

Title (up to 20 words) - Unlocked

Strapline (up to 40 words) - "I was an outsider, inside."

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

The time was 9am when I arrived that day. A different job than what I was used to, but the same work, nonetheless. I remember feeling a tingling unease spread throughout my body as I strolled towards the camp, I tightly clutched my equipment in my blistered left hand.

Until now, I had not realised how heavy it was. My shoulder ached persistently, but this was not out of the ordinary; every day I carried the same heavy suitcase with the same heavy equipment, to the same small houses, to cut the same old people's hair. As a mobile hairdresser, the only work I ever found was for the elderly. Everyone else would simply go to the salon, but I could not afford a whole building, and so my salon was my suitcase. It was tiresome work, but I was good.

I transformed 70-year-olds' straw hair into something visually pleasing on a daily basis, and so – when I was hired for a day in a prisoner of war camp – I was not thrilled.

Not because I was uncomfortable (which I undoubtedly was) but mainly because I knew that I would have to style and cut them all the same. My skills were not necessary to complete the task I was asked to do, however I could not turn down the pay, so there I was.

When I entered the building, I was led to a large room with a dozen long tables, each with at least twenty men in orange jumpsuits slumped in front of them, devouring some sort of sludge. The guard who had escorted me to the canteen directed me to a small table on the back wall and said: "You can set up here, the inmates will be here shortly".

Then he left me alone.

"Great."

I was alone in a room full of imprisoned enemy soldiers. *Fantastic.*

I was an outsider, inside - and I did not feel welcome.

After some time, a line began to form and I started my work; I was told – as I had expected – to shave their heads evenly into buzzcuts. It was repetitive work, and throughout the next few hours I must have completed at least one hundred and fifty haircuts on various prisoners. I found my mind constantly wandering, thinking about how these men may live back home. Did they have families? Friends? Were they like us?

However, these thoughts only lasted a split second at a time, hearing the British, Russian and French accents brought me back to reality: *These were my enemies. They were **villains**.*

It was around 4:30pm when it happened. I cannot recall the incident, but I remember clearly what happened afterwards...

I woke up in extreme pain. My head was heavy, my ears felt like they would explode at any moment, I could not see. My hands were tied and shaking. I was screaming, yelling, shouting, cursing, crying.

I felt a presence near me, and then a hand over my mouth. I heard words, but not what they were. It was a male voice, deep and gravelly.

I quietened down and, after a few minutes, the man removed his hand. My eyesight slowly came into focus.

The first thing I saw was a tall bald man. He was extremely muscular. His muscles were so large that his chest was bulging out of his orange jumpsuit, he had ripped away the sleeves and his fully tattooed, mass biceps were on full show. The mere sight of him made me feel like an insignificant insect, about to be thoughtlessly crushed by this colossal man.

The second man I saw was much smaller in comparison, he had ocean blue eyes and wavy blonde hair. I recognised him from the queue earlier, he had seemed cheerful and outgoing, but now there was a sense of urgency and unease in his eyes. Whatever was going on, it was not going to turn out well for them.

When the bald man realised that I was awake, he tapped the other's shoulder and pointed in my direction. The blonde man walked towards me and untied me; he spoke with a calm voice: "What is your name?"

He was English.

"Edna" I reply in a quiet voice.

"Well nice to meet you" he said, holding out his hand. I found this quite odd, considering a few moments previously I had been tied up and unconscious in his presence. Nevertheless, I cautiously shook his hand.

His German was quite good considering it was not his first language, and he continued to introduce himself and his friend.

“My name is Malcolm, and this...” he indicated towards the other man, “...is Pavel. He doesn’t speak any German, but it shouldn’t make much difference, he’s shy as anything”.

Pavel.

That was a Russian name.

I looked over to him, he had now given up on the top half of his jumpsuit completely. I could not resist a small giggle. After studying Russian for years before the Nazis came into power, I knew full well the irony of his name.

“Why are you laughing?” Malcolm asked, with clear confusion in his face. I spoke Russian to Pavel: “A man like you with a name meaning *small*? Classic.” Pavel smiled a little but did not speak. Malcolm continued to ask what was going on, Pavel laughed and spoke English to him.

Malcolm then went on to explain what was happening.

“They don’t treat us well, we don’t have enough food, we are physically punished. Today someone died here. Head got banged against a wall by a guard. Someone fought back. Here we are.” He said it so casually, like it had happened many times.

“Did you know him?” I ask.

“No, no,” he said “Some French bloke from D block, seemed nice enough” he said.

“So, what happens now?” I ask, my hands are no longer shaking as the two men became more and more human to me.

Pavel’s deep voice came from behind

me: “We escape.”