

image 23

On the fourth night, after supper, we gave him a considerable sum in money and some of the jewelry, and then he led us to our new hiding-place. This was a spot in the corner of the barn. A long table, about 25 centimeters from the wall, was completely covered with a thick layer of hay and straw. Between the table and the walls of the barn were piles of leaves to shelter us from the cold. Entrance to this hideout was made from outside the barn, by removing one plank in the wall. The opening was about one-and-a-half feet wide.

We arranged to have food brought to us three times a day and asked Bojarski to get us a quilt and an oil lamp. We also insisted that he let us out each night after dark for some fresh air and exercise. Squeezing through the narrow opening, we now entered our little shelter feeling quite happy.

This isn't how you'd hide people. You'd have them be able to roam freely in the barn with one person looking through a hole in the barn to monitor if anyone was coming. Acting as a lookout, and listening for dogs to bark, and only go into the cramped hole if someone unknown was coming. The farmer was not even on the Germans' suspect list. He is just a random farmer in Poland. Imagine hiding someone in your home: You'd have them in a room, but ready to crawl into a small hiding space only if someone knocked at the door. You wouldn't have them in some cramped hole at all times!

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We laid down. We could sit, but only with heads bent, as the table was not high enough. After awhile, the farmer knocked and said that we hadn't given him money for the things he had to buy. We had no Polish currency, so we gave him German marks. A few days later, he brought us a quilt and a kerosene lamp, and some cigarettes which Fred had requested. Considering how other Jews fared, we felt we were in paradise.

Three weeks went by and life in the shelter became routine. What if, crouching, our necks and backs ached from the cramped quarters and we saw no daylight? We knew that sooner or later all this would end and, in the meantime, we were safe. We still would have preferred to part of some partisan group, but Bojarski frankly said he wouldn't allow us to contact anyone. He stubbornly maintained that he didn't know anyone

The power of irony in short stories. 'In these awful conditions we were in paradise!' More irony to make Bojarski look bad follows in the story.

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whom he could trust. He was suspicious of these armed men roaming the countryside; and perhaps, too, he feared that by joining them we might be induced to rob him of the gold and jewels.

And so, we lived in our narrow hole. The boundary between us and the rest of the world was a small plank of wood in the wall of the barn, yet it imprisoned us more surely than jailers and prison bars.

One night, Bojarski asked Fred to lend him his boots as he wanted to wear them to church. After that, we had to "lend" him his other things, one by one, until one day, we were left with only underpants, one pair of overalls and one sweater between us three to share. We didn't complain. We felt the sacrifice was worthwhile.

Then misfortune struck. One night, the dog began to bark fiercely. We heard voices from the house, coming closer, until someone entered the barn. There came the night sound of digging into straw, the overturning of objects. Then a strange voice.

"Any strangers here?"

"No, all the time."

Except prisons have concrete walls and metal bars, and the wall on the inside of the barn, here, is made of hay.

The farmer was given diamonds and gold and he's going to take their pants? It's November or December in Poland at this time. (Uprising was Oct. 15, 1943) and these men are living outside in freezing temperatures with no heat. He never mentions he's freezing though.

Irony in short stories: stealing clothes to wear to church!

They have a million dollars in loot, but they're going to hang out in these conditions even though Blatt knows this city like the back of his hand.

image 26

"Any strangers here?"

"Well then, how is it you seem to be so well off lately? And so well dressed? Where do you get the dough to do this? Everyone can see this, and they won't stand being cheated. Come on, give up the Jew. We will make short work of him!"

Bojarski began to weep; we could hear him, and he gave his oath that he wasn't hiding anyone. He knew that if he were to be found out, he would be shot along with us. The intruders, however, didn't seem to trust him, for they went snooping around the barn for some time. In the end, they punched the straw a bit more, without reaching us, however, for we were too deeply hidden. We crouched, quietly praying, each thrust of the stick and rustle of the straw stopping our breath. Finally they left.

That same night, Bojarski entered our hideout and began to clamor: "You see now? Just a bit more and they would have shot me and all of you. What do we do now?"

He was right of course, but we consoled him, telling him that now that these men were convinced he doesn't harbor Jews they'd leave him alone. We gave him some more gold and he left satisfied.

One day we heard some dull detonations. The "landlord" came and whispered happily

Bojarski enters their cramped hideout to have a conversation with them. I wonder if Bojarski thought, "Gee, these men are living nearly naked outside in freezing temperatures because I borrowed their clothes to look good. This just ain't right!"

Every "hide in the straw" story has to have somebody poking the straw at some point.



image 27

that the front was coming closer — then asked whether we regretted having given him the extra money. We assured him we didn't, and added that if only we survived, we would even add the deed to a house which my family owned in Izbica. The following day the news was even better; all the Volksdeutsche [German-born residents] were fleeing Izbica.

Days went by; the sounds of heavy guns gradually ceased; the Volksdeutsche returned, and we learned that the fighting had not been between the German occupation forces and the regular Soviet army, but rather the Nazis had clashed with the partisan group of General Kowpak, which had penetrated alone and was making its way to some further destination. Bojarski became cross and our treatment became worse.

He no longer allowed us to get out at night, and brought us food only once a day, at night — a bowl of soup, a chunk of bread and spoons.

Yet they didn't leave, simply by punching through the hay, into the barn, on a Sunday while he's at church. They could have then broke into his house, stole some clothes and left. He wouldn't have reported it because then he'd be in trouble.

image 28

### 3. WHEN THE WORLD IS CUT DOWN TO 80 CUBIC FEET

Our life in the shelter ran somewhat like this: we knew of daybreak by the crowing of roosters; we talked on various possible and impossible subjects; when we heard the voice of Bojarski's son returning from school we knew it was dinnertime; after that, we waited for nightfall and our only meal — the removable board in the wall of the barn was now secured by an outside lock, and we took turns of duty at this opening; the one on watch waited to receive the bowl of food; at his side was another identical bowl, to be returned to the "landlord" — this one containing our eliminations.

image 29

After our meal, Kostman would add another straw to an ashtray — our calendar. Two months had gone by. At first we had quite a bit of trouble keeping track since each of us went to sleep whenever he felt like it, and day and night had a way of getting mixed up. However, we decided to put an end to this and instituted a rigorous routine. From cockcrow to supper it was forbidden to sleep. In a short time we felt psychologically much better. I remember being curious as to how I looked, but we had no mirror. However, one glance at my two buddies

They would have had air holes, which would have let light in, otherwise the moisture would have built up and given them hypothermia when it got cold.

You wouldn't need this kind of concealment even in a big city, let alone a farm. They would have at least been allowed in the barn and simply hid if they heard anyone coming.

Contrast this over-the-top concealment to Yankel Wiernik's account after allegedly escaping Treblinka: Wiernik escapes and goes and gets a municipal desk job in Warsaw. Or with Samuel Willenberg: He escapes Treblinka and afterward openly walks around the Warsaw streets. Willenberg's Jewish father simply rents an apartment from a landlord by saying he's not Jewish.

So apparently no amount of money, gold, or diamonds could persuade anyone in the Bojarski family to buy kerosene or cigarettes for them. And strange that the classmate daughter took no interest in their well-being. Blatt has forgot about her in his story.

convinced me that we all looked the same: half naked, unkempt and wild.

One day, when our kerosene was exhausted, Bojarski refused to buy more. Now we seemed to be living in a tomb; everything was done by touch, in total darkness. Kostman, the only one who smoked, couldn't fight his addiction. He tore bits of coarse paper from old bags which had contained cement, crumbled some dead oak leaves from our "bedding" and lit up. Once, when I was receiving the bowl, I was scalded by the boiling soup. My hand was badly burned.

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