

I am David

This story is set during the Second World War. David is a prisoner in a concentration camp where he has lived ever since he was a baby. The man in this passage is a cruel prison guard whom David hates. David is astonished when the man tells him that he will help him to escape.



“You must get away tonight,” the man had told him. “Stay awake so that you’re ready just before the guard’s changed. When you see me strike a match, the current will be cut off and you can climb over – you’ll have half a minute for it, no more.”

In his mind’s eye David saw once again the grey bare room he knew so well. He saw the man and was conscious, somewhere in the pit of his stomach, of the hard knot of hate he felt whenever he saw him. The man’s eyes were small, repulsive, light in colour, their expression never changing; his face was gross and fat. David had known him all his life, but he never spoke to him more than was barely necessary to answer his questions; and though he had known his name for as long as he could remember, he never said anything but “the man” when he spoke about him or thought of him. Giving him a name would be like admitting that he knew him; it would place him on an equal footing with the others.

But that evening he had spoken to him. He had said, “And if I don’t escape?”

The man had shrugged his shoulders. “That’ll be none of my business. I have to leave here tomorrow, and whatever my successor may decide to do about you, I shan’t be able to interfere. But you’ll soon be a big lad, and there’s need in a good many places for those strong enough to work.”

David knew only too well that those other places would not be any better than the camp where he now was. “And if I get away without being caught, what then?” he had asked.

“Just by the big tree in the thicket that lies on the road out to the mines, you’ll find a bottle of water and a compass. Follow the compass southwards till you get to Salonica, and then when no one’s looking go on board a ship and hide. You’ll have to stay hidden while the ship’s at sea, and you’ll need the water. Find a ship that’s bound for Italy, and when you get there go north till you come to a country called Denmark – you’ll be safe there.”

Answer in sentences.

- 1 Which words show that David had known the man for a long time?
- 2 What did David hate about the man’s eyes?
- 3 Did David know the man’s name?
- 4 Did David like the man?
- 5 How would David know that the electricity had been cut off?
- 6 How long would David have to climb over the wall?
- 7 What would David find hidden by the tree?
- 8 Where must David go first?
- 9 When he gets to Salonica, what must he do next?
- 10 Why must David do his best to get to Denmark?