy led Angus' mother to the Committee building, which had two entrances, one from the camp side and the other from the guards' enclosure, near the main gate. Angus had to wait outside, but he already had his own plans, seeing an opening for himself to play an active role in the camp. So while he was waiting, he reported to the Camp Committee and before Mother returned, he came out as one of the voluntary runners. He would be responsible for finding the people for whom visitors came, to call them and to conduct them to the right place. To be sure, he became accepted only conditionally to his mother's approval, and at first she had objections. But Angus managed to reason them out.

They returned to the barrack as, considering camp conditions, rather well-to-do people, bending under the weight of food, clothing, and even bedclothes. Angus could hardly believe how the aunt with her daughter had managed to carry it all the long way on foot. Even after the German guards did took some weight off the load, Mother and Angus had to rest several times, before they arrived at their temporary sleeping location. Only long after the deportation did Mother tell Angus the aunt had also managed to supply her discreetly with a notable sum of money.

Money remained in value in the Camp. It was possible to buy many goods, but now they did not need it and Mother could share some with her neighbors, as well as declining the extra food delivered by the Committee.

However, for Angus, the most important was that he had now begun a new, active period in his life. His works began after breakfast and lasted through the afternoon, but sometimes took longer, depending on the times of arrival and number of the visitors. His duty was to report to the Committee and await dispositions, then to seek out and pass the messages to the right person, eventually leading them to the Committee. Sometimes, especially in case of the old or helpless people, new in the

camp or still disoriented, he led them back and helped to carry the load, but this happened rarely. The bunch of juvenile messengers consisted of two groups. One included the young Boy Scouts, eager to do good deeds. The others were the young wise guys, gutter urchins in average older and eager to get something for their service, performed on a business basis. To Angus' regret, mother never allowed him to join the Boy Scouts, which caused almost an inferiority complex. But anyway he accepted their standards and became badly confused, if meeting with an attempt to reward him. After a time, he learned to frame a polite rejection, and in cases of an insistence to treat, always carried away something which he could share around. Soon he came to know the camp as well as his pocket and formed many acquaintances, if rather shallow.

He tried to rebuild an information agency like the one on Śniadeckich Street, repeating all messages heard, especially about the war. There were none, only gossip, fantasy and tittle-tattle – so much of it, that he needed not invent more news himself, as he had before. The main was, it created an occasion for much talk and contact with people.

Surely what attracted him most was the men's barrack. There was only one, but it was the biggest. When Angus was thrown into the camp, it contained about eight hundred men, but this number had more than doubled now. The building was not only great, but also high and the living space planned after another pattern than were the three long and low barracks for women and children. There weren't any pallets along the walls, but rather bunks like shelves in a store magazine, principally three levels, in the higher places even four levels. The men needed some hard gymnastics to reach the upper bunks. The floor was covered with bricks. In the central part there were rails in a knee-deep excavation, so trains could run direct into the barrack or even drive straight through it.

Prisoners living in this barrack had the duty to work just like all others in concentration camps. But for now, this work was only in the camp itself, mainly erecting and adapting the barracks and fixing all necessary installations and utilities. Inside this barrack they had built the bunks, all the internal furniture. They also transported the food. In short, it was yet not such a heavy, murderous work as in other camps, which with scare food led to devastation of body and soul. So far, there was not hunger, and the energy expense was not excessive.

Besides, this work they did willingly, it was for their own benefit or that of fellow-prisoners, many times accompanied by the thanks of

women or children. It gave satisfaction, knowing they were softening stress.

German guards, satisfied with current state of affairs, most of all with the ample food, their share received from the prisoners, interfered with almost nothing and did not intrude between the interned. Even the children did not seek shelter in dark corners and mothers were not afraid to let them go and play outdoors. In comparison with other concentration camps this was almost an idyll – if not exactly praised by the prisoners, who noticed first the hardship.

It is not necessary to explain why Angus acted as he did and what his plans might be. All the heroes of adventure books, imprisoned or even thrown in chains into dungeons, always escaped, many times missing death only by a miracle. Immediately afterwards they began to fight the enemy. It was a standard procedure, nothing other would do; elementary, dear Watson.

As are most ideas taken from books – it was stupid, stupid, stupid. At least Angus recognized a little of the difficulty and danger and decided to act carefully. First, it was necessary to learn the territory well and in all detail, and this much he had already half carried out. His work gave him neither formal claim nor privileges, but eased moving around the camp. He could go almost anywhere, even in the places which were banned; the risk would be only a cuff on the neck or a kick, and he could always invent offhand some justification.

He could even risk walking around after dark, if better not in the deep of night. On these occasions he noticed first his small advantage, confirmed years after: if neither hawk-eyed nor observant, rather the opposite, gawky and gaping, yet in the dark he was able to see a little better than most people. So he could concentrate next on the routes and times of the patrols walking around the camp, and this was not too difficult. He did not exactly stalk them, but they did their service rather negligently, he heard them long before they came and it was enough time to take cover. They came by near enough, yet never noticed him. It might be worse if the patrol walked a dog, but soon he noted the patrols with dogs went only between the barbed wires and sometimes along them, near the watch turrets. It was pure routine and the logical conclusion was, several determined men could surprise and disarm such a military patrol.

Sure, this would be only the first step. But it was so real, in hand's reach, bred in him high spirits. Angus already knew his too strong imagination and decided to step on the brakes. In fantasy, by the eyes of the soul he already saw himself as an avenger, an elusive spirit of the

forest and a terror for the occupying army. Yet remembering these were only dreams, he put them aside and decided to think over every successive step in detail and never to spring to the next, before he got the first "foolproof" in its most exact sense.

It was obvious that he could not do this by himself. One small boy could not attack and overpower a patrol even if it consisted of only two soldiers, not to say three. His strength would be not enough for even one, never mind surprise. For such a task would be needed a double force, four men, fit and efficient, if all should happen quick and quiet, no noise and especially no permanent damage to anyone. Not only a loud sound, a dislocated arm or leg could spoil any further plans.

As concerned the German soldiers, it would be necessary to stun and bind them, but nothing worse. This not only because they behaved fairly well, rather decently in fact and deserved a better treatment. It was an accepted procedure in the books; the positive heroes never killed anyone except in open fight. No ambush, but applying a fair play, for example in battle or trying to defend people – not themselves, only someone else. The bad people deserving to die perished anyway because of their own wrongdoings.

It was a naive manner of fighting a war, but Angus was after all a kid and knew the world only from books. Moreover, his whole life and education had implanted in him such views. So had religion, everything coherent and no place for any other conception. If the Germans preferred a manner of fighting without principles, this was no grounds for doing the same. Acting similar would be equivalent to coming down to their moral level.

However, a quiet and efficient overpowering is more difficult than killing, especially if it is to be a "clean stun," with no chance of accident ending with harm to the men. It would need partners not only strong, but with proper features of character: bold, fast thinking and moving, inspired with initiative. It was necessary to fix a detailed plan of operation. But it was obvious, it would be better to find candidates, men with the necessary attitudes, to share in this work. In fact he hoped to find partners much smarter and more clever than himself, but with the same strong determination. So finding them should be the first step and only then and with them, would come making of adequate plans.

Angus never dreamed to become a leader. It would be not only unrealistic, but in fact rather funny. Obviously, a leader must be an adult able to decide fast in drastic conditions and whom the others would follow. However, if Angus found such a man, he could not influence him. He could only hope to find someone with similar dreams and shoulders

strong enough to bear the whole responsibility. In fact, he reasoned a bit like Piotr Wysocki, willing to start the action first and only next seek someone to take over the command.

Now it is clear what attracted Angus to the men's barrack. Only there he could find the candidates for his plan. The place was strictly organized after the military manner, the men divided in squads and groups with internal discipline. In his dreams, Angus envisaged them making an all-out uprising, disarming the German soldiers, taking their arms, marching to the City and starting a real revolt. He allowed himself to spin fairy tales for own use only, which would invariably end with triumphant meeting of French troops and Polish Army. He allowed himself such dreams, but was fully aware they were unrealistic, in planning never considered them seriously. One could say, he lived in two separate worlds, one based on firmly fixed facts without a gram of fantasy and the second, where he could relax and forget the black reality. But knowing his own tendency to overoptimism, he decided that all these dreams must remain forever banned from real planning. The only luxury he granted himself was to pray, as for God there was nothing impossible. But in the real world, he decided to never allow himself wishful thinking.

So far he was sure of one fact, that it was possible to surprise a German patrol. He assured himself several times, knew the route and estimated times and occasionally watched them from a short distance. But there was not a way he could stun the soldiers senseless, even with a helper in such a task. Maybe Winnetou could do this with the silver decorated butt of his rifle. If he was Old Shatterhand, he could do so with two cuffs of his fists, but Old Shatterhand was a German. Anyway Angus, even if boxing was the basic entertainment of the boys, never saw any real knockout. He had heard that even in matches between professional boxers this happens rarely. In short, he knew nothing about the business and must leave this job to adults.

Still, he remembered reading that in some ancient army, maybe Babylonian or Assyrian, in surgery of the wounded they put a wooden helmet on the subject's head and the expert chaplain applied "the narcosis" with an oak bludgeon.

So now the time came to find some help. He hoped the people by this time were getting to know him in a positive context, as a runner announcing the visits, sometimes helping them to find their way and to carry the gifts. After performing his duties, he began remain some time

in or near the men's quarters. The convenient pretext was playing checkers. This was a popular game, and many men made a chessboard from a scrap of plywood or a plank and a set of checkers from bread (forming chess figures was too difficult, and playing cards were exceptional rare). Happily, Angus was a good player at checkers; he had often played with his father, who was a demanding teacher. With chess it would be much worse, he was only a beginner – hotly dedicated, but only his cousins in Podłoziny by a special grace agreed to play with him. But in checkers he won most matches. In fact he lost some games willingly to give some satisfaction to the opponents, and soon was much in demand. A good player never had to seek long for an invitation, and it was an opening to chat. Occasionally a man had a book or two, which for Angus it was water in the desert, nevertheless he delayed his own reading to lend these lent books to others and in this way make more acquaintances.

Despite a reasonably good beginning, further efforts failed: no headway, no progress. First, he did not know how to start a sincere conversation with grown men. Second, he failed to evaluate people well, not only lacking the natural feeling and psychology, but in fact being clumsy and unskillful. The first chosen candidate, posing as the popular actor Dymśa, sure was talkative, singing patriotic songs, aping the manner of a "superman," but would not speak at all on dangerous themes. He said a bit about "when the hour strikes" and that "he would go, when all would go." Any involvement at this point, he considered a bad blunder. Well, this man didn't pay any attention what Angus had to say. To the end of war, in fact, he waited for "the hour to strike" and never took the smallest risk, while always keeping up to appear a great Cossack.

Some others treated Angus like a silly child, cutting short the conversation before the lad could begin to explain what he had in mind. The worst of this was, he quickly began lose whatever confidence he had. He sensed all that he said as quite hopeless, because he was not able to express himself properly. So he became less and less effective. Days passed, the exceptional good weather, the gold autumn ended. He should hurry, but could not make any progress.

It was at this exact moment that something happened which he regarded as an unexpected good chance. One of the mornings, as he was moving through the camp with some message, he unexpectedly met a friend from his class who had lived on the same street. This boy and his family had traveled further in their evacuation, and had returned later

too, only to be arrested on sight and delivered straight to the Concentration Camp.

They were not close friends. In fact, this boy, just like Angus, had no close friends. This had nothing to do with him being an unchallenged top of the class, which does make close comradeship difficult. The cause was similar to Angus' own. He too was a late child, had rather an old mother, but in addition considerably older sisters. The house of women cared about him, but did not over-care as in the case of Angus. His mother and sisters expected from him great doings and made high demands. He should always be the first, there remained no time to pal up with someone or form a close acquaintance. Of course, he remained on good terms with his classmates, did not display superiority, trying to be a good colleague. But he never had more time than was enough for several words only, was always in a hurry for some task. He simply had too much of work, always must rush for something: private tutoring, piano lesson, two languages, even drawing. If there was some time off, there would be lessons in dancing, horse riding, tennis or fencing. It was a heavy burden and he treated it as deadly serious, he must be always first. If sometimes such was not the case, it meant bad business not only for him, but for his mother too; it would keep sleep from her eyes. So he tried harder every second, took advantage of every opening and generally achieved the purpose.

Angus considered this meeting a wink of providence. At last someone familiar, with whom he could speak openly, no need to wind the matter in cotton. Also, a colleague with an open and intelligent mind, whom he appraised highly. Even if Jurek were to take no active role, surely together they could discuss the project in detail. This was exactly what Angus wanted, believing two heads better than one. He suggested a short walk and immediately presented his plan, starting with this, he already had a good working knowledge of the place and its routines. He had checked every detail and could warrant with his head, that surprising and disarming a German patrol was possible and real.

"This is not exactly the best guarantee," said Jurek dryly, "because if you have missed something, you will anyway have no head left, and neither will anybody who listened to you."

"Well, yes, it is only a beginning," admitted Angus, "but one has to start from something. Next, I suggest disarming a second patrol and taking the rifles, and then penetrating the garages. I do not know yet, if and how the Germans guard this area. I haven't got that far. But, if I see right, all the guards do their duty rather negligently. You can expect this too in the section where they feel most safe, where they have their

headquarters, accommodations, magazines and garages. I have already talked to some boys who regularly come and go from camp, using this route. They bring goods for sale, relay messages and letters for money, and take orders for just anything. They encouraged me to go with them, but I have not decided yet. Sincerely, I do not know if I could be any good at it. They are more skillful, more expert and nimble-fingered than I, they are from poor families. They are smaller than I am, but they push harder and manage to slip in almost everywhere. I may try to see if I can follow them. I already talked with the most experienced one and he promised to be my guide. I consider it a possibility to say more to him; he may be valuable in action, with his good orientation. But the time has not yet come; first I want to know him better. Anyway, the point is, we could become free, armed and in cars. What more? There exist several possible courses, but I think we had better discuss this and choose the alternative together."

"Continue with your idea, what would follow next?"

"I imagine, we could travel as long a way as possible in one night with a car or cars, depending how many escape. Then hide in some distant and inaccessible forest, make a hideout, occasionally make some strike against the nearest German troops and hide again. This way we may fight and survive during the war, even if it continues for the whole winter. Where? That is for all to decide, but I would suggest Eastern Poland, probably Polesie. I have never been there, but as you remember, last year we hosted for ten days a class from Polesie. Almost every one of us had a guest-boy from a village near Pińsk. This one that lived with me told me near his house are some places where the only possibility of travel is in winter, when the marshes and swamps freeze, or by boat at the time of highest water. Normally they are inaccessible. We got to be good pals and he invited me, I am sure he will show us the way now. I will not say it is the best choice, but we don't have inaccessible territory like that here in Great Poland. There are some forests closer by in Pomerania, but there are now too many Germans. I thought of the mountains, but in fact I am not good in mountains – why, in a forest I feel as at home as I do in my house. Besides, the mountains are even further than Polesie. But I do not persist, it is only a proposal.

"How shall we make our way?" Angus continued rhetorically. "Precisely in German cars. They will never expect this, they control horse wagons and people, but they think everything that has a motor belongs to Germans. Before they realize what has happened, we will be about three hundred kilometers away in some forest, maybe near Kampinos, and they will ransack the region near Poznań. We get the rest of way the

next night. There is a border to cross. I suggest a fast action: smash the barrier with a car and run, before they start shooting. The main is determination; if we don't delay, we have a good chance to come through."

But Jurek Macheda had another opinion.

"This conception can't be realized. The important reason is not the risk you mention. By the way, I think you calculated it wrong – if you have about a seventy-five percent chance to handle the first patrol and the same with the other, for both of them the chance drops to about half. With every other task, as for example gaining access to the garage, escaping, smashing the barrier and so on, you should every time multiple the result by the next percent of probability. After several such hazards, the result falls below one percent. And by the way, how do you want to overpower the soldiers? I hope you do not intend killing them?"

"But never mind your own risk, have you imagined what happens with the prisoners who remain in the camp? Never mind if you succeed or not, let's assume you have luck all the way and escape. This camp is at the moment rather soft. Do you want thousands of people, who now have a good chance to survive, to curse you and your idea? You can guess how the Germans will react. First they will change the entire camp guard, in place of the elderly reserve soldiers they will send here the worst criminals and sadists like the ones from Dachau and the other camps. This camp would change from, well, not too bad yet a place to a hell on earth. Probably they will begin an inquiry, search for the conspirators and find them. After torture, the weak will confess to their inventions and imagination, point out others and these, the next and so on. But if you unwittingly injure one of the soldiers, or if one dies afterwards from any natural cause, an illness, you know what we can expect! You saw the announcements, collective responsibility, a hundred hostages shot for one German. One can never tell what harm could happen in a struggle. Do you want to take such a risk? Considering the other people, I disagree with you most strenuously."

This surprised Angus. He had never thought along these lines and he should have. Well, all this should have been plain to him from the start. Nevertheless he tried to argue. His inner conviction had not changed, but he was not able to express it so proper.

"I never thought about repercussions, but anyway I never wanted to kill anyone during the escape. I know already, how to do this." Here he explained the antique methods of anesthesia, applied in the Assyrian army by impact on the helmet. "The only argument against this method

may be the loud bang, that would spread the alarm like a bell in the night. But I found a solution. Come with me, I will show you."

He dragged his colleague to a secluded spot, where in a circle of bushes lay an old pot, rusty and full of holes, and a bag full of sand. He hefted this and struck the pot with all his might. The impact was not loud; there occurred some sound, but slight.

"My aunt knit me stockings from a thick wool, preparing for a bad winter in the camp. One of those would will be ideal for our purpose, filled with sand or gravel. Surely a strike on the helmet can't do any harm, under the helmet is a soft padding, no way a bone could break. I volunteer for the first experiment; you may try this on me. Anyway, practice is necessary. If I'm not all right, we resign."

They decided to break the discussion for now to think all this over and meet again a few hours. But they each stuck by their former conclusions and finally Jurek came out with the heavy guns:

"I have thought this over and I have decided your plan may be – well – not impossible, nor outright silly. You may succeed in first, manage the escape, even if the long-term chances are against you. But you have no right to do so. You may risk your skin as much as you like and share this risk with any person who chooses do so. But do you presume to ask all the prisoners if they agree? The Germans will take revenge on them; the enterprise will end with a disaster. In short, either you give it up, or I go direct to your mum and tell her all. She may have better success at reasoning you out."

This was a persuasion not to be rejected. And a heavy blow, not well-mannered at all. Even more painful, because supported by sound arguments. How could he think only about his chances and risk, not considering the fate of the other people? However, if forced to accept defeat and resign from his plan, after this talk Angus did not seek further contact with Jurek. At least not then and there (they were to meet again only after the war, and for a time became great pals). This happened precisely because Jurek was right and presented sound logic and a superior reasoning. It is a popular weakness; we don't like anybody being too smart.

But thinking over all the arguments, Angus felt unconvinced by the conclusion. First, he never believed the German would behave fair, whether the Poles opposed them or not. Right from the start of the occupation they had been murdering people. Shooting in public their hostages in tens and hundreds. There was no other reason than to impress the people, to intimidate them, to show that they were free to do this if they so chose. They murdered as many as was currently

convenient for them. The giant machine of murder was not ready yet, but this was what one could expect with time.

Were all the people blind, could they not see the obvious? This concentration camp was a new one. It was temporarily supplied with a rear unit of Wehrmacht, because they were not ready with the fiends from special units for the executions and other gruesome tasks. They were now expanding the Special Forces, which took time. These soldiers here were human, if a little greedy, satisfied with small achievements. However, the existing state of affairs would not continue for long. It could all change anytime. To tell it straight, Angus didn't expect the prisoners would leave the camp alive. The Germans had robbed them of all possessions, against international law. In fact any human law, any norms of war or peace. It was an outright criminal act. According to criminal logic it is better to kill the victims to prevent them protesting. To prevent, now or later, them telling about these shameful events, possibly influencing the public opinion against the Nazi, who applies such a low, crude felony.

After any compromising action, liquidation of the witness is a standard gangster procedure. In fact, the Nazis after a time advanced with exactly such actions, first applying them to the Jews. They might well be planning to extend the same procedure to others, but had so far not enough time and not enough power, their troops being busy on many fronts and keeping too many territories, too diluted. And so Angus' line of reasoning was not absurd at all.

But why tell this silly story about a silly child who daydreamed some fairy-tale, which anyway came to nothing and was never realized? In fact the points of view presented by Angus and by Jurek are small examples reflecting a deep and serious rift, dividing now all Polish society. The people reasoning like Angus belonged then to a minority. They wanted to act instinctively, against what at the time was considered sound reasoning. Mainly the impetus was deep emotion, as in this case, inspired by history. However, such action is impossible without a strong backing by public opinion. This was the primary condition, and any premature action, even in case of a possible lucky start, was sure to end as Jurek predicted, with a disaster. The people must be ready psychologically.

Angus' plan was not absurd, if considering only the first part, a possible escape. But continuing the fight against the occupying army was surely impossible. It would meet with public doom and ostracism from the Polish community. This concerned not only a small and naïve brat like Angus, but happened even to real great heroes, like Major

Dobrzański, the famous Hubal. The Polish Army never surrendered, even if some troops had to, like Warszawa on the 28th of November, Hel on December 4th, or the Group Polesie on December 6th. But some regular troops remained in the field fighting and survived till the French Campaign of 1940. Hubal was victorious in every fight, nevertheless he was not able to defend the civil population from the following strafing expeditions. The people said he perished because of his conscience, he finally decided to die. (The author happens to know this is only a tale, but it shows the bias of contemporary public opinion.)

**Capsule: Psychology of survival, escape from confrontation, hope that they will let us alone.**

Poland now presents herself as the one and the only nation which from the start to the final victory of WWII continued to fight Hitler with full engagement and self-sacrifice. However, denying neither the gallantry nor the patriotic feeling, this is not exactly the truth. An immediate shock occurred, caused by the unexpected disaster of the 1939 campaign, contrary to reasonable forecast and expectations, and despite a deep faith and full-hearted commitment. Worse still, the plain people, baffled and mystified, could not understand why the Allies left them without help. If not a fair execution of treaties, they expected at least some make-believe decency, keeping up the appearances. The duplicity and outright treason paralyzed and intimidated them, and even more so did the following terror. Some fighting continued still, but this was only the sporadic defense of true desperadoes, like the actions of Gryf Pomorski.

The cruel, inhumane terror, a genocide never before applied in the civilized world, nor even in barbaric times, at first froze the Poles helpless. However, after a time it turned public opinion, and the people became fearless fighters with nothing more to lose. It is the same principle which afterwards turned the Russian soldiers, who at first accepted captivity, but after a year of war, preferred death. Terror, mass-murder is a two-edged weapon, too much of it motivates to battle to the end. But this time had not come yet.

These are the plain facts: In the campaign of 1939 the number of Polish soldiers killed was about seventy thousand, civilians up to one hundred thousand. At first the terror of occupation was not so seeming in central Poland. Only in the western provinces maybe four to five thousand hostages were shot as a demonstration of power and several times more killed in prisons, all in all maybe about twenty thousand. But in 1940, with no fighting and no battles the number of victims had

grown perhaps tenfold. With the start of 1941, it continued to grow exponentially. It became clear there was no prospect of the Poles being left alive. With the attack on the Soviets, with the Wehrmacht engaged on the front and the occupation forces watered down in vast new territories, armed fighting in Poland revived. And now the issues became clear, the fighting did not multiply, but rather reduced the number of victims. The SS, the police and military organizations, and the remaining regular troops had a limited capacity; they were most effective at murdering unprotected and unarmed civilians. If under attack, the death machine is less useful, it stutters and stops. Under stress, the occupation forces had to apply fire-extinguishing tactics; there might be more dead locally, but the average number of victims markedly fell.

The final turning point of public opinion was an experiment with the "final solution of the Polish question" on the limited territory of Ziemi Zamojskiej. The goal was a liquidation of the Polish population and an importation of German settlers. This resulted in a battle of extermination. Both sides, Poles and Germans, suffered seriously. The experiment ended without success, because introducing more occupation troops in Ziemi Zamojskiej resulted in many more attacks on German transport in other provinces. With Poland being the tender backside of the east front, the Germans could not risk a full-scale escalation of extermination. They had not enough troops to protect their transports, they lacked enough men and weapons. But the machine of murder, the death camps with their whole organisation, could not stand still; it would be a bad investment. That being so, the Germans decided temporary to delay the final solution of the Polish question and started now the final solution of the Jewish question. Neither the Poles nor the Jews expected this.

For the Poles, this accompanied the old prewar propaganda, the worn-out melody of a "common battle against the red danger, the wild hordes from Asia." All would be forgotten and forgiven if only they would cooperate now. Surely this approach could not succeed; nobody was so stupid to believe it. But it was a temporary relief, even if all knew Hitler would start the genocide again the moment he had the necessary power.

The Jews, meanwhile, were caught unawares. The Germans had persecuted them before, had robbed and looted; the ghettos were little better than the concentration camps, with a heavy mortality rate, but they still hoped to survive. At least many, even if poor, expected probably to emigrate and start again. Until only the Poles had been mass-murdered, and the Jews could not believe how suddenly the roles changed. They never offered an offense to the Germans, they had not the strength, enough men, with all able to fight volunteering to Polish

Army, but instead caught by Stalin. It was a shock similar to that suffered by the Poles in 1939 and 1940, but Poles fought the war and lost. The Jews didn't have the opportunity to fight, they were an easy target, could not resist. At the beginning, it was a common event for a few of the Hitlerjugend to escorted to the death camp transport a whole column of Jews. Still, public opinion within the Jewish community functioned almost the same as that among the Poles in 1939.

These are the statements of Jewish people of letters and influence:  
Syjonistic leader Menachem Kirszbaum, April 1942:

"We can accept with a whole certainty, that in the center of Europe the German shall not risk such proceedings. Let's not play with fire. Think about the collective responsibility of the Ghetto. Don't invite disaster on all of us."

The History professor Dr Ignacy Szyper, already in July of 1942:

"Self-defense is equivalent with extinction of the whole Ghetto. I believe the basic part of the Ghetto remains. It is a war; each nation must make sacrifices to preserve an important part of the nation. If I were convinced that we couldn't upheld the basic part, I would announce other conclusions."

Orthodox leader Zysie Frydman, also in July 1942:

"I believe in God – and I believe the miracle will happen. We should wait, wait for a miracle. Battle with the Germans is nonsense. They would exterminate us within several days. I ask you, my friends, if you do believe in the Allies, why despair? Why to despair, if you do believe that they will conquer and they will bring back you freedom."

It is astonishing, the likeness of the reactions of these communities, Polish and Jewish, in the face of extinction. In the autumn of 1939 the Poles dared not continue the fight, they waited for a miracle. They already knew exactly when this miracle would happen – it would be the 8th of December 1939. The psychological turning point needed time. The slaughter of the Poles began in 1939 and it was roughly two years later that they began to fight back (though some of resistance remained active throughout). For the Jews the worst began at the end of 1941 and it took them also about two years to ready their spirit for armed combat, but it was already too late. They perished, after heroic fight, but saved only the honor.

One point more. Of course Angus could not understand then all the psychological refinements. Being a simpleton, he always imagined Hitler a devil incarnate and wanted with all his soul to fight. It's a blessing of God that he met with zero success. It was not until 1944 that he read an article in memory of the Ghetto rising and remembered his own

experiences, could understand the propaganda machinations of public opinion. In fact, it is not difficult now to understand such subtle matters, but this clear vision may only now be achieved, looking backwards, from a distant perspective.

From here we can see that Hitler determined to exterminate not only the Poles and Jews. No nation in Europe would be safe. It is puzzling, that he presented the idea so openly in *Mein Kampf*, yet nobody saw and took seriously the obvious consequences. The essence of Hitler's idea was apply the methods used for breeding animals to cultivate pure, superior types of people. A radical but logical solution was, drastically liquidate the less valuable herds, and substitute for them a valuable race. This most valuable breeding stock should be the Nordic strain (as we know, Hitler focused on a set of physical characteristics exactly opposite his own; what could he think, looking in a mirror?).

That being so, only the Dutchmen might feel at ease. The French, for example, he called not a nation at all, but crossbreed mongrels (not to say bastards or worse), a blend of Arabic, African and yellow genes. Better to stop now and skip the obscenities. Those with a chance for survival were the blonde and blue-eyed, but the heritage of the German tribes was too small and needed "refreshing" (whatever that may have meant).

Even the English people, though classified as a Germanic race, he also considered an impossible mixture. Let our review finish at this; these were the best examples. Other nations Hitler censured still worse, but nevertheless wanted the valuable genetic material carefully selected and retained for further breeding. For this purpose in Poland, for example, he created the sub-class of "Volksdeutsches", because the percentage of the so-called Nordic type, whatever the madmen assumed by that term, was higher here than in Germany. In short, in Europe at least three hundred million people were to be "exchanged." The number of Poles and Jews in comparison shall be just a chicken-feed.

The natural evolution of humans is in fact, wise and self-propelling. So it is for animals, too, but sometimes we want a breed especially producing milk, or fat, or lean meat. Intellectually, mongrels achieve the best results. A distant analogy is the free market compared to a Marxist economy. In both cases, the most drastic methods resulted in horrors. But Hitler wanted no half-measures. He treated the matter seriously – one may say, deadly serious.

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Meanwhile Angus fought with his thoughts. It was such a crazy battle that his head almost steamed. He could not sleep the whole night and left at first light to prowl in out-of-the-way places. He even wanted nothing to eat, which seriously disturbed his mother.

The day was misty and chilly, with some fog, nothing strange in late November. It was almost incredible, the weather remaining fair so long, but now fell frequent a small drizzle. Angus concentrated mentally on yesterday's dispute; he considered new arguments and continued the debate with himself. Who was right? He had indeed given his word, but if he could do something worthy, valuable for the Polish cause, or the human cause, or evil to Hitler, the devil take his word and honor, his good name and reputation. There were more important matters at stake. But he recognized the weight and truth of yesterday's arguments; it was his duty to remember the fate of his Polish co-prisoners. So think carefully, deeply, you stupid ass, is there some alternative, did you miss something?

Was it impossible to fight the Germans because they might take vengeance on their hostages? And what did the defending Głogów men do, when eight hundred years ago the Germans besieged them and used as shields their own children and co-citizens taken by unexpected treachery? They went to the church and prayed for the dead hostages, but defended their city with final success.

Unable to sleep and afraid to disturb the sleeping masses of people on his platform, he took night duty in the Camp Committee. When evening came he felt a cold in his head, so he brought along a book; it was *Pharaoh* by B. Prus, a novel of over eight hundred pages. He hoped reading might provide the best rest; in other circumstances he might even have been happy with such a prospect, even if he had read this book several times already.

To his surprise, he found another boy already there; there were about thirty or forty such Committee runners as Angus altogether, some older – these were mostly former Boy Scouts – and some urchins from poor families. This boy was unknown to Angus, seemed have no manners, but was much older, taller and heavier. He said his name was Heniek and he was already fifteen, in fact he should be working with the men, but his old lady had told him to declare he was only fourteen. He had thought it best to become a runner. Sure fit, Angus thought, why not talk with this youth about his much maligned idea.

First it would be necessary to know a little more about him. Angus began to talk about books. Heniek read only comics, but sometimes made an exception for Carl May, even if reading was rather an

exhausting enterprise. Angus had read just about all of Carl May, the comics he considered as something below him, but he didn't say so; anyway, some of his classmates bought comics too. Now he took the fatigued booklets and tried to read them, but soon lost interest. He laid them aside and returned to talk.

First he learned that this boy had to shave every few days, if he wanted not to show a beard, and this was a must, otherwise he would look too old and they might take him off to real work. Also he smoked occasionally and that was unusual. In those days a boy would never dare to appear with a cigarette in public, not to say smoke one; it was considered bad behavior. Any adult could put him in order and it was a natural reaction to remove the cigarette without delay, rebuke him and sometimes use even stronger persuasion. No adult would walk by indifferently, which today is the normal reaction. It does not follow that by such methods the youth improved, but at least the young hooligans had to wait to be grown up. Anyway, the boys tried smoke precisely because it was a privilege of adults, but always in private, for example in rest-rooms. Angus didn't smoke, because once his father had caught him out and as sole punishment had told him to smoke the cigarette to the very end. After that he had somehow lost all interest.

Anyway, with this particular boy smoking must be not a negative point, as overall he seemed so well developed, almost grown up. He looked really strong. Maybe not too intelligent, a strong primitive, but his biceps were impressive. Angus decided to grant him the benefit of the doubt with his head. At least he was all for adventures and interested, yes, hungry for the world. Angus considered this as promising. After more talk, he decided to try him, but only prudently.

"Do you know," he said, "I heard there are some who would like to run away from this camp? What do you think about that?"

Heniek, who sat in his chair with his legs stretched out as long as they could get, tightened and sat up as if electrocuted, opening wide his eyes. His ears seemed stretch several times longer.

"When was it? Where? Who? Do you know anything specific?"

"Nothing. I only heard something from a distance and am just curious. It appears like an adventure. Doesn't it?"

"Listen to me, you don't realize how serious it is. Try to learn more, and tell me immediately. I shall go straight to the Germans. I tried already to tell them about the small brats sneaking out, but I had nothing concrete and got only a kick in my pants. But such an important message, a genuine escape! There shall be a reward and I will divide it with you."

Angus could not grasp this, there must be something wrong with his hearing.

"Holy Jesus! What did you say?"

"Listen, do you think I came here for nothing? To run silly errands and for my pains get a smoke, or a few small coins? Never, I came here because I decided to become a German informer, looking for an opportunity to hear something important. If I do, the Germans will think twice and finally let me be their secret agent, who is an important person. Talking about thinking twice, I will give you the whole reward and my personal protection if you only come through with this."

Angus felt as if the earth had suddenly opened under his legs and he was falling in an unknown, monstrous world. Can this be true or may someone here lost his mind, or is raving with a fever? Have I screwed something up, or is this boy indeed telling me he wants to become a traitor, a German spy? So simply, as if it were a most natural to do?

In Angus' imagination traitors looked different, he didn't know exactly how, but envisaged weak and deeply unhappy people, who could not hold out under torture, stress or fear. Maybe they wanted to save someone loved, close family or a woman. Anyway they should live in deep misery or already past survival, unhappy and broken.

As in the Mickiewicz verse:

Z bramy więzienia wywożą pod strażą  
Ze czterech desek zbitą trumnę białą  
Rzucają na wóz, za miasto wieść każą  
To więźnia ciało.....

(From a prison gate they transport under guard a white coffin of four planks, they throw it on a wagon, ordering out of the city a prisoner's body. The burial place by a field, the pilgrim passes around with disgust, skipping the usual prayers, even Ave Maria...)

In his most horrible nightmares he was arrested by the Germans for some secret organization activity or wounded in a battle. Then awoke in a cold sweat, unsure if he would be able to hold out through the ingenious tortures or succeed with a suicide – but before telling a word, not after. In deep secret he tried to discipline himself by applying pain, for instance holding in his hand a burning scrap of paper, or diving into a patch of nettles. Or, if in a public place, simply by suffering a position after it became uncomfortable to the point of cramps. He wanted to become reliably gallant in pain, to be able to laugh in the face of tormentors. Yet he feared he might be composed from a poor ore, weaker than other people. After such a dream, it took him a longtime to recover.

Was it possible, that a future traitor and spy could look so ordinary? And that a traitor dreamed about treason as his great chance? A life career? But he had to make some answer.

"Why, I only heard some rumor and thought you might be able to tell me something more. I am just curious."

"It may be possible, because I did hear some kids sneak out and then return. This was what I tried to tell the guards, but first I do not know the language, and next I think they get probably some protection money and that's why the soldiers treated me so badly. But a genuine, organized escape, that would be something different, big."

Angus felt he could not suffer the company a second longer.

"You know, I am coming down with a cold today, I'm running a fever. If you can, finish the duty and tell them I have fallen ill. If I hear any news, I will look for you here."

A few meters from the building he got violently sick; considering he had eaten almost nothing all-day it was strange, but not if considering the conversation.

It was at this point still deep night, dark because of the covered sky. But normally this would make not a slightest difference, he knew by heart every square meter of the camp. More so, as preparing for action he had become so familiar with the terrain, he could orient himself with his eyes shut, by the mere touch of any bush or tree. Stepping on any scrap of earth he could accurately set up as on a map in his head everything in front of or behind him. However this time, with a high fever and nervous tension, it was as if he swam in unknown waters. Shivering, he had sometimes the impression that he was already in his bed and dark outlines were looming at him. The impossible happened; he lost his way and wandered around the camp till at least reached his barrack. But again could not recognize his section and place, and anyway there was no place left, and nobody wakened, all continued to sleep. So he sat on a bench along the middle table and leaning on it, fell into unconsciousness.

It appeared as if he was riding a fast elevator, but instead of subsequent floors, there were different worlds with people, buildings, fields, trees and bushes, even clouds in skies, or rather hells. All repulsive, horrible, somehow hollow but not empty and with feelings of boredom, fatigue and distaste, hate and repulsion as if everything was infected with leprosy. He wanted to cry, but his teeth were so cramped, there was no chance for a sound, still less a word.

The whole next day and night he was dead out, awaking only the following morning still sore and with fever, but not high. They told him,

his mother had managed to put a cup to his mouth as he was still sitting by the table, and had moved him to the pallet, paying two people to seek temporarily another place for themselves. Now he lay conveniently along a fringe of loose planks, separate from the main platform. He had a bad cough and sore throat but this was all.

He remembered the events of the last days, but wanted to forget, a classic case of wishful thinking. What had happened was inconsistent with his whole world. It could not be true and finally Angus assumed, this must be a bad joke, the overgrown idiot had made fun of a younger and smaller boy. In fact an idiotic horseplay, and he decided never speak to him again and best of all never meet him, as if his life depended on it.

However, they did meet several times and Angus had to revise this judgment. Heniek was in fact a mean and scurvy individual and did a lot of harm, spying first for the Germans and next for the Soviets, before he came to a bad end. Angus should tip off the people now, at least give some warning as the situation became clear. But he did not do so in time and in result they met once too often, much later, but this is already the subject of a second book.

There is no question but that Angus was a rotten psychologist. He credited to people his own emotions, attitudes and ways of thinking. What was natural to him, he thought the only possible reality; he never could understand other people.

A longtime after the war, they said about people like Heniek, he isn't really a communist, he is only making his career. This is the gist of the matter: Heniek was neither a German, nor did he become a communist later, as the country was gripped in the claws of the next occupation, but only an egoist, interested in himself and making his career. He never could learn the German language if trying hard and never could understand the Marxist jargon – in fact many Polish words too, if they had more than four letters.

Solidarity isn't really opposite to egoism; individual egoism may expand first to close family and next to greater groups, finally on society and nations and possibly on all humanity. But this process may be less or more advanced. In case of Heniek it never began, for even in family he never sensed solidarity, but only competition. He always demanded more for himself and less for the others, including his own mother, who tried as best she could and Heniek never hungered. But he was hungry not for food but for everything, and demanded more and more for himself – and being neither clever nor intelligent, got from life many cuffs and kicks.

Now he hoped to find a perfect opening, to take his rightful place. His career awaited him; because he had neither conscience nor any

other restraints, he felt able to do what the others would not. At least he could take the upper position, could show the queasy idiots who is more important and able; Heniek knew what he wanted and how to get it.

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Angus remained ill several days more. As long as the fever lasted, he lost interest in anything, but then he became thirsty for books, anything to read. He read the same book again and again, never bored, for the next two days. Knowing the book by heart, he tried to beat the record in speed-reading. The record didn't falter, but he at least gained the technique of quick reading, could take in at one look several lines of text. As a skill this might sometimes may be useful, if limited; but it has the advantage of making it impossible to take time for reflection, estimation or creative meditation, which is exactly what Angus wanted at this point.

He had already recovered, but his mother fretted still, not allowing him to start again on runner duty and encouraging him to eat more. With just a slight catarrh, if dressed warmly he could visit the men's barrack, to return the books and play checkers. But on the way, he ran into his godmother and the Balcer family.

This woman already mentioned, was a German, born in Berlin and married to a Pole. She ended in the Concentration Camp, declaring herself a Polish citizen. Angus and his mother, a longtime friend, commiserated with her, but the situation was embarrassing, the worst because the poor woman never was able learn correct Polish and mixed up the words. However sympathetic they might be, though, nobody was in the mood now to speak German and so she remained rather alone, her eyes red from tears. She was a splendid grand lady, but not happy. She decided not to seek out anybody, didn't communicate even with her bosom friend and they met unexpectedly indeed.

But these were already the last days. With the end of November came a volley of rumors that all prisoners were to be transported away, nobody knew where. One said, it shall be another Concentration Camp and probably much worse, others suggested they would only be displaced as far from Poznań as possible and then set free.

\* \* \*

December 1st, 1939. Angus hastened for news to the men's barrack. Even though it was still early work hours, all the men sat in the barrack and talked, but the news was contradictory and nobody knew anything concrete. During the moment of the most heated discussion, directly before noon, there was a deafening rumble and the great wooden gate broke into splinters. The following clouds of steam and smoke screened visibility in the center of the building. The men sprang up, a moment of confusion, and there were cries:

"The French Army! The French to the rescue! At last!"

An obvious absurd, wishful thinking, or maybe some simpletons still believed in the prophecy, that a week later, on the 8th of December a miracle would happen and Poland may restore. If so, the 1st would be a good beginning.

But so strong was the faith and confidence in the ally, France, that all the prisoners rose to attention and began to sing the French anthem. Angus sang the first two verses and was on the third, which he didn't properly recall. Suddenly around the locomotive and train which smashed the gate, running into the interior of the barrack because it could not stop its momentum on the rails, appeared German helmets and uniforms. The singing stopped gradually, not all the men came to their senses at the same time. A long, awkward silence followed, a bad dead confusion. But the camp guards did not react, as if they heard and noticed nothing.

It may have been the last friendly gesture, or perhaps the German soldiers just did not want any problems. If they reported a hostile demonstration, surely the Gestapo would have to deal with it; the effect would be unpleasant for all present. Whatever the cause, the soldiers preferred to be dumb, showing both a decent reaction and sound common sense.

After this incident, Angus returned to his mother just in time. Their train, in fact two more, stood already on an open square behind the barracks, where rails continued along the terrain of the camp. It consisted of cattle wagons adapted for military transport. Directly behind the locomotive and at the end were two personal wagons for the escort. Polish inscriptions from the time of the campaign remained on the cattle wagons: "8 horses or 40 people." Helping his mother and handing up some packages, Angus heard a comment:

"Look, old horse, if you go in there, we will only need to take thirty-two more people and may travel in comfort."

"Well, yes, but you had better keep away, an ass is not so privileged!"

The floor was paved with straw and by one of the four oblong, narrow windows in the corners, protected with wire mesh, a curtain was suspended and a big tin placed as a substitute urinal and rest room. Prisoners got two buckets of drinking water between them, and everyone got half a loaf of bread. And then the guards closed the doors and secured them with wire, warning the prisoners that on any attempt at opening them the escort would open fire without any further warning. For maybe one hour more the guards checked the registers and then the train began to move.

Angus settled next to his mother and began the journey into the unknown future, if there remained still any future left. But he was full of hope to find his way, ready for any enterprise. Soon, the early darkness fell and the people crowded by the windows stopped telling one another what they could see, and settled on their cots.

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