1940

May

Hail Hitler! The new camp has opened finally. We have called it Auschwitz-Birkenau. We think it will be the best one yet. They say it can hold more than 10,000 people! I’m new to all this, and I’m only in the army because mutter and vatter cannot support the family if I don’t. I haven’t been told much about it, only it can hold loads of Jews and Hitler wants us too, so it must be ok. My name is Klaus. I’m classic German apparently, according to mutter. Blond hair and blue eyes, wide mouth and full lips. Everyone says I suit the uniform, that green is my colour! I have no idea what that means, I mean, I’m not going to a camp to get a girl, I’m doing it for the good of my family and my country.

This is my fifth day on the job and I’m standing at the gate watching rows and rows of Jews being marched into the camp and shoved in the bunks. The line is endless…I wonder where they have all come from? Holland…Austria…Even some German traitors that have betrayed their own country and nation! How could you desert your life like that? I’m glad I joined the army now. There is none of the brutal murder that I expected, not yet anyway, and for that I am glad. Even though I am in this army and I will fight for my country if I have to, I would rather not kill in cold blood.

June

The dorms are already filling themselves with Jews, even though we have developed a method to sort out the Jews. I saw a man praying in block 15. I was with Bruno, who is an old hand from the army. He took one look at the sad old man and wasted a bullet ending his sad little life. I knew that he would get reprimanded for killing a slave, but there was no point having them if they don’t realise why their there – because the Furher thinks that Jews are wrong, and if he says so then it is. Everyone around us was screaming in terror and shock, but Bruno hitched his rifle onto his shoulder and rested his finger on the trigger while he glanced around the dim dorm, and the Jews shut up pretty quickly. I guess you would if you were looking down the barrel of a gun in the hands of a man that was obviously all too willing to shoot. Later I heard that the new commander, Rudolf Höss, had clapped Bruno on the back and said “man, whatever you do, the Furher will be on your side” which I think is a bit rich coming from someone who has never met him...

July

The summer is going to be hot this year, I know it. We have put the male Jews that can do manual labour to work, building even more blocks so that we can hold more Jews. We send some of them off to the mines nearby (obviously with a group of armed guards so that if any escape they will escape without their life!) and some of the farms, and so that when they come back with their wages, they give them to Herr Höss, and I get more pay to send back home! Apparently Hitler has decided against Gypsies and Poles, so we have another 100 people coming in through the gates every week. We have developed a slogan, as a bit of a joke to us Nazis, that we have cast onto the gate so that all of the Jews can see that there is no way out! It reads Arbiet Macht Frei. *Work Makes You Free.* Ha! Not in their case. We still haven’t found a way to get rid of the Jews that aren’t useful to us any more, but I think

Höss is looking for a way to lose them – Kill them of course.

I cannot write much as I am working hard and the commander reprimands us if we are slacking.

1941

September

I haven’t seen my family for over a year now and I haven’t got any letters from them. I used to write every week, and then when I got no replies, I wrote less and less until I stopped altogether. I wonder if any of my letters have actually got to them.

On a better note (well, for me anyway, and the rest of us Nazis) we’ve found some way to use the women and children that don’t work. We have turned blocks 1-5 into the women’s area, where the children stay too, and a man that I met at the station, Josef Mengele (says he’s a doctor...why is he here?!), said that he had an idea for how to get some use out of them. I don’t know what he plans to do but he claims he’s a surgeon, which doesn’t sound good for the people that are in there. I was watching him group the new arrivals, and as well as women and children, for some reason he picked out anyone that was disabled or anyone with a twin, whether they were there or not. He took them away to blocks 1-5 smiling and for some reason it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and a chill run down my spine. I shook the odd feeling out of my mind and lead the men that were destined to be slaves away to the dorms.

October

I heard a strange rumour when I was in block 17 throwing the food out with Bruno. The Jews would scrabble around on the floor on the bread like rats that smell blood. Some part of my brain made me remember when Mutter used to take me to the duck pond in the park in Berlin, when the ducks would quack and squabble about the tiniest crumb of stale bread. The people behind me were whispering about the man that I met on the platform, Dr Mengele. Apparently he was doing medical tests on the people that he selected from the station, things that are disgusting to think about, even though he’s doing them to sinners, like trying skin transplants and seeing what chemicals make what reaction on the human body. Im sure that’s illegal but they’re only rumours...I know that Bruno heard but when I tried to catch his eye he turned his face so that he was facing the other way.

1942

June

We had a meting today in Block 11, with every single Nazi on the site. The commander stood on a raised platform in front of us.

“As you all know, we have had a small problem involving the -“ a pause, then “*disposal* of the Jews that we do not want or need. Now we have come up with a solution.” There everyone started muttering until the noise level rose to a roar. I glanced around the room, and I could see Dr. Mengele smiling to himself in the corner. I wondered what he was thinking, as the rumours of his medically abusing women have become ever more common since last Christmas. But I couldn’t go over and talk to him because Höss was yelling at us to quiet.

“I can see many of you are pleased with this. I think you will be even happier when you know how we shall dispose of these vile creatures. I have 2 words for you. Zyklon-B.”

Everyone started yelling again. Some men were confused, others trying to hide a look of horror on their faces. Many were crying out in glee that we would finally get rid of some of the Jews and I tentatively celebrated. I was beginning to doubt what the motives were for this gassing. I guessed they were going to put them all somewhere and just throw the gas in. Everyone knew that Zyklon-B was lethal to humans if they breathe too much of it in. I guess Höss was using that to his advantage.

July

We had the first ever gassing today here in Auschwitz. A man named Hans Dermas and I were charged with getting the people into the antechamber to the mortuary. We decided to gas them in there, and Höss had slaves put in air vents and holes in the roof so that someone could drop the pellets of Zyklon-B into the mortuary. Hans and I took 600 Russian prisoners of war and another 100 Jews that were in the hospital and led them to the antechamber, where we told them that they were to have a shower and to take off all clothes and any possessions they had on them. Then we opened the door to the room that was to be their last sight, and shoved them in as fast as we could go. We both agreed that we should get it over with quickly. We slammed the door shut and ran until we got out of the building altogether. I could see the men in gas masks coming down the steps from the roof, carrying empty containers. I felt sick. A man came up to me, I guess he was my better, because he told me to go into the antechamber and take everything in there of any worth. I was terrified that the gas might leak out from under the door, but that wasn’t the thing that is seared into my memory. As I walked closer to the door of the death room, I could hear muffled screams as the people in there realised what was happening to them. I stood, frozen, against the door, expecting any minute for it to stop, and for all of this to be over, but the end didn’t come. The people kept on screaming for minutes that seemed like hours. Then, when the final scream died away, there was silence. And the sound of a wet hand sliding down a door.

1943

February

The moments from the first gassing sometimes haunt me at night, even though I should have become used to killing by now. I have been leading people to the gas chambers ever since that first time, but never have I gone into the antechamber unless I am sure the people inside are dead. The shower thing has stuck and now that is the lie that people are told when people like me lead them to their deaths.

Today, I was throwing bread out when a man in front of me stumbled and fell in his haste to get out of my way. Instead of walking over him like my companion did, I paused and held my hand out to him. He looked at it for a second and then hesitantly placed his hand in mine. I pulled him up, feeling as I did so, the lightness of his body compared to the sturdiness of mine. I looked into his eyes, confused for a second, and then let my lips curl up at the corners. I placed a hunk of bread into his hand, and he bowed his head and moved away. I looked up and saw that everyone in the block was staring at me, whether there was wonder or hatred or confusion in their eyes.

March

I have learnt the name of the man I helped in Block 12. His name is Len Yessop, and he is 27. My age. He looked so much older when I lifted his frail body off the ground in the block, but I’ve realised how little food we are giving them compared to us. We have banquets on birthdays in block 20, the Nazi block. All the while, we can hear, over the laughter and talking, the screaming from the madmen in block 19, the men we sentence to death by starvation, or we lock in a coffin until they die.

I have decided to be nicer to the people we are holding here in the blocks, Len and all his inmates. Even though I know that my colleagues whisper that im a Jew and I’m supporting the enemy, but I have the commander on my side, and when Bruno suggested to him that I may be a traitor but I don’t think he believed him. If he did...

July

Earlier, I was giving out food in Block 12 again, and I saw Len. Once I had given out all my bread, I thought that maybe he wanted some company. On the files it said that he had a wife who was in block 3 – he would never see her again – and a son named Rudolf, who was gassed as soon as he got off the train. I walked cautiously up to him, sitting in a corner on his own. He had mousey brownish hair and a typical Jewish nose. He could have been handsome if he didn’t look so worn and tired I think, and he obviously needed some more food. I felt bad going up to him with no food...

“Hello Len”

He looked up with a look of pure terror that softened a tiny bit when he recognised me.

“Hello Sir.”

“Its Klaus.”

“Yes sir - Klaus.” I smiled, unsure, but he seemed okay.

“Sir?”

“Yes?”

“Do you have any food sir? Its just, im so hungry, and...”

I looked around to see if Bruno had left yet. I couldn’t see him, so I assumed he couldn’t see me. I dug around in my pocket and pulled out a bit of bacon that I had saved for my favourite dog at breakfast, but I reckoned Heinz, the Alsatian, could do without for a day. I saw Len’s eyes light up with hunger, and I slipped the scrap into his hand.

“Thank you sir, thank you so much sir. I haven’t had bacon in three years!” The smile came easier now. Neither he nor I were scared of showing emotion now. I think Len might think of me as a friend. I hope he does. I like him, he is a good man. I wonder if there are any more good men here. I think there probably are, but no one has had the sense to seek them out.

The next time I see Len is in the yard. I was one of the guards that were supposed to oversee the building of the new gas chamber. We have so many people that we need more that the 3 that we already have. I glimpsed him out of the corner of my eye when I saw a man tumble and fall. Even though the man was getting up with a Nazi yelling at him for laziness, Len stood between them and held out his hand to the man on the floor. I remembered the first moment I saw Len, when I helped him off the earth floor in Block 12. I could see that Len was a natural helper, and a nice man underneath the skin and striped pyjamas.

August

We have been gassing for over a year now and we have 3 chambers, and another one being built. We have so many people now that we do 5 gassings in a chamber per day, which means we gas about 5,000 people per day! The camp can hold 40,000 now, not including us Nazis, but there aren’t enough furnaces to burn the corpses that lie higgledy-piggeldy on the stone floor when we finally open the chambers. We have been forced (not unwillingly for some...) to burn them in open pits in the clear space by the 2nd gas chamber. Some people think that it teaches the Jews a lesson about what happens when you go against God, but I think its wrong. I do not like to watch them burn, but sometimes I am made to. I know there is a pit burning at the moment; there is usually one at about noon.

I have been helping Len since early July. I think I’ve been keeping him alive, now that I can see how much he eats, and good God its not enough! I save bits from breakfast and lunch for him to take. I hope that he can avoid the gas chambers, cause I think that he’s my only actual friend here in Auschwitz. Only last week, I saw a man that I didn’t know beat Len for tripping over while carrying a load of bricks in his twig-like arms, and I wondered properly for the first time in 3 years what was I actually doing here. God’s work? I don’t think so! That’s what I thought when I came here, but now I just don’t know any more.

Today, Len was in the yard again, and I had a piece of bread in my pocket that I had saved for him. I looked around to see if any of the other guards were looking our way, and then tried to casually saunter over to him. I slipped my hand into my pocket and felt my fingers close around the roll. I could feel the crumbs at the bottom of my pocket by my fingertips. A bell rung and I paused for a second. That was the bell that told us to get the next load of people to the gas chambers. I was glad I wasn’t on that job now, listening to the screams of pain every single day. That leaves a mark...

*I am talking to Len. I haven’t noticed the confused look of the man over the site. But now Len’s eyes widen, and I feel a hand on my shoulder. A jolt of fear pierces into my heart. I think I know what’s going to happen. Len does to. I slowly turn around and the man that was standing the other side of the site has come round and is staring at me.*

*“Consorting with the enemy? That’s a federal crime, you know that?” I didn’t know what to say.*

*“Well. That’s a shame for you isn’t it? And you know what a federal crime is punishable by?”*

*“I-I-Yes I-No I-“ The man claps his hand across my mouth. And snaps his gun across his hip. And pulls it up to his eye. And tightens his finger on the trigger.*

*“Any last words, traitor?”*

*I turned to Len Yessop for one last time.*

*“Len?”*

*“Yes si – Klaus?”*

*“Never go for a shower.”*

*The bullet slides down the barrel at more than 100 meters per second. And comes into the open air. And singes the green of my jacket. And punches into my heart.*

By Olive Jackson, 9E, Year 9, Stroud High School.