

WORK BRINGS FREEDOM

by

Jerod Brennen

2324 Glencroft Drive  
Hilliard, Ohio 43026  
323.863.6398  
jerod.brennen@gmail.com

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EXT. KONZENTRATIONSLAGER AUSCHWITZ - DAY - 1942

1

The TRAIN slows, pulling a long line of BOXCARS behind the engine. It rolls to a stop with the grating SCRAPE of metal-on-metal.

The engine sighs and goes quiet. The boxcar doors slide open. A heartbeat of silence.

Then, one PASSENGER dares to peer outside, followed by another, and another.

Soon, a flood of tired humanity pours from the cars, frightened, timid, unspeaking.

One woman stands out among the crowd, defiant and unafraid. This is ELSE (mid-20's). The STAR OF DAVID is sewn into her coat, over her heart.

She bends down and picks up a young girl, her DAUGHTER, settling the child on her hip. She reaches out with her free hand for the man at her side, her HUSBAND.

SS Officer OSKAR BAER (mid 30's) observes the scene from a distance, taking particular interest in this striking young mother.

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INT. BAER'S OFFICE - DAY - 1942

2

Oskar sits behind his desk, absorbed in his work. The office is utilitarian, with two exceptions.

A FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH adorns his desk, featuring Oskar with his wife and child. Beside the photo, a BOTTLE OF RED WINE with TWO GLASSES. The wine label reads Dornfelder.

A knock at the door. Oskar does not look up.

OSKAR

Enter.

A WARDRESS opens the door, leading Else into the room. Else's coat has been replaced by a dull gray dress. Her shaved head is covered by a dark scarf.

WARDRESS

Else Birkenwald, sir.

Else stands unafraid.

(CONTINUED)

OSKAR

Leave us.

The wardress nods her acquiescence and leaves, showing the faintest hint of emotion. Jealousy?

The door CLICKS shut behind her.

Else examines Oskar. Oskar ignores her.

The silence is powerful. Else gives in first.

ELSE

Why am I here?

Oskar smirks. He looks up from his work, savoring his answer.

OSKAR

I thought that much was obvious.  
You are here because you are a Jew.

Else steps forward.

OSKAR (cont'd)

I did not give you permission to  
come closer.

Else continues until she stands at the edge of the desk.

ELSE

Why did you bring me here?

Oskar understands perfectly.

OSKAR

My apologies. I misunderstood.

He reaches into his desk drawer and removes a CORKSCREW.  
Oskar uncorks the wine and fills both glasses halfway.

He raises one glass, savors the aroma, and sips. He motions toward the second glass.

OSKAR (cont'd)

Please.

Else remains still, glowering.

Oskar sets his glass down. He picks up the photo of his family.

(CONTINUED)

OSKAR (cont'd)  
My wife and son. They remain in  
Hohenstein, until the war is  
finished. How long since I last saw  
them? Seven months? (beat) Do you  
have a family?

Else's defiance wavers. Oskar latches onto her reaction and continues.

OSKAR (cont'd)  
Ah, of course you do. A husband and  
a daughter, correct? (beat) I love  
my Hilde deeply. I would do  
anything for her, and for my little  
Karl. They are the reason I sit  
behind this desk. They are the  
reason I do what must be done here.

He returns the photo to his desk.

OSKAR (cont'd)  
But seven months is a long time.

He stands and walks around his desk to stand behind Else,  
close enough that she can feel his breath on her neck.

She refuses to look at him.

ELSE  
What do you want from me?

OSKAR  
I am in need of assistance. The  
number of tasks that I must do each  
day is too great for one man. I  
would like you to work for me.

ELSE  
We do not always get what we want,  
do we?

OSKAR  
And what do you want?

ELSE  
I want my freedom.

Oskar leans on the desk and nudges the glass toward her.

OSKAR  
Work brings freedom.

(CONTINUED)

ELSE  
And if I refuse?

The response Oskar expected. He returns to the photo.

OSKAR  
My Hilde has asked to come here to see me, but I have forbidden it. I have seen things that I would spare her from ever knowing. Grown men, men like your husband, starved to death for minor offenses, wasting away until they are too weak to even raise their voice in protest.

Else's lips quiver.

OSKAR (cont'd)  
And the children. How could I answer my Karl's questions about the boys and girls that he sees here, girls like your daughter? What if he were to wander off and stumble across Block 10? The things that happen there, no child should ever experience.

Tears come to Else's eyes.

OSKAR (cont'd)  
But I digress. The choice is yours, Else. In this matter, you are free to make your own decision.

Else hesitates.

She reaches down and picks up the glass of wine, bringing it to her lips with a trembling hand.

Else drinks.

Oskar leans in close, whispering in her ear.

OSKAR (cont'd)  
Excellent.

Oskar turns his back on Else to lock his door. He begins unbuttoning his jacket as he turns to face her again.

OSKAR (cont'd)  
And now, for your first-

His words are cut short as the wine bottle SHATTERS across the side of his face. He falls to the floor, hard.

(CONTINUED)

Else stands over him, clutching the neck of the broken bottle.

What now?

She moves to the window and looks outside. Men in black and white striped uniforms mill about with women in scarves and dresses just like Else's.

She scans their faces, searching for her family. So many faces.

Despair overwhelms her.

ELSE  
(to herself)  
Work brings freedom...

A GUNSHOT!

Else looks down at her chest. A CRIMSON STAIN spreads over her heart, over the same spot where she once wore the Star of David.

Oskar stands across the office, his face sliced open, his uniform stained with BLOOD and WINE. He fights to remain steady as he keeps his LUGER trained on Else.

Else slumps against the window and slides to the floor as the life ebbs from her body.

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EXT. KONZENTRATIONSLAGER AUSCHWITZ - DAY - 1942

3

Else's husband cradles their daughter. He wanders through the camp, scanning the crowd.

ELSE'S DAUGHTER  
Papa? Where's Mama?

ELSE'S HUSBAND  
Shh, little one. We'll find her.  
We'll find her.

He passes the entrance to the camp, an imposing chain link gate framed with barbed wire.

Above the gate, three words are wrought into the iron:

ARBEIT MACHT FREI

FADE TO BLACK