

Chapter 3_Briquets ...

In this chapter, we are introduced to Arpad Kovacs, the guard who relieves Andor Gutman each night at six. Arpad is characterized as a lively and flamboyant individual with a penchant for boasting. Upon starting his shift, he asks to see Gutman's writing, eagerly praising it without actually reading it, projecting confidence and cheerfulness as he walks up and down the corridor.

He uses a metaphor to criticize those who do not resist the Nazis, referring to them as "briquets" – a term signifying individuals molded by convenience and complacency, much like coal dust bricks. Arpad emphasizes that, unlike these "briquets," he took active steps to survive the Holocaust by obtaining false papers and joining the Hungarian S.S. This choice fuels his disdain for passivity and his belief in the necessity of self-preservation.

Their conversation shifts to Gutman's role as a Nazi radio propagandist. Gutman shares a transcript of one of his broadcasts, only for Arpad to dismiss its potency, claiming it is lacking in conviction. Arpad is surprised to find that the broadcasts weren't as incendiary or influential as he expected, asserting that they lacked the drama and impact he would have aimed for if he held Gutman's role.

Recalling his S.S. experiences, Arpad boasts about his tenure, claiming no one suspected his Jewish heritage due to his Aryan looks and loyalty. His pride continues as he shares that his unit was tasked with uncovering potential leaks within the S.S. regarding their plans for the Jewish population. Ultimately, he boasts of their success, reporting that fourteen S.S. men were executed based on his unit's recommendations, earning praise from Eichmann himself.

As the conversation concludes, there's a bitter undertone as Arpad reflects on not recognizing Eichmann's significance at the time, lamenting that if he had, he would have taken the opportunity to kill him. This chapter explores themes of identity, survival, complicity, and the spectrum of moral choices made during dire circumstances.