

## A-25271: The Symphony of Liberation

The name Belsen always sent shivers through my spine. It was a place I'd have given anything to forget, but now I found myself yearning for those dreaded words: "A-25271 Anuj!" The guard's shout, harsh and cruel, would have been a symphony of liberation amidst the suffocating silence.

Last Friday, my task was to gather the belongings of the dead—worn bags, fragments of lives cut too short. I trudged to the pile of corpses, where the bags would soon meet fire. As I bent down to pick one up, the sight of black boots startled me, towering to the knees, gleaming like obsidian beneath the fading sunlight. Rising slowly, I was met by a figure, his belly pushing against the light green uniform like a balloon about to burst. He handed me the bag with a simple nod, his blue eyes eerily calm. For a moment, I felt a bizarre sense of openness from this stranger who, despite the uniform, seemed oddly detached from the horrors around us. He turned and walked away towards the chief officer's office, leaving me standing in the quiet stillness of death.

The afternoon brought fitness drills, though the only fitness we were being tested for was survival. We were stripped bare and sent to a vast, brown field, the dirt dry as the dust that seemed to coat our lungs.

The command was simple: Run. And run we did, until one by one, we were pushed aside. Just as I stumbled to the ground, panting for breath, a gunshot shattered the air. An old man, a mere shadow of himself, crumpled like paper, his head leaking crimson onto the thirsty earth. Ants, unaware of the carnage, swarmed over the blood-soaked soil. The scene, grotesque in its starkness, left me frozen. My heart thudded, my stomach twisted in nausea, but I couldn't afford to stop.

"Get dressed and keep moving!" The guard's voice snapped me back into the grim reality, and I staggered back to the barracks, feeling the weight of death clinging to me like a second skin.

The next day, I was summoned to the guest office. The room was suffocating, thick with heavy curtains that blocked any trace of light. A single lamp flickered weakly, casting shadows on the walls. In the darkness, a man sat hunched over a desk, staring blankly at the wall. "Sir," I whispered, the words barely escaping my throat. The figure turned, his eyes as cold and vast as the ocean.

"What's your name?"

"Anuj," I replied, trembling under his gaze.

The man introduced himself: Oskar Schindler. His name was known, but his words stunned me. He wanted me to be his secretary, to manage labor for his factory. His voice, though gruff, was steady as he

took a long drag from his cigarette, the smoke swirling like ghosts between us. Confused and desperate to escape the suffocating tension, I nodded, agreeing to his offer without truly understanding what lay ahead.

Schindler was a man driven by wealth and power, his ambition as sharp as the iron walls of the camp. I gave him a list of 102 names, scrawled on a piece of white paper in bold, black ink. These were the men and women working in the factory, their lives hanging in the balance as he counted profits that reached into the millions. Despite his cold exterior, Schindler had an odd warmth. He joked with me often, an unexpected humanity in the heart of this nightmare.

One evening, he invited me to his guest house. A candle flickered between us, casting strange shadows on his face as he served me a dish of eggplant.

"Why are you all here?" he asked suddenly, his voice heavy with something I couldn't quite place.

"Because we're Jews," I replied, confused.

His face twisted with anger and something deeper, something I couldn't name. "Is that all?" he spat, his voice breaking. The silver spoon in my hand felt cold, as if I'd been plunged into an ice bath. Tears welled in his eyes, streaking down his cheeks, soaking into his iconic white coat. His breakdown was terrifying and raw, as if the weight of all our suffering had finally settled onto his shoulders.

I wanted to comfort him, to tell him it was okay, but the words stuck in my throat. He stormed out of the room, his figure disappearing into the darkness. Later, I learned he'd bargained with the officers, offering more than he could afford to secure more labor for his factory. He was desperate, as if saving us was the only thing keeping him alive.

The next morning, the sound of gunfire jolted me awake. Schindler had requested a list of every Jew I'd known in the camp, and I spent three excruciating hours typing the names. The old typewriter clattered with each stroke, its metallic keys a constant reminder of the lives hanging in the balance. Schindler paced the room like a caged animal, biting his nails, his voice a strained whisper as he asked how many were left.

"1190," I muttered.

"Ten more," he begged, his hands trembling as he glanced at his dwindling funds. He was willing to part with everything—his watch, his dignity—to save just ten more souls. Finally, with a list of 1200 names in his hands, he marched to the office.

That day, we were lined up, called by our numbers like cattle ready for slaughter. But instead of death, we were packed onto a train bound for Czechia, Schindler's homeland.

The train ride felt surreal. Children laughed, trying to break the ice that had formed above the train car, eagerly waiting for it to melt into water. We were being taken to a new factory; one Schindler promised would grant us more freedom than we'd ever known in Belsen. But even as the train clattered forward, the weight of what we'd left behind—the ashes, the blood, the screams—lingered like a shadow over our hearts.

The symphony of liberation had begun, but its melody was one of haunting pain, loss, and sacrifice.