Blindspots

by Macx

Summary

This is how it is: Hogan and his men are the devious operatives, working underneath Klink’s nose. Sabotage, thefts and whatever else London orders. Klink is the inept POW camp commander with a perfect non-escape record they can manipulate to work in their favor.

Perfect cover.

No one ever expected anything to change.

Especially not in the way it did. With a bang, not a whimper. With a revelation that changes everything. Especially for a special operations military Sentinel trained to work alone. Someone who thought he had everything under control, who knew the players in this game they were playing.

Fact is: he didn't.

When things go extremely sideways for Hogan because he makes a big mistake in front of a Gestapo Sentinel, the help he receives comes from the last place he expected. It turns his world upside down and inside out.

They just might not survive it.

Notes
Author's Voice:

I'm nervous as hell!

I'm not sure how this fic happened. They started showing reruns of Hogan's Heroes over here and I thought, hey, nostalgia calling, let's watch! Even if the dub is somewhat silly sometimes. They changed a lot of dialog.

Then my muse climbed out of hibernation, started coming up with this insane story idea, and when it was bad enough that I kept visualizing scenes, I started to take notes.

Which started a writing binge of epic proportions. Right down to finishing 10 k in 24 hours.

Due to the fact that I had never seen HH episodes other than in dubbed versions, I binge-watched them on youtube.

Bad idea. Really bad idea.

I have no clue if anyone will really read this, since it's an AU I haven't seen here before, and the fandom appears to be rather small. Anyway, I'm throwing this out here because I wrote it and even if one person thinks it's worth reading and gives it a chance, I'll be happy.

So have at it.

Please: AU! Don't go flaming! Just the fact that this is a Sentinel/Guide thing should tell you AU, AU, AU! I can't repet it enough!

Anyone who knows my writing probably also knows to expect a little different take on the Sentinel thing. I like to experiment :)


Chapter 1

It had been a long, long time since Robert E. Hogan, United States Army Air Force, had had a zone out or dropped into a kind of haze because one of his senses had fired up and couldn't be controlled.

Ages.

Ever, actually.

He couldn't remember things getting so bad it went past his natural defenses, took him out for good, left him vulnerable.

Not even getting shot down and captured by the Germans had triggered him.

Hardly anything ever had in all his life.

It wasn't that he was completely self-contained in his senses. No, he had to learn a lot about himself and his abilities after joining the US Army at a very early age. What Robert had been able to do without the help of a skilled Guide was a talent only few Sentinels possessed: he could handle himself. His mind was strong enough to build natural barriers, though such talent came at a price.

The military always actively looked for such talent, for Sentinels that could be thrown into about any kind of situation without a partner, make it out alive and without zoning, and they trained them.

Relentlessly.

Such talent was usually found with strong minds, strong characters, fast thinking, quick on the uptake, highly adaptable, and only military material on paper. Sentinels were commanding, yes. Perfect soldiers in so many ways. But those working autonomously, as specialists – or troubleshooters, as they became known – had a problem with authority.

Hogan had been no exception. People had to earn his respect and he was downright insubordinate in his ways, but also charming, very skilled in manipulations, and his success rate filled pages upon pages.

They gave him to Special Ops. Special Ops, the troubleshooters, wanted Sentinels that didn't need a partner, a Guide, except to decompress, and even that could be handled by anyone trained to do it.

Even the Sentinel himself, if he had the necessary safe place and the time.

It was something Hogan had been doing all his life: take care of himself.

So yes, troubleshooters didn't need anyone. Troubleshooters had to rely on themselves because a Guide was a weakness, a liability, a danger to the mission.

One of his trainers had once described his condition as an endless, unbroken loop. Nothing could interfere as long as Hogan kept up his training and mental exercises.

He was good at that. Really good.

Looping became an official name for what they did not much later. Just another name for something science had yet to classify.

"You might not ever need a Guide, Hogan," the Sentinel who had trained him had told him one
evening after rigorous training. "You're very strong. Alpha material. You're a natural leader."

The praise had him give his trademark smirk.

"Just be careful. Don't overdo it. Find time to decompress."

"Textbook," he only remarked.

Because military Sentinels were constantly bombarded with sensations, always on guard, always tense and ready to spring into action. They had no one to lean on. They had only themselves.

Hogan liked that kind of life. He thrived on it.

His old instructor grimaced. "Yeah, which so many of you kids disregard. But don't throw it out. The rules are there for a reason. And remember that you're not invincible. There are strong minds out there."

"I'm not drawn to them."

There had been a parade of them at the training center and everywhere he had been sent to continue his combat training. They challenged him, but none had ever managed to break the Loop.

"Just sayin', kid. Guys like you, the specialists and impossible mission operatives, don't last forever. A year into a mission and symptoms show. Two years? That would be a long time running the show. You'll start unravelling. Decompressing will take longer, will be more difficult. Pull out before it gets you, Hogan."

"I've never needed anyone."

The older man nodded. "You're exceptional, I give you that, but not completely self-contained. No Sentinel is. We're not made that way. Guides, sure. They can be. You have a powerful mind that keeps you alive. Just heed my warning: go by the books, Hogan. Troubleshooters can be shot down."

Sure, they could. Like all covert ops they lived a dangerous life.

Hogan ran his first few missions flawlessly. He rose quickly through the ranks, became a full colonel at an age where most were still working captain.

Eval spoke of his strength, of his focus, how fast he thought on his feet and how he had incorporated his senses into his life. They still pitched him against Guides, wanted to see if he connected, because even his kind of mind could find a permanent anchor.

No one ever fit.

He liked it that way.

When he had been assigned to run a covert operation involved with espionage and sabotage out of Stalag 13, Hogan had come without a Guide. Command had orchestrated his capture, his placement in this very Stalag, and everything around him. His close inner circle was aware of who and what he was and the crew had been trained in all kinds of Sentinel first aid.
Getting him out of a fugue had been one of those scenarios, but up until that fateful moment, no one had had to ever do it.

They made it back from their dark-of-the-night covert operation just in the nick of time, dragging their completely out of it commander with them. Newkirk and Carter hauled him out of the tunnel and into the barracks, just as Schultz was hollering for roll-call.

"Bloody hell," Newkirk hissed. "Now what?"

Carter gave a helpless shrug.

"Everyone out, out, out!" Schultz ordered as he stomped into the barracks, stopping short as he discovered Hogan. "What is wrong with him?"

"Uh, something he ate?" Carter tried, looking guileless.

Schultz gave him a scowl, but he appeared a little unsure.

"Maybe a virus? It could be contagious," Newkirk added, sniffling for show. "Been feeling a tad bit under the weather myself lately."

"No, no, no. Everyone out! I'm not falling for this!"

"But he's really sick!"

"I will be in so much trouble if not everyone is out!" the sergeant complained. "Please, just get him outside?"

The men exchanged worried glances, but Kinch finally pulled up their lethargic looking Colonel and they made it out into the night. Lights were flooding the ground and the guards were keeping an eye on matters as Klink stalked out of his office, squinting at the assembly.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Uh, all men accounted for," Schultz reported.

"What is wrong with Colonel Hogan?"

"He's sick," Newkirk piped up. "Bad flu bug."

"Sick? From what?" the Kommandant demanded. "There hasn't been a sniffle or sneeze in this camp in weeks!"

"So it was about time for one of us to catch something," LeBeau explained unhelpfully. "Mon Colonel was the one who volunteered."

Klink came over, scowling, then snapped sharply, "Colonel Hogan! I won't have you playacting your way into a trip to the doctor in town for whatever reason you are planning to be there!"

Hogan blinked, a quizzical sound escaping his throat. Klink leaned closer, eyes narrowed with a suspicious expression.

"I am not in the mood for your bad acting, Colonel Hogan. Do me the favor and stop it!"

Hogan startled, eyes wide, and he stared at Klink. "What…?"
"Aha! I knew it! I just knew it!"

Kinch, who had been holding him up as much as he could, shot their commanding officer and resident Sentinel a surprised, almost shocked look.

"Klink?" Hogan managed.

"Yes. I can see you are well. That kind of ruse won't work on me! No one escapes this Stalag, not even you, in some faked attempt to be seen by an outside doctor. Now, no more playing around. I expect you and your men to be up and ready early tomorrow morning to sweep the camp! The place looks like a pigsty!"

He turned on his heels, ordering Schultz to return the prisoners to their barracks, before anyone could understand what had happened.

Least of all Hogan, who blinked almost owlishly at his men as they went back into the barracks.

"Colonel?" Newkirk asked quietly. "You okay?"

"What…?"

"You zoned."

"I… oh…"

"We had no clue how to get you out. You just snapped out of it. Throughout roll-call."

"Huh."

"You okay?" Kinchloe repeated Newkirk's question.

"Yeah. I… a bit out of it, but okay. What happened?"

"Not sure. No one was with you. We found you in a ditch. You still moved, but you weren't there, Colonel. I thought it was a medium zone, but you were kinda locked in there."

"Huh."

"You really okay?"

"I feel fine, Kinch." He clapped the other man's shoulder and gave his men a tight smile. "Think I'll get some real rest now. Thanks for the cover, guys. Perfect execution."

And then he was in his private room.

The men exchanged confused looks.

"What happened out there?" Newkirk asked.

"No clue. I thought we had really lost him." Kinch stared at the door, then shrugged. "We better grab some sleep before tomorrow. Colonel's orders."

They moved to their bunks, no one truly satisfied with the explanation as to how their Sentinel had recovered, but no one wanted to theorize much longer. It had been luck and a whole lot of more luck.
By next morning things had gone back to normal. Absolutely normal.

Hogan was still confused as to how he had gotten into this mess. The last thing he remembered was waiting for a resistance contact, then nothing, and finally coming around to Klink staring at him like Hogan was there personally for him to make his life harder.

This had never happened before.

Ever.

The one time he had been pushed into a bad zone had been in early trainings, but never since then.

He had spent the night sleeping soundly, his senses realigning themselves with practiced ease. He fell back on his military training, using focal points of his choosing, sinking into a brief meditative state as he pulled in each sense and relaxed into the well-known territory that was Stalag 13.

His territory.

One he had lasted in without problem for months now, over a year actually, heading onward to two.

It had always worked so far. At least when he was rudimentarily still aware of what was going on.

So how had it happened this time?

Maybe it had been a subconscious reaction on his part while nearly in a zone, using one of his men. Maybe training had kicked in and pushed him back into the safety of the Loop.

Maybe.

Hogan blew out a breath, opening his eyes and going through sense exercises. Sight, hearing, smell and touch. All fine. Taste had never been top-notch, which was just fine in such an environment, and his instructor had once jokingly called him a 4 ½ senses Sentinel.

He got out of his bed, dressed and rejoined his men, feeling on top of the world again.

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Kinch looked still too worried for Hogan's liking when he found him in the tunnels, over the radio, listening to chatter. He put down the headset, fixing his commanding officer with serious eyes.

"You zoned, Colonel. For real. That's not good."

And it shouldn't happen to a skilled and seasoned operative, was the unspoken addition. At least someone who took care of himself and his senses.

He thought he had.
Apparently he hadn't and it had come back to bite him.

Hogan wondered if back-to-back missions, shuttling downed pilots out of Germany, helping defectors escape and blowing up important tracks and bridges, had been too much.

He didn't think so, but the more he thought about it, the more he believed it possible. Too much lately. There had been no time to do the most basic of anchoring and he had paid for it.

Hogan rubbed at one temple. "Wish I had an answer, Kinch. I thought I had done everything right."

"Evidence says not so much."

"I think I'll need some decompression time," the colonel agreed ruefully. "Looks like my head finally exploded."

Kinch gave a little snort. "You think? We got lucky, Colonel."

Very lucky, yes. Maybe there had been too many complex, near-impossible situations to handle. They had made it out on top, getting to their objective, eliminating targets and foiling plans, but it had taken a toll.

On him.

He couldn't be off his game like that again. If the German patrols had found him… The Gestapo would have a field day interrogating an American Sentinel.

"You do that. Think you need me?" his second in command asked.

"No. I'll be fine."

Kinch nodded and went back to listening.

Yes, Hogan knew he had to take care of himself, remember training.

Part of him still puzzled as to what had pulled him out, though.

He was the only Sentinel in the POW camp. The highest rank, a full Colonel who hadn't been traded for anyone on the other side, who hadn't been moved to a different Stalag. Anyone identifying as a Sentinel had been quickly moved, shuttled through the underground and away from Stalag 13.

No Guides had been revealed either. Kinch was the only one he used as a base line, and even that was hit or miss because the man wasn't a Guide. He had some ancestry in that regard, but it had never shown in him.

Hogan blew out a breath.

Time to make an appearance, get the clean-up started, then find a moment or two of alone time to handle the fallout of last night.

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There was little time to think about matters, aside from really taking the time he needed to find his
focus. A truck full of Red Cross supplies finally came in, including blankets and mattresses they really needed. Some barracks' stoves were replaced, which was a surprise.

"You're too good to us," he told Klink as he breezed into the man's office again, full of insolent charm and teasing remarks. "What did we do to deserve that?"

Klink scowled at him. "Can't you ever be thankful and not suspect something?"

"Is there something to suspect?"

"No. Now leave. I have work to do."

Hogan let his eyes sweep around the neat office, over the maps on the walls, the files. "Anything exciting?" he asked innocently.

"Nothing you should concern yourself with."

"I mean, I could help. Nothing much else to do, right?"

"Out!" Klink ordered. "Just leave!"

"And here I thought you liked my company."

"You are a nuisance!"

"I do my very best. So that's a no?"

"No!"

"No to the no or is that a yes hidden in a no?"

"Hogan! Out! Out of my sight!"

"Yes, sir!"

He gave a sloppy salute and was out the door, winking at Hilda, and back to the barracks before Klink was done yelling some more.

That had felt good.

Lifting his spirits actually.

Business as usual.

* * *

He had played his role for as long as he could remember. From childhood to now, from hiding under the radar the moment his abilities manifested, through the rise of Hitler to power and the war. He hid and operated from behind that perfectly crafted façade, had done all in his power to undermine the Reich and help the Allied Forces.

Even if Colonel Robert E. Hogan didn't make it easy.
The man was a nuisance on a good day and a nail to his coffin on less than good days. He downright cursed the American's existence when things went really bad.

Which happened from time to time.

Actually, almost every week, Monday to Friday. With the occasional weekend respite.

Protecting him and his crew was of utmost importance. The base of their operations, his Stalag, needed to be both secure and yet not too perfect. He needed to be inept, a bit dimwitted, cowardly, and often clueless and rather gullible on one side, but cunning, secretive and fast-thinking on the other. His background was solid, his line of descent decent enough for him to rise through the ranks as if only outside influence had helped him along, and while he would have excelled at his chosen fields of studies, he had given them up like so much already. He had voluntarily failed his entrance exams.

Because Colonel Wilhelm Klink needed to hide everything he was and be everything he had never wanted to be, if he had had a choice.

Of an old aristocratic line, but poor and without influential advocates to advance his rank, Klink was unimportant enough to be ignored, to be cast aside, to be made fun of. His uncle had made sure that he ended up in a military academy where everyone knew that the only reason he had been there was that the uncle was the mayor's barber.

Klink graduated in the lower nineties of his class. Ninety-fifth, actually. Laughable, but ensuring his survival.

He had seen his former class mates get killed as they rose in rank, as they became too good or not good enough, were suspected of treason or crimes.

Klink was a blind spot. He was invisible, rarely ever suspected of true intelligence, and his so-called connections to

Just as planned.

No one could have planned on the special operative they would get into the camp, the Military Sentinel. Colonel Robert Hogan. A man who was truly skilled, who operated with such a high success rate, he was entitled to be cocky sometimes. Well, he was cocky most of the time.

Sure, he had to grab him and drag him out of a mess or two by the neck, figuratively speaking, but he was good.

Klink had thought he would last a few months, then a replacement would be sent in. Even autonomous Sentinels needed decompression time, to be pulled out of assignments to realign their senses, balance themselves, then get back into business.

But Command kept him there.

Klink thought it was insane.

The German colonel had never contacted the Allied Command directly if not absolutely necessary. The risk was too great, his cover too deep.

He had done so twice concerning the Sentinel in his camp now. Each time he had been told to handle the situation. They knew what Wilhelm Klink was and they had given him permission to reveal himself.
Fools. Absolute idiots!

Still, Hogan kept running the operation with charm, skill, intelligence, some luck on occasions, and without failures.

He was good. Really good.

Yes, some of his schemes were outrageous and even Klink wondered if he hadn't gone insane, but it worked. Sometimes with a little exaggerated acting on his part, doing his best to distract from Hogan's crew, but it worked.

Six months into their cooperation, of which Hogan knew nothing, the first falters occurred. Klink was annoyed that London still didn't listen, so he did his own damage control.

It wasn't hard.

His abilities were good enough and he wasn't detected.

A year into the operation and it got a little more tricky. The man was under constant pressure and it was starting to show.

Klink knew he could snap Hogan out of a fugue state with his voice alone. He ordered him into his office when Hogan's actions spoke of how he frayed at the edges, invited him to chess games that forced him to focus, or gave him small tasks that required his mind to sharpen. The Sentinel reacted to him, which was worrisome sometimes, but he didn't try to think about it. He was here, had been placed here, because of his inability to connect and his absolute unwillingness to let himself fall into such a connection.

That required trust.

Absolute trust.

And an intimacy he wasn't ready to give.

So Klink worked from the shadows, unseen, as before. He did what he could, stayed true to his image. He did what he could without giving away the fact that he a) knew what was going on, every detail of it and was b) the balancing factor Hogan needed when it got too bad.

Everything worked swimmingly… to a degree, sometimes, but it worked. For almost two years.

Until Johannes Rothenburg. Gestapo Sentinel, ruthlessly trained to be even more ruthless, looking for the underground and sniffing around his camp.

Looking for trouble.

And finding Klink.

Because of Hogan.

For all his laying low and flying under even the American Sentinel's radar, Klink had allowed himself to become… attached, for lack of a better word.
It was the very first mistake he made in his life as an invisible Guide.

He had warded off zones and fugue states, had cursed the grade A annoyance that was Robert Hogan for making his life and work so much harder because he kept running into situations that were hard on any Sentinel's senses, let alone one of Hogan's caliber. It was once bad enough that he sent the insolent man to the cooler to give him twenty-four hours to basically get his act together, center himself, and it still showed later on.

Klink wondered how badly London wanted to keep the headstrong operative in the game to risk burning him. So he did everything for the man to stay in the game.

What he hadn't counted on was Hogan losing his cool in front of Rothenburg.

Because of a girl, because his protective instincts got the better of him. Probably because he had been overdoing it again after getting back on his mental feet. London had sent him impossible assignments and Hogan had jumped right in, the challenge too much to ignore.

He needed the little kicks and thrills.

He also needed a Guide. Nothing London could tell him convinced Klink that Hogan would last much longer under these conditions, no matter how subtly he tried to help. Matters were spiraling out of control and the troubleshooter was burning up.

The Gestapo Sentinels had pretty little Guides for that, burning through them like fire through paper, leaving them broken and dead inside in their wake. They served as temporary anchors until they lost their use.

Hogan had a group of men who knew how to handle him, but none with a grain of ability for the fine-tuning. None of them could serve as an anchor for the Sentinel to just let himself fall and trust them.

So, Rothenburg.

A Sentinel who had the most common of senses, Sight and Hearing, found in Sentinel kind. A cold-blooded killer. Who came to the camp for what he called an inspection of an outstanding prison camp where no one had ever escaped, because they were looking for a place to keep special prisoners and Stalag 13 had such a perfect record.

Who was in the company of two assistants and a young woman.

A girl, really.

Probably no older than sixteen.

Klink didn't have to guess or ask who and what she was: a Guide. There for the pleasure of the Sentinel, to be abused when he needed to realign his senses or sate his pleasures. She was decoration. She was a token, a sign to tell others that he didn't need a seasoned Guide, that such a little girl was all it took.

If he had bonded her, it would be a one-sided connection, chaining her to him, and her death would mean nothing to his mental state. Or Rothenburg was already so far gone that it didn't matter.

Klink was seething inside, but he needed to be his inept, slightly bumbling self.
The problem was, someone slipped.

The Sentinel in their midst.

Hogan took one look at the girl and Klink saw the hard edge settle in the dark eyes, saw his stance shift, felt the first eddies of a protective Sentinel about to go off at another one.

The girl was radiating distress, had no shields to speak of, and Klink would have soothed her if it didn't give him away. She had been abused for years, everything taken away from her to be open and receptive to whomever wanted to use her empathic skills, which also left her open to be bombarded by every emotion around her.

Hogan was reacting to that.

He was a true protector, encompassing all a Sentinel should be. He should be more contained, really. He should have let it wash over him, ignore it, be neutral.

But instinct took over.

So Klink slipped as well. Consciously.

And Rothenburg's senses, alerted by Hogan's mistake, honed in on him.

"You..." he growled, surprise twisting his narrow features into an ugly visage.

The girl, always a step behind him, shrank back. Her eyes were huge, her mouth opening, but there was no sound coming out.

"You are...?" He laughed harshly. "I do not believe for a moment that you are a Sentinel!"

Klink gave the man his best confused look. "I assure you, Major, I am not."

Rothenburg was suddenly in his face, his two assistants tensing, the girl curling in on herself from the outpour of negative energy that was radiating off her Sentinel.

"You are challenging me? A major of the Gestapo? Your superior in so many ways?"

"I assure you, Major Rothenburg, I do not," Klink whined, trying for submissive and aware that he was starting to fail here. For the very first time he was failing.

Because Hogan hadn't been able to keep his reactions in check!

Curse the man!

His second mistake. Probably his last, Klink mused, brain firing on all cylinders. Years he had kept himself hidden. Against all odds. Surviving hunts for his kind, surviving the raids and the propaganda.

Now, because of one American Sentinel, he had given that up.

Without hesitation.

With a little more time to think about his reaction he might understand the decision. But time he didn't have.
Fact was, it went from bad to really bad to abysmally-worse-than-he-could-ever imagine in a heartbeat.

Rothenburg's hand snapped up and he suddenly had his fingers around Klink's throat, pushing him back and squeezing hard.

"No one takes what is mine," he hissed. "Least of all cowards like you, Klink! She is mine! You should know your place!"

A lot happened all at once.

Hogan stepped forward, the movement involuntary, his eyes narrowed slits and his lips curling away from his teeth in a snarl.

Just that started a cascade of events.

His men made a grab for him, voices loud in Klink's ears as his own blood pounded through his body, his heart hammering.

Schultz's guards suddenly raised their weapons, unsure where to aim, the prisoners or the assailant of their Kommandant.

Schultz himself, eyes comically wide, waved at them to stop.

The Gestapo men had their own guns out, pointing them at the prisoners and the restless soldiers.

There was a loud commotion from the dogs in the kennels.

And there was a surge of power as Hogan reacted to the threat of the Gestapo Sentinel, who turned his head a fraction, baring even white teeth, searching for the source of the well-known psychic disturbance.

Klink's instinctive reaction was… unlike him. With a rather smooth and very practiced blow he removed the hand around his throat, startling everyone watching the confrontation.

Red marks remained, but he ignored the bruised feeling, mind primed and narrowing down toward the threat.

"Do not touch me," he said icily.

Rothenburg snarled viciously, eyes cold, pupils mere dots.

"You dare challenge me over her? Weak little mockery of a German officer that you are? You want her for yourself?" He laughed. "I won her in a fight, you know. I killed her prior Sentinel. He was just as weak as you are. You want her? Kill me and she's yours. Even as defective as you are, Klink, you should know the rules of a Sentinel challenge!" The grin was fearsome and sharp.

Klink knew he had only one chance to get through this and that was to walk into it with all he was, throwing caution and survival instinct to the wind, fingers crossed, keeping Rothenburg away from Hogan. As long as the Major believed that Klink was the Sentinel, weak and probably barely one sense, this could still work.

To protect the Allied operative.

tbc...
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I'm just blown away by the positive reception I've gotten for this rather unconventional fic in a tiny fandom :) Thank you!

I hope the next chapter is up to your expectations ;P There's a pretty long piece after that, which I'm still hammering into shape, so depending on how much time I have (since I'm off to see Dr. Strange tonight), you might get the next chapter soon, too.

Hogan knew the moment the Gestapo officer had uttered the words that things were about to go to hell in a handbasket.

A challenge.

How backwards were these creeps?! It was an old, bloody and deadly tradition from the Dark Ages. While Sentinel challenges were still a thing in the Western world, they never went to the death anymore.

Except here.

Because the Gestapo reveled in such things.

But Klink was no Sentinel! part of him clamored. He couldn't be!

"Sir," Newkirk whispered urgently.

He shook his head. From the expression in everyone's faces, no one could believe what they were seeing or hearing.

And when Rothenburg grabbed two broken broom handles, since there were no swords and the Gestapo just loved their backwater games, tossing one at Klink who caught it easily, he knew they were about to go down with that ship.

"I don't believe it," LeBeau murmured, looking incredulous. "He can't be… Sentinel? Un Protecteur? Can he? Colonel?"

Hogan shook his head again. He was sure that Klink wasn't a Sentinel. He would have known. He would have been told. He would have sensed something!

It had been him that Rothenburg had recognized, his slip-up, but for some reason he was concentrating on their Kommandant, not Hogan.

Why? How?

"I'll kill you!" Rothenburg promised darkly, then lashed out.

Klink blocked the blow with an ease that spoke of training. His posture had changed, he was no longer stooped over, his movements fluid and practiced.
"Blimey me," Newkirk muttered, face reflecting stunned horror at the display. "Look at him!"

Yes, he was looking at him. And seeing someone he had never known, never met, and was now watching in a fight he wouldn't have bet on Klink ever starting or, more importantly, winning.

Hogan felt something inside of him snarl furiously, wanting to be in that fight, end the bastard, free the girl, and protect what they had here.

But that was already over.

Whatever the outcome of this fight would be, things couldn't be the same afterwards.

Ever again.

The old life was over.

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The clashing of wooden staffs against each other echoed loudly over the otherwise silent grounds, both German soldiers and Allied prisoners watching in horrified fascination as their otherwise so meek and cowardly Kommandant was facing off against a Gestapo Sentinel. A trained, lethal Sentinel; a killer.

Blows rained down on each of the fighters, both receiving hits and dealing out, skin breaking under the force involved. Neither man backed down. Klink was featuring a long cut along one cheek while Rothenburg had what looked like at least two broken fingers. There was also a bruise forming on the Sentinel's forehead.

A blow broke Klink's staff in two pieces. He didn't look impressed as he changed his grip on his two new weapons, shifting his stance a little, and even through the blood and other marks on his skin, he was still giving Rothenburg challenging looks.

Klink hadn't said a word throughout the last minutes.

The Sentinel bared his teeth, muscles flexing. "You will go down," he whispered harshly. "I will tear you to pieces! You are a disgrace, Klink!"

Blue eyes that had always appeared too soft, too watery, were like steel, burning with something no one at the camp had ever seen before.

"You are nothing!" Rothenburg snarled, spitting blood. "Nothing, you hear me?"

Still no answer.

The deadly dance continued, a tradition as brutal and still current as it had been since the Dark Ages of Sentinel kind.

But Klink was no Sentinel. Had never been.

Hogan's eyes never left the surprisingly lithely moving man, the German officer he had never seen this way.
Nothing about this was in any file. Yes, he had been a pilot, which meant also a rudimentary training
to fight the enemy on the ground, too, but not the skills he was displaying now. This was a man who
had trained for years, maybe since his youth, to hold his own against someone with enhanced senses.

There had also been no intel concerning Klink's possible disposition as a Guide.

And the man was a Guide.

Hogan felt it. With every fiber of his being.

Something inside of him reacted strongly, felt something familiar, something that had touched him
before. The voice. The presence. Klink…

Shit, raced through him. Shit, shit, shit! Now it all made sense. Such, terrible, horrifying sense. He
was starting to realize something that would have had him laugh hysterically otherwise, but now it
only invoked absolute terror.

Quickly followed by an overwhelming protective instinct.

That he just as quickly beat down.

Rothenburg might not be able to add together all the little hints, come up with something absolutely
surprising, but Hogan could. He had known the other colonel for close to two years now and he
finally understood so much now. His agile mind was bringing the puzzle pieces together in a way he
had never considered, watched them slide into place and just… fit.

Had London known? Had anyone? Here? At the camp? Outside? Because Klink's abilities…

Guides couldn't really hide what they were from trained Sentinels. The Sentinel reacted to a Guide's
presence, involuntarily, feeling something ping off their radar, so to speak. Those with training, with
high level shields, could control themselves, could fool trained senses, but never for long.

Not this way, though, Hogan decided. Not as completely as Klink had fooled him and everyone else.
Not continuously, and it had to be for all his life because he had come this far in an army that was
run by a madman, who wiped out what he found threatening or inhuman.

Klink had to be good. Insanely good.

Something deep inside him growled softly, hungrily, wanted to push forward and past shields that
had kept this incredible power hidden. It wanted to touch, wanted to center on the man and never let
go. It was a beacon, briefly flashing in the darkness, and it was enough to have him salivating for
more.

Dimly he remembered those warnings throughout his training, about strong empaths, able to throw a
troubleshooter out of the Loop, break him, annihilate years of training. And he heard his instructor
telling him that even a strong individual like Hogan, someone with an iron will, born shields, and no
interest in a Guide, could be lured.

The lure was right there.

Fighting.

Against another Sentinel.

For him!
It should be him facing Rothenburg, killing the bastard! It should be…

"He is going to kill him!" Carter murmured, swallowing hard, the words bringing Hogan out of his primal thoughts.

Klink had gone down on one knee, more blood showing from so many tiny wounds, breathing hard, muscles trembling. But he wasn't bowing to the superior Sentinel.

Because the man wasn't superior.

The American Sentinel bared his teeth and Kinchloe clamped a firm hand around his wrist. "Colonel!" he growled in a low, deep voice. "Don't. You can't! Focus!"

He did.

On the display of power before him.

On Wilhelm Klink.

Red tinged his vision and he flexed his fingers, priming for a fight, ready.

Okay, so things were going even more sideways. Fast.

Something stopped him, freezing him, giving him a hard slap that had him reel back on a psychic level. It told him to stand down.

And he did.

Following an order.

For a fraction of a second he met the blue eyes as Klink slid his gaze over to the prisoners, to Hogan, and he was lost in what he saw.

What he felt.

What he…

Hogan's eyes widened as he sensed the psychic build-up only those rare few who were either Sentinel or Guide could really be aware of, and a new snarl involuntarily escaped his lips, soft, but loud enough for the Gestapo man to hear it.

Surprised, Rothenburg turned, and it was the last he would ever do.

"I am your opponent, Sentinel," Klink said coldly, the first words he had spoken since the beginning of the fight.

Then he flipped the splintered, broken broom staff around, ramming it upward and into the soft belly of the other man, right into his center mass. Stomach, lungs, maybe even nicking the heart.

The strength needed to do that spoke of what else was hidden inside the supposedly incompetent man. Hogan's eyes were on the weapon lodged in the Sentinel, the blood covering the wood and Klink's hands. He zeroed in on the white-knuckled grip, the bruises and open cuts, and the red running freely down the pale skin.

Rothenburg cried out, eyes almost comically wide, hands grasping at the staff now sticking out of his middle.
"Wh…"

"You lose," Klink said emotionlessly.

And the psychic lance that hit the Sentinel had Hogan almost whine. It carved through Rotheburg’s shields, sliced into his mind, and the wide eyes as the Gestapo killer realized were almost amusing.

Hogan felt the echo, felt the roiling waves of the impact along his own mind. It spared him and took out the other Sentinel with such surgical precision, the colonel was breathless.

Left wanting.

"Holy shit," someone from his team murmured.

Blood pooled on the ground.

"He whammied him," Newkirk added faintly.

Blood covered Klink’s hands, his shirt, his skin.

"He… killed a Gestapo Sentinel," another man added.

Hogan felt his breath quickening, adrenaline surging higher, and the tremors racing through his body increased. The scent of the blood, of death, hung in the air. Rothenburg’s heart had stopped beating a while ago, his lungs emptied of all air.

Kinch’s strong grip had him fight for composure.

"Colonel," he murmured.

He couldn’t… just couldn’t…

His eyes were drawn to the dead Sentinel, then flicked over to the one who had killed him. His senses were homing in on the smallest detail, from the sweat on the high forehead to the blood drying on his skin, to the countless cuts and bruises.

"Colonel Hogan," Kinchloe repeated, voice harder now.

His whole body was vibrating with unreleased tension.

It had never been like this before. Maybe because he had never been confronted with something that was truly on equal footing with his own abilities. Maybe because he had never been this unstable after running undercover too long.

Still, the rage was there, wanting out. It wanted to maim, tear into the flesh of the man who had dared violate the young girl, but also hurt another Guide, too. A Guide who had killed him.

The want and need was like a salivating beast, flexing its claws and read to break out, take what Hogan had never thought he had wanted until just now.

There was another slap, stronger this time, and he blinked. The primal instinct was snuffed out like a flame in a hurricane, and he expelled a breath he hadn’t been aware of holding.

Hogan blinked again, focusing.

Just one push and the looming fugue state was averted.
Holy shit, part of him whimpered. That was some serious ability! He wasn't a light-weight on any
day, even now, and this man had just… with one poke…

It left him reeling.

"I'm good," he told Kinch in a low voice.

It was over. Silence fell over the grounds. No one moved, no one so much as raised a weapon.

Klink straightened, shoulders squared, looking even less like the man Hogan had been working with
and working around for the past months. There was nothing left of the Kommandant so eager to
please superiors, a born bookkeeper and records man.

For another moment their eyes met.

Hogan was mesmerized, wondering how he had never… in all that time… two years! He had been
in the dark for two years!

"Sergeant Schultz." The voice was quiet, authoritarian. "I'll be in my quarters. I expect there to be…
consequences… and visitors." Those hard, blue eyes held Schultz's. "You saw nothing and know
nothing."

"But…"

"Nothing, Sergeant. Take care of the late Major's… companions… and the young woman. I believe
she could use tea and some rest. Maybe something stronger."

Schultz's eyes fell on the pale, trembling girl who had shrunk into herself, hiding behind a guard.

"I will," he said quietly.

And then Klink walked over to his private quarters, head held high, a slight limp in his gait, one arm
lightly wrapped around his ribs. His jacket was torn, his white shirt stained, but the air of command
around him was stunning.

Hogan was already following before his brain caught up to his instinctive reaction.

"Colonel Hogan," Schultz warned, blocking the path.

"Out of my way," he said softly, voice so much harder than he usually addressed the older man.

"You heard the Kommandant. You saw what he did!" Schultz said quickly. "Please, Colonel
Hogan…"

Hogan looked at the assembled men, both enemies and allies, and he raised an eyebrow, nodding
slightly toward the Gestapo officers that had accompanied Rothenburg. Schultz turned his head and
there was a moment of shock and panic reflecting on his round face, then he huffed a little.

"We will all die," he mourned softly, but he squared his shoulders.

Because his men were holding Rothenburg's goons at gunpoint, keeping them in place.

"Let my men and your men handle clean-up. You take care of Rothenburg's prisoner. The girl,
Schultz. You know she's a Guide and she's traumatized. Let me help Klink."

Dark eyes bore into Schultz's.
"Hogan," the Sergeant sighed, sounding defeated. "Please… This was to protect. Don't…" He made a little motion with his hands. "Just don't?"

It was the moment Hogan realized that Schultz knew what Klink was, had more than an inkling of the goings-on when it came to his superior officer.

Today was a day of one shocking revelation after another, it seemed. Their sergeant seemed to be a deeper well of hidden information than ever thought.

"I won't, Schultz. This… is no longer the game we play, right?"

It got him a nod.

"I just feel stupid I didn't see it before."

"Stronger men have overlooked it, had been blind. I will take care of her, but you will have to hide her," Schultz said softly, voice firm and quiet like it rarely was. "She cannot be seen in the camp."

Hogan gestured at LeBeau, who sidled over. "You are with Schultz. Hide the girl. Downstairs, LeBeau. She needs calm and quiet."

"The safe room, Colonel?"

"One of them. Take Kinch with you. She might need him to settle down. The sergeant will help you with supplies."

"Understood. C'mon, Schultzie. Colonel has a plan."

Schultz sighed almost theatrically, some of his old humor back for a fleeting second. "Colonel Hogan… the Kommandant…"

"I'll handle it. I promise. It was my mistake. I failed at my job. There's a first time for everything, it seems."

The portly sergeant nodded, brow lowering a little. "Instinct is hard to suppress. For both of you. Good men, too, both of you. Don't be too hard on yourself, Colonel Hogan."

And with that he was gone.

Hogan swallowed. With one last look at the shocked and confused faces of his men, he went after the man who had just killed a Military Sentinel in a challenge fight.

tbc…
"You're a Guide."

He had had better, smoother opening lines, but this was the first that came out of his mouth. It was the only thing running around his head anyway.

Colonel Robert Hogan stood just inside Klink's personal quarters, still a little shell-shocked, the door closed behind him, eyes on the slender form revealed to him. Without the uniform jacket, without the coat, just in his pants and a bloody, ripped shirt, Wilhelm Klink looked so very different.

And still the same.

He let his senses cast out a little. There was the familiar heartbeat, steady breaths, hitching a little as the man was fighting the pain, but he caught no whiff of the psychic power he had felt before. That one strike that had been swift, surgical and to the point.

What he got was a closer look at the blood, the open wounds, the bruises, the swelling, and it he would be able to touch, he might just detect more.

But Klink was standing upright. The man who claimed had never seen a day fighting this war in his life, was standing upright after getting into a to the death fight with a man trained for such confrontations.

Damn!

Klink wiped the last blood off his face and hands. He dropped the stained towel into the sink, shoulders drooping a little.

"I am a tired man, Colonel Hogan. What do you want?" he asked.

"You are a Guide," Hogan repeated firmly, like it would make it even more real. You brilliant, manipulative bastard, he added in his mind.

Klink glanced at him, a fine smile playing over his pale lips. There was a gray tinge to his features, the blue eyes reflecting a tiredness that wasn't physical. Without the monocle reflecting the light of the lamps, without the always crisp uniform, he looked so different.

"What does it matter now? In a few hours, maybe a day or two, I will be a dead man."

"Nope."

"You might have noticed the dead Gestapo Sentinel. A Gestapo Sentinel I killed. In front of you, other prisoners, the guards."

"Didn't see a thing."

"Enough of my men did. Enough of yours. While I believe your men would cheerfully bury him in the woods and spit on his grave, mine won't."

Hogan knew the smirk on his lips was unbecoming and he probably looked cocky as hell, but it helped with handling the million and one emotions cascading through him. And the endless repetition of GuideGuideGuide. He knew it for a fact. It was unshakably anchored in his mind that Colonel Wilhelm Klink was a Guide and damn good one. A powerful one.
His Sentinel side roiled through him, clamoring to be released, to show the Guide what and who he was, that he could match him. Never before in his life had he reacted like that to anyone.

_They warned you about it_, part of him sneered. _You thought you were the exception to the rule. You thought it would never happen to you. You lost your edge._

Maybe.

Just maybe.

Because he had run such successful assignments, had never needed anyone, had really been exceptional enough not to fail under such stressful conditions.

Until now.

Hogan kicked the emotional reaction back into a dark corner of his mind and turned an easy-going smile on the German officer.

"You'd be surprised. You have loyal men, Colonel. They hate the Gestapo goons just as much as we do, actually. It wouldn't be in their files, though."

It got him a slow shake of his head. "While I believe the selection process that placed every single man under my command in this camp was thorough and that you did your own weeding out of unsavory characters, word will spread. Fences are only able to keep out a body, not the rumors. There will be rumors. Even the best slip. I did. There is nothing you or anyone else can do about it this time. But maybe you're in luck and London finds you a good replacement. I'm just sorry it had to be this quickly. I'm normally better adapting to your leaps and unconventional reactions, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan blinked as the words registered. The quizzical noise that escaped his throat was completely involuntary. For a moment he forgot about the fact that a Guide had given himself away and focused on the words that revealed so much more.

Klink smiled, exhaustion reflecting even in that tiny movement of his lips. He moved slowly over to the first aid cabinet and pulled out some bandages and disinfectant. One arm was still supporting his ribs.

"We have a few hours, maybe a day, until the Gestapo is here, looking for their missing combat Sentinel, Colonel Hogan. Maybe we should spend it productively. Like getting to know each other for real. It's not like I could give you a lot of hints or help openly. Undercover operations require a certain amount of secrecy, especially with a troubleshooter in their midst."

Now he was gaping. Hogan knew he was. Flustered he didn't do as a rule and Klink had never managed that in the past. The two years he had been in this place and run a secret operation that sabotaged German positions, blew up munitions depots, derailed trains, brought down planes and sometimes even took a life.

Hearing the words, he tried to keep up with the lightning fast changes of a status quo he had always taken for granted. Did London know of this? Who was Klink? How much had he known? And since when?

"Sit, Colonel. Ask what you want. I think we can start from the beginning and see where we'll end up when the Gestapo gets here."

"They won't get you," Hogan heard himself growl before he could stop the words. "They have to go
through me. Us."

Klink grimaced weakly. "I'll try to remember that when the firing squad lines up."

The Sentinel shot him a challenging look. "I won't let them," he stated coldly, demeanor switching abruptly.

The Guide didn't even twitch under the flashing eyes. "Sit, Colonel Hogan. Robert. For once in your life, listen first."

He bristled briefly, which showed him just how close to the edge he really was. Control was going out the window and he had never lost control around Klink; ever.

"You want some help with your ribs first?" he blurted.

"No. I'm good."

"Bullshit."

"Language, Colonel."

"Well, bullshit again. You were used as a punching ball by that Gestapo goon!" He bit back on another surge.

"And I'll heal. I'm fine. Now please sit down." Klink placed the bandages on the desk and lowered himself into his chair. But not without wincing again.

"Klink…"

The look in the blue eyes stopped him and the Sentinel sat down, feeling slapped on the nose like a puppy all of a sudden. He flailed a little mentally, then almost laughed out loud.

Guide. Yeah, the man was a Guide. Empathic. Capable, too. And really, really strong to get to a troubleshooter without the Sentinel noticing until he was slapped.

"You're good," he said softly, barely loud enough to be above a whisper.

Something rippled.

Between them.

Like low level currents of electricity.

It was there and gone again in a flash and Hogan wondered if he had ever truly felt it.

"In this business you have to be to survive. I was and still am your back-up." Klink carefully rubbed over his bruised head. "I have been in the know, as you might say, from the start. Never to be seen. It's what I trained myself to be: invisible. Knuckling under if I have to be. Hide in plain sight and be whoever I have to be."

"And fight like you did. You beat a military Sentinel!" He couldn't keep the still-lingering awe out of his voice.

Klink smirked a little.

"How?"
"Training."

"Like that?" Hogan couldn't believe it.

"It's a matter of knowing your friends. I was in the Luftwaffe. We had fitness requirements."

"Like that?!"

"That's an edge that I needed."

"And hid it like a pro." Hogan laughed, shaking his head. "Why wasn't I told?"

Klink gave him a wry look. "Would it have worked so perfectly otherwise? Would you have treated me as you did? Do you think you can act so incredibly well in front of Burkhalter, Hochstetter or whoever else visited? I doubt it, Colonel."

He chuckled. "Probably not. Congrats, Will."

Klink didn't object to the name, just inclined his head at the compliment.

"And you're an insanely talented Guide."

"Yes. Like you are a Sentinel."

"Oh, I doubt we're alike."

"Of course not," was the defeated sounding sigh. Klink massaged one temple. "I am the enemy. The stupid Kraut."

"That's not what I meant!" Hogan snapped, surprising himself with his outburst once more.

"You're... a Guide! Here!

"And you're repeating yourself."

"I... How can you work in such a place and..." He stopped, mind racing. "You're..." The light bulb went on. "It was an act, but I've never thought someone could uphold it for so long. You could. You pushed your will at them?"

Klink didn't answer and Hogan raised his eyebrows.

"Damn. That's some serious firepower, Will. A lot of weight."

The man had to be high level to do that. Still, Hogan didn't get so much as a single hum or eddy from him now. Klink didn't exist on a Sentinel's radar, just like before.

Intriguing.

"The Reich isn't very favorable when it comes to Guides," Hogan murmured.

Like the Madman was not in favor of so many things that didn't fit ideology.

"Especially male ones," Klink agreed.

Guides were seen as a weakness, especially since a bond between Sentinel and Guide was usually far from platonic. Female Guides were grudgingly accepted and used if a Sentinel needed one, but they were seen as tools without even basic rights. Male Guides rarely ever lived long enough to forge
a permanent bond, or were killed right away. The Reich feared their empathic abilities, the possibility of their influence, their negative influence, on Sentinels or anyone else.

Many had fled with the beginning of the war; many had ended in internment camps. Or worse. The few taken to 'work' for the regime were like Anna: bruised, battered, broken.

Hogan had worked with Guides in the US and in England, before going on his mission, and seeing what Hitler's orders had done to the ones unable to flee Germany had sickened him. Like many times before he had had to lock away his emotions and continue with his mission.

"One of the many reasons my family hid me, trained me to hide myself. I became invisible, Hogan. I don't ping on any Sentinel's radar. I'm a blind spot."

That sparked a memory. "Heard of Blindspots. Never met one." Hogan cocked his head a little, senses again brushing over the other man and registering nothing that would identify him as anything but normal. "Then again, that's the whole purpose, right? No one can see you."

"Correct."

"So Rothenburg didn't… know? Not for real? Not for one second?"

"He thought he had recognized a weak Sentinel or someone with potential. He never connected the dots. Neither did you." The last was said with a thin smile and an almost-twinkle in those blue eyes.

"You never registered with me! I didn't know about you!"

"That was the plan, my dear Hogan. The back-up. To deflect suspicion from you, to protect the underground operations and to make sure the charade would run."

The Sentinel was speechless, almost breathless, as his thoughts raced. Klink was powerful enough to become non-existent to Sentinels and Guides alike, to be right under everyone's noses and not blip even once. He had woven the perfect cover, had fooled everyone. He had only ever once dropped his shields and that had been mere hours ago.

To… save him. Him!

"Wait," he said, something said before clicking. "You said your family told you to hide right from the beginning? But… You were born before the war…"

"Yes."

"And…"

"And the way Sentinels and Guides were treated wasn't invented with Hitler's rise to power. There are those who fear what they can't understand. In some cultures the Sentinel is the protector and the Guide is his shield, there for him to do his job, to advise, guide and protect in turn. In some countries… the Sentinel is feared but accepted because of his abilities. The Guide is feared and threatened, seen as a threat. A Guide's standing was difficult before the Madman came into power. He just took the already present fear and turned people against people."

Hogan nodded slowly. "So your family taught you to hide."

"Yes."

"You started to work for the Allies, but not as a Guide. You could have worked with me, Klink!"
"I have been working with and for you for the whole war," was the mild reply.

"Hiding what you are!"

That came out as more of an accusation than intended. He bit back on a growl.

"Would that be your requirement, Colonel Hogan?" came the suddenly hard question. "For me to be controlled by a Sentinel?"

"Controlled?! No! That's not what I meant!" he snapped back, then pulled himself together. "I didn't say that," he added harshly. "I never said that!"

Too much was happening, too much for him to process, and he still reeled with the newfound openness. Hogan drew a deep breath, centering himself-

"No. I'm not like Rothenburg. I'll never be. But you knew I was a Sentinel." It sounded almost petulant. "You knew I was special ops. You knew my assignment!"

"Yes, I knew you were placed here in the capacity of a troubleshooter. That alone tells me that you don't need a Guide's help, though you were very reckless sometimes. Outright suicidal, too. You didn't take care of your senses and didn't have downtime, Hogan. Orders were to keep the status quo. I did. For all of our sakes." Klink met his eyes evenly. "And I know you're not Rothenburg. Just like I am not like the Guides you might know."

"Yeah, you got that right. You're a goddamn Blindspot." He drummed his fingers against his knees. "You might not be like anyone I ever met, but you and I…"

Klink slowly shook his head, grimacing slightly as it probably launched more of a headache than he already had.

"You do not understand, Robert. To be this open, to allow you that close, would require a trust I haven't been capable of. It requires to surrender your body and your mind to someone you barely know."

He opened his mouth to protest, then snapped it shut again. "We know each other," he grumbled, trying not to sound like he was whining.

"Do we?"

It got Klink a glare.

"Sentinels like to imprint with force at first touch or taste. It's barbaric for the other side, to be forced into a psychic connection with someone that only sees you as a tool."

"That's the Nazi system!" Hogan growled, surprised by his own surge of emotions at Klink's calmly delivered words. "It's not how it's supposed to work!"

"It's the only one I know. Like you know only the American way, correct?"

He snarled a little.

"Guides are slaves, used and discarded later, mental wrecks, abused and treated like cattle. Slaughtered by those that force an imprint on them.

"Will…"
"To ask me to trust a Sentinel, an American, is more than I can give."

"You know me! I don't want..." He stopped and inhaled, forcing himself to calm down. "You never wanted something... closer then? A partner? Companionship?"

They were truly getting personal now, but Klink had never been this open. Whether this was because he thought he wouldn't survive the day or the end of the week, or if it was something else, Hogan had no idea.

Klink gave a minute shrug, wincing a little as it seemed to hurt. "You know of my lack of success with the fairer sex, Hogan."

"You manipulated them," the Sentinel stated, just now realizing it.

"In a way. That was all I needed, those polite refusals and sometimes the disgust of the ladies. I act like I truly try, to escape close companionship. I find myself... incapable of surrendering so completely, to give up control."

"To be vulnerable," Hogan murmured, almost to himself.

Klink smiled tiredly. "Yes, vulnerable. I don't seek companionship of such intimate nature. I see no need, no appeal, to give up... control. I'm not sure I could enjoy a physical encounter without overthinking how much I have to surrender to the other. How much I hand over to another person. Myself. My body. My mind. All of me. A Guide's mind is not like yours." He smirked a little. "And yours is generally different from many I know. But Guides are empathic. Our abilities are a blessing and a curse. For me, it would be a curse all the way."

Hogan blinked at the quiet words. "Surface bonds don't require intimacy," he argued faintly.

"Just trust?"

He had to suppress a laugh. "Yeah. That. At least a little anyway."

Klink shared the humorless smile on Hogan's lips. "I was taught to never to give anyone power over me. Not as a Guide. I play my part in this theater of war and death, but not in anyone's arms or bedroom. Not to a Sentinel either. I'm not even sure I would know how to." Another shrug. "I have been building my shields since coming online. Against human contact and psychic connections. The only times I had to truly fight off advances was with Burkhalter's sister."

Hogan chuckled. "Yeah. You won those battles."

"Only with a lot of luck, let me tell you. She has a formidable spirit." Klink palpated the cut in his cheek and grimaced.

"Want help?" the Sentinel offered, making no move to get closer.

He knew he had to keep his distance. This man was extremely dangerous and currently still too much on the edge, his strength honed from years of rigorous training. For that one second when Klink had dropped the shields he had been like a beacon, a promise, and the instinctual part of Hogan wanted more. He wanted to feel this again.

"I'll manage," the German Colonel's voice broke into his possessive thoughts. "It won't matter anyway."
"You're giving up after fighting for so long?" Hogan leaned forward, pulling himself together, holding those intense eyes. "We've done the impossible before. You and me both. You say you know what we do, what we can do…"

"Letting a Gestapo Sentinel disappear? That's even beyond your paygrade, Colonel."

He winked. "Trust me."

"In that regard? Probably more than I should and more than is sane." Klink sounded almost teasing. "But my men saw what happened, saw me kill."

"And you still won't believe me when I say that those men are firmly on our side. You and I know each and every one by file and intel background reports, right?"

Klink nodded.

"So trust me, Will. You didn't see what I saw when you walked away. You didn't see them watch you kill that Sentinel. Stalag 13 is yours."

"Yours," he corrected softly. "Sentinel."

Hogan shook his head. "No. In their eyes, you are the Sentinel. They might not understand it, but they react to authority and power. To what you projected. And you projected hard in under one second."

Klink sighed and rubbed his eyes. "I learned that early on. My grandfather taught me a little, the rest I adapted. He was a Guide, too."

"I'm sorry."

"You come from a family of Sentinels?"

"Kinda. I was the only one who presented so strongly and didn't need anyone to help me with my senses when I came online. I was naturally in control already. I chose the military." A shrug, like that had been a given. Maybe it had. "Never managed to connect to a Guide there. I felt no need. It was all just fine. You can imagine their joy at having someone for special ops." Hogan grimaced. "Until my last assignment showed me the limits."

There was an almost tentative knock on the door and Klink straightened painfully, rising from the chair as Schultz carefully slipped into the room, followed by Carter and Newkirk. Both of his men were shooting curious and somewhat still confused looks at the German colonel.

Hogan raised his eyebrows as a silent prompt.

"All done, Colonel," Newkirk reported briskly. "The final clean-up is in progress. Rothenburg and his men were never here. Langenscheidt and some of the others are keeping an eye on Jäger and Barth. They’re in the cooler right now. Your orders?"

"Contact our friends of the underground resistance. Hand over the two live ones and the body. Backtrack to where Rothenburg came from, let him detour and run into a whole lot of trouble of the explosive kind."

Carter nodded. "My specialty."

Schultz looked torn between unhappy and firm. The sergeant groaned. "I wish I really could know
nothing now. Herr Kommandant?"

Klink was too pale for Hogan's liking, but the fire he saw burning in the blue eyes was far from diminishing. He had never in all his time here seen the fellow colonel like that.

"Do what they need you to do. Even if it is to forget."

"I can do that." The rotund man smiled briefly.

"What about the girl?" Hogan asked.

"She is currently in a very safe place, away from prying eyes," Newkirk said readily. "LeBeau and Kinch are with her. She hasn't said a word. We don't even know her name. LeBeau calls her Anna."

Klink nodded slowly. "She is most likely psychically traumatized. Deep mental trauma, possibly crippling, knowing what Sentinels like Rothenburg do to Guides. She might even have physical injuries that haven't come to light yet."

"We can get a doctor…"

He shook his head. "She needs to settle first. She has next to no shields. One reason why Colonel Hogan… reacted."

Hogan tilted his head a little, trying not to let his own embarrassment leak through. "You might be able to help her," he suggested.

"I'm the last person she needs to see right now, Hogan. I just killed her abuser in front of her. The psychic output of that confrontation and his death alone had her close to the edge already. She thinks I'm a Sentinel about to claim her. Not a good idea."

"But you aren't!" the American colonel insisted. "I am. And I'm not on her radar."

"Maybe later," Klink said after a moment of silence, meeting the Sentinel's eyes without flinching.

Hogan was incredibly tempted to touch what he saw, drawn to the steel and backbone like a moth to the flame. He had never sensed or seen Klink like that, and it was unnerving to think about the fact that this was the man with all his shields in place. What would it feel like, be like, if he opened those impenetrable walls?

"You really believe you can pull this off, Hogan?" Klink asked, drawing him out of his thoughts.

"With all of us on the same page? Yeah, I think we can. This'll blow over. After it blows up." Hogan nodded at Carter, who slipped away.

"You are out of your mind, Hogan," Klink stated with an almost fatalistic air to it.

"No more than usual. What about your men, Schultz?"

The portly sergeant puffed out his chest. "Awaiting Herr Kommandant's orders. All of them." He met Klink's eyes. "Closed ranks, sir."

Klink looked as flabbergasted as Hogan had felt throughout the lengthy revelations as of late.

"Like I said, Will, we handpicked them. Both of us. They're loyal. Schultz, I think the Colonel needs some rest after disposing of the crazy Sentinel, so how about we let him?"
Schultz looked at Klink, who made a half-hearted shooing motion. "You heard the man, Sergeant. And… thank you. I will address the men later. Should there be a change…”

"You will know immediately."

Hogan gave Schultz a nod of thanks, then the door was closed again.

"Let me look at your injuries, Will," he said without preamble.

"That's an insanely bad idea."

"Why?"

"You saw me defeat a Military Sentinel. You know what I am. I know what you are. Touching me wouldn't be helpful, Robert. We're both on edge. Direct touch is ill-advised in such situations and you know it. This could blow up spectacularly." Klink's expression was wry.

Hogan drew in a deep breath, tempted to open up his senses just a fraction, but he knew Klink was right.

"I just…"

It got him a small smile. "Make sure the Guide is okay? I appreciate it, thank you. Right now it would harm all of us should you forget your training, Colonel. You were trained to work without a Guide. And I don't… seek out physical contact. I could retaliate unconsciously and you would end up like Rothenburg."

"You wouldn't hurt me, Will."

"I just might."

"You helped me before," the American colonel murmured, as if he was just now realizing it.

"In small ways, yes. Your men are good and were well-prepared for handling an autonomous Sentinel, but working undercover in a prison camp is hell on any normal person, let alone a Sentinel. Especially with four active senses."

Hogan chuckled. "You're good."

"The best. Now, adhere to your own words, Robert. Please leave."

And he did.

Reluctantly.

Still tracking Klink's movements, hyper-aware of him.

He had to talk to his men, find out what had happened while he had talked to Klink, and he had to digest everything he had heard and seen today.

He met Schultz on the way out of the building.
"I'll help treat the injuries," the sergeant promised.

"Thanks, Schultz."

"Colonel Hogan?"

"Yes?"

"Please, no shenanigans?"

He smiled tiredly. "No shenanigans," he promised. "Hey, Schultz?"

"Yes, Colonel Hogan?"

"You've always known?"

"I never know anything. You know that. I see nothing, I hear nothing, I know nothing!"

Hogan chuckled, shaking his head. "Is that so?"

Schultz leaned closer. "You also know I don't take sides."


The large man made a gesture that implied his lips were sealed. He had kept many secrets in the past two years, had seen the prisoners in various German uniforms, witnessed them pulling off stunts that seemed crazy and insane, and he had helped them in his own way.

"Thanks for everything, sergeant."

"No. Thank you."

Hogan looked over the empty grounds, found just a few prisoners milling around as usual, and the guards were suspiciously busy doing guard things. No blood on the ground, no disturbed area from the fight. The Gestapo's car was gone. Knowing his crew, it had been stripped of insignia and was currently hidden in the camp's motorpool until further notice.

Everything looked so very normal.

But as of now, nothing was normal anymore.

He drew in a deep breath, steeling himself for all that was still to come.

Deep inside, the Sentinel felt the continued thrill at what he had been told, like an adrenaline high on a mission, like that warm tingle when a beautiful woman was in his arms.

Just more.

And everything together.

tbc...
"Klink is a bleedin' what?!" Newkirk exclaimed.

"A Blindspot. A Guide who's not obviously a Guide. Someone who's so insanely talented that he can hide himself from everything. He's powerful. More than I can put into words. He wiped the floor with the asshole. I doubt he would have much trouble with me." Hogan rubbed a hand over his head, hair in disarray. "Or us."

Voices babbled together, the sound washing over the Sentinel's senses, more soothing than he would have figured. In a way the chaos outside counteracted the chaos inside.

There was a lot of that. His mind was unable to cope with everything he had heard and seen.

"How come we didn't know?" Newkirk added.

"Did London know?" Carter piped up.

"Yeah, they did. At least to a degree and that he's a Blindspot."

"You never picked up on it?" Kinchloe asked. "In any way?"

He shook his head, though part of him called him a liar. He had sensed the Guide subconsciously, because Klink had pushed at him, had helped, though never openly. A primal part had known, but he hadn't understood, hadn't seen the signs.

"You don't find Blindspots if they don't want you to see them," he said slowly.

Klink had, though. He had, in his own, unique way, been open. Hogan had been too blind to see. He had believed in the charade their Kommandant had played so perfectly.

Yeah, it had been perfect. Acting like a pro.

"So," Kinch mused slowly, sharp eyes on their colonel, "Klink was the one who snapped you out of the zone?"

Hogan gave a rueful grimace. "Yeah."

And so much more.

It explained a lot. Especially how he had felt so much more at ease every time they had gone head to head. Why he had been drawn to the Kommandant again and again, had been allowed to waltz into the office like he belonged there, and why he usually left feeling more focused.

Klink's work. The Guide.

And in another life, one where Wilhelm Klink wouldn't have had to hide from his own people, one where Robert Hogan could have met him under so very different circumstances, they might have formed more than a surface connection at the first encounter, growing closer as they got to know each other.

Hogan nearly did a full-stop, with screeching tires and fuming brakes. At least mentally.

Oh damn…
Surface…? Really? Surface?!

Shit!

They had… a surface connection already. He had been the one to reach out. Now, thinking about it, Hogan was sure he had.

Unconsciously.

Stupidly.

He had looked for an anchor because the pressure had been too much, and Klink had been there, unseen, to help. He had gently, firmly and repeatedly done the best he could to protect the special ops Sentinel.

And the connection had formed. Slowly, steadily, over months. He could pick out the man in a crowd without using Sight. Hogan felt heat rush through him at the realization that he had always centered himself on the steady heartbeat, never questioning his choice.

He finally met Kinch's knowing gaze and the other man saluted him with his coffee mug. "Big revelations, sir?"

"Oh yeah," he breathed. "This started a long time ago, Kinch. A very long time ago."

"Figured as much. So did you. Finally."

Hogan scrubbed a hand over his face. "I hate you."

"I'm not a Sentinel who's been in the dark about a high-level Guide in our camp. A Guide who has been keeping aforementioned Sentinel from zoning on more than one occasion without that particular Sentinel realizing it."

"I really, really hate you," Hogan repeated without bite. "Why do you have to be so sensible about this?"

"Because you're not, sir?"

"Hate."

Kinchloe just smiled the smile of the apparently only sane person in this whole camp, the one person who made more sense of events than the Sentinel it concerned.

Why hadn't Hogan identified the very source of his balance until the moment the man had killed Rothenburg? For him.

"Sir?" Kinchloe prodded.

Hogan was calling himself all kinds of names. He was a Sentinel, dammit! He had four very accurate, sharp and honed senses! None had done him any good, though.

Something inside of him curled with warmth and longing, wanted to feel the Guide's power again, wanted to touch that strength.

But Klink was invisible. Unless he wanted to be seen and that was something he didn't want. So chances were pretty slim. Non-existent, really.
"He's good," he said almost to himself. "Really good. Even when he reached out and helped me, I never pinged. His shields are… I can't begin to describe them. I can't even feel them!"

The men exchanged incredulous, disbelieving looks.

"Isn't that what Sentinels usually do?" Carter asked. "Sense a Guide? I mean, I'm no expert, but that's what I thought. That you can sniff them out somehow?"

"Yeah, well, this Sentinel has been in the dark about one particular Guide the whole time. If not for that strike of lightning, I still wouldn't have a clue, Carter. If he blips, it's because he wants someone to know."

And it wasn't like Guides were openly visible to any Sentinel. New ones, yes. Those without training. Those without protection. Seasoned ones were quite invisible, but not the whole damn time! Mental stress caused them to lose control of carefully maintained shields. Tiredness, exhaustion, lack of sleep in general, emotional upheaval, pain… all that could be upsetting a shield and even the most seasoned one would falter.

Klink hadn't. Not ever throughout those two years had Hogan seen the other side of the man.

"Rothenburg caught up to his ruse," Newkirk remarked. "And I doubt that Gestapo creep is better than you, sir."

"No, he isn't. Wasn't." Hogan was sure he could have wiped the floor with the man sense-wise. "No, that was Klink covering for me," he sighed ruefully. "I slipped. The girl… she caught me unawares and I made a mistake. Klink misdirected the Gestapo Sentinel and ended up as the target."

"He… became a Protecteur?" LeBeau asked. "He made him believe he was one? Is that even possible? Guides are Guides."

"Yeah, you'd think so. For a second he faked being a Sentinel, pretended, and it worked. Rothenburg believed it. And went into a rage fit."

"But why?"

So Hogan started to tell them. About Klink's placement as the apparently bumbling, inept, easily manipulated failure of a Luftwaffe officer, who didn't advance, had to be rescued from being ordered to the Russian front or to be executed. A man who had apparently been a failure at whatever he did, unpopular even with the ladies who wanted to marry for title and advancement, and a general embarrassment, if not for his spotless record as the Kommandant of Stalag 13.

He had been competent enough to be promoted to colonel, incompetent enough not to go any further.

"You believe all of that?" LeBeau asked.

"Yes. He had all the correct code words. Not the ones floating around that German spies might find out and try to use. Won't hurt to check with London again, but while my instinct and senses didn't catch on before, they tell me he's telling the truth now."

They all exchanged looks, trying to digest the news, the revelations, and the consequences this might have. Their future.

"I'll radio London," Kinch finally said into the silence.
"And the rest of you have three unwanted guests to deliver to their new place of residence," Hogan told the others. His brain was finally firing up again, analyzing events, taking the facts and developing strategies and plans. "We also need to make sure Klink's injuries have an official, airtight explanation."

The exchanged looks.

"What's your plan?" Newkirk asked slowly, almost cautiously.

Everyone knew that their commanding officer was capable of hair-raising schemes.

A slow smile spread over Hogan's lips. It made the four men almost uncomfortable.

"Kommandant Klink was on his way to Hammelburg this sunny day when he was involved in a car crash orchestrated by the underground to catch a Gestapo Sentinel, to kill him and free the Guide. The Sentinel was killed, apparently because his men were traitors and working for the Allies, while Colonel Klink was injured and survived."

Carter looked almost relieved at the ease of the plan. "Sounds about right."

"Thanks for volunteering, Carter."

"But…"

"Take LeBeau, Newkirk and two more guys with you. Prepare Klink's car, take it out, prepare the scene."

Carter groaned. "Yes, Colonel."

"You'll be breaking the news to Klink about his planned trip?" Kinch asked.

"Yep."

Getting rid of the dead Sentinel and two Gestapo goons was easy, compared to what else had happened today. Hogan's crew took the Kommandant's car, left the camp as the guards turned a blind eye on activities outside the camp, transporting their two captives and the body. They would drop off the packages, then get about staging the attack.

Langenscheidt and two more neutrals from Stalag 13 would be the later witnesses to come to the scene, finding their injured Kommandant and bringing him back to Stalag 13.

No one would ever know the truth because dead men didn't talk.

The underground agents were there, as usual, taking the prisoners off their hands.

*  

Klink had been aware of the activities in his camp, but since no one had come running to him,
especially Schultz, he had wisely decided not to step out of the door. For now. Just two hours after Rothenburg's death and he had yet to truly comprehend what he had done.

Well, he knew what he had done: kill a man. A Gestapo Sentinel. He also knew why: another Sentinel by the name of Robert Hogan.

Because of instincts.

Decades of control had gone out the window in a moment and he had risked everything, his very life, to protect the American.

Instincts.

Klink wanted to curse himself, but he knew it had been his own mistake. He had gotten too close. He had allowed someone to finally sneak past his carefully crafted guard and it had to be a powerful special ops Sentinel.

His body ached, muscles screaming abuse, contusions, bruises and cuts blooming vividly everywhere. His ribs were a mess and he couldn't lie down without feeling the abuse. His mind was in upheaval and he felt his shields pulled tightly around his very core. Nothing leaked, nothing came in either. It was an instinctual reaction, one he didn't have to think about.

It was a life-saver.

It had had him survive worse situations.

Well, there was nothing worse than killing a Gestapo Sentinel in front of a whole POW camp, German and Allied officers watching as their no longer so incompetent Kommandant took out a monster.

The last moments replayed over and over, and Klink knew he would do it again if faced with the choices he had had.

He had done the right thing.

And he would most likely die for that.

For all his shields, he was still quite aware of Hogan. The Sentinel had always been close, had come even closer, and after killing for him, Klink couldn't really ignore the strong presence.

Right now he was close by, once more. Waiting. Senses trained on him and the surrounding area, doing what Sentinels that weren't cold-blooded lunatics did best: guard and protect.

Klink hurt all over, but he had taken care of the worst, with Schultz fixating the ribs, and he knew he would heal.

It didn't matter anyway.

He would be executed soon.

He rubbed a hand over his eyes. Eyes with shadows underneath.

"I know you're just around the corner. Come in," he said softly, aware the Sentinel could hear him.

"Sure you're not a Sentinel?" the American teased, that cocky air to him, though it was as much a façade as Klink's ineptness right now.
"Very. But if you get a sense of me as one, you know what Rothenburg got."

"I get a lot more than Rothenburg from you, Will. A lot."

"You're making a mistake." He straightened, ignoring the flashes of pain from his bruised ribs, the exhaustion deep-set but far from enabling him to sleep. "Have you talked to Command?"

"Ah, kinda. They… confirmed everything you said, which is more unnerving now than hearing it from you, actually." Hogan filled a glass and held it out to Klink, who declined. So he emptied it in one gulp. "The operation is still going on. New orders might come in any moment."

"You should pull out."

"I'm not. None of us is."

Klink looked at the place where one of the many microphones was hidden and Hogan shook his head, almost ruefully.

"This is private right now, Will. Absolutely private. And do I want to know how you know about this?" He gestured at the listening device.

"No," was the simple answer.

"No," the other man echoed with a sigh. "I thought we were openly on the same side now."

"As openly as is safe, which means everything is back to before."

"Except when we're alone?"

A slight nod.

"So… we get another hour of light?" Hogan asked slyly.

"No."

"How about extra rations for the men?"

"You're pushing it."

"Do I have to pull out the Geneva Convention?"

Mock irritation showed. "Again?"

The well-practiced exchange soothed raw nerves and Hogan's eyes crinkled at the corners. Klink knew the other man loved the bargaining game, even if it now was simply entertainment. To tell the truth, he had always enjoyed betting his wits against the American Colonel, too. It had kept him on his toes and he had spent the evenings replaying their games, laughing softly to himself at some antics.

Now it was all out in the open.

"As often as I have to, actually. Is there anything in the Convention about imprisoned Sentinels?"

Klink scoffed. "Probably that they are a pain to work with and should be denied whatever they ask for."
Hogan looked downright happy at the answer, the old spark right there.

"Why are you here?" Klink finally asked.

"Just to let you know that you drove into Hammelburg this afternoon because you fancied some cake fresh from the local café. You ran into trouble just before arriving as you found the underground had attacked Major Rothenburg’s car. The man was already dead. The attackers were wearing Gestapo uniforms and you will later identify them as Jäger and Barth, Rothenburg’s goons, who were secretly working for the underground. As you tried to run, they crashed your car. You barely got out of the mess alive and the attackers only let off when a local family intervened."

Klink stared at the Sentinel, the words registering in his brain, but they sounded almost ludicrous. "I what?"

"You were nearly killed, Kommandant. The tough as nails commander of the only POW camp in Germany where no one ever escaped. Apparently the underground managed to turn two loyal Gestapo officers to take out a military Sentinel and you just about made it out. With the bruises to show."

He opened his mouth to say something, then snapped it shut again. Klink slowly shook his head, amusement warring with terror. This man… This insane, remarkable man…

"It'll hold up, Will," Hogan added, voice softer now. "You'll have the names of the family who helped you on file. Gives them good cover, too."

"Friendlies?"

"Very much. They help in smuggling out prisoners."

"Anton and Erika Schneider?"

Hogan's surprise was almost comical and Klink allowed himself a smile. "Of course you'd know," the Sentinel murmured.

"I'll write them a letter of commendation for their heroic deed."

It got Klink a laugh. "You think you can spin the tale with Burkhalter, too?"

"Easily." He had done a lot more with a lot less, always making it out by a breath or with just a little more luck than anyone else. This was no different.

Hogan nodded. The dark eyes were intense, senses checking the man in front of him, and Klink slightly tilted his head. There was a brief flush of color and the Sentinel cleared his throat.

"How is Anna?" Klink asked, changing the topic.

Hogan regarded the worn-out, beaten up man in front of him, but he saw no weakness. There was this core of steel, a ramrod straight line of power running through his very center, and that need to power through what could have destroyed lesser Guides within minutes. Klink had changed into a new shirt and fresh pants, but he wasn't wearing a robe or even his uniform jacket.

He still couldn't understand how all of that had so absolutely by-passed every single one of them,
how they had fallen for the most perfect act ever, but there were currently other problems to solve.

Like the girl. Anna. Because a dead Sentinel currently kept on ice wasn’t really that problematic. They could dispose of him easily. Machinations were already at work to divert all suspicious tracks from Stalag 13 somewhere else.

"Restlessly sleeping," he truthfully answered Klink. "Being around Kinch helps her. He's the most grounded non-Guide I ever had the privilege of knowing."

He had always believed that he had worked as an anchor to his senses, though it had never been a guarantee. Hit and miss, depending on how riled up his senses were, how easily he could fall into the trust needed to use Kinch's settled nature.

But it hadn’t been Kinchloe for a long, long time now.

It had been Wilhelm Klink. With Klink… it was so much easier. Second nature. Like now. His Sentinel side was at ease, calm, aware of the shielded Guide and happy with the proximity, even if there wasn't a tremor of psychic energy anywhere. He was content to just know, to look and see the man, like he had never been before.

Well… damn.

"She hasn't spoken yet, has eaten little," Hogan added.

"You want me to meet her," Klink translated with a fine smile.

There were lines around his eyes, speaking of his exhaustion, but he rose slowly, painfully.

Hogan did, too, biting his lower lip briefly to keep himself from helping.

Yes, he wanted Klink to talk to Anna, because Klink had freed her, had more or less won her from the lunatic, and he was a Guide. Her kind. She might react more to him than anyone else.

"You're up to that?" he heard himself ask.

Klink nodded. "Of course. Are you and your men up to me among you?" he replied warily.

"After what happened, I think they'll hand you a medal," Hogan teased. "Or name you head of this year's Secret Santa committee."

Klink laughed and it sounded real. "I'd go for a bottle of very good, old and heavy liquor myself."

"That can be arranged. If you share it with me."

"You always find a way to get into my liquor cabinet anyway."

"Keeps me and you on our toes."

tbc...
They used one of the secret entrances into the tunnel system to get to Anna's safe room. None of his men working their jobs in the tunnel system more than glanced at Klink as he moved among them, past the supplies, the radio station, the weapons and explosives, past equipment stored for future use. There wasn't even an eyebrow twitch from the German colonel as he saw counterfeited papers, passports, clothes and uniforms.

Without his own uniform, the riding crop, the monocle, Wilhelm Klink looked completely unlike his Kommandant self. Yes, he looked beaten up. His injuries were plain to see. But he wasn't the man everyone had believed him to be right now.

The Sentinel at his side almost smiled with pride before he caught himself.

Hogan puzzled about his reaction, especially toward the insanely talented Guide next to him. Just twenty-four hours ago he would have come up with just another scheme of manipulation, of getting Klink to do what they needed him to do, without the man realizing it, and Hogan would have loved to pitch his mind against Klink's.

Now… now he still wanted to do that, but in a completely different manner.

Troubleshooters were independent. They didn't connect. They ran like an endless circle, self-sufficient.

And Hogan himself had never felt the need either, despite meeting his share of pretty little Guides, despite bedding them. Sex didn't start a connection. Sex didn't confirm a bond. Sex was intimate, yes, but the trust needed to establish a psychic connection was different.

He could hardly get a true sense of Wilhelm Klink. Blindspot, for real. Unless he went all badass.

Hogan fought down a rather unaccustomed feeling of want at the memory of Klink fighting Rothenburg.

Still, there was something there. Simmering on a low level and from the feel of it, it had been like that for a while. Hogan had just never realized it, sensed it, because he had been missing the trigger.

Something called out to him.

Something strong.

A myriad of emotions crashed down on him and he fought through the wave, never showing a single twitch.

This man… he was special.

Klink had supported and repaired his natural walls, undetected, and Hogan had reacted to him without noticing up until now.

Maybe that thought should be frightening the troubleshooter, but it was strangely… warm, calming, familiar.
Anna was in one of the guest rooms, consisting of a bunk bed, a tiny table and a chair, a dresser, and a heater to keep her comfortable. She was still dressed in the same clothes, wrapped in a blanket and huddled against the wall, eyes large and slightly too blown for Hogan's liking.

When Klink entered, her head turned and she fixed those eyes on the man who had killed her abuser.

Klink just met her gaze, saying nothing, but Hogan felt the first sliver of psychic energy like it was a powerful blow, his Sentinel side thrilled and hungry itself, and he nearly touched the other man instinctively.

Anna blinked, lips opening, tongue wetting the chapped skin.

"My name is Wilhelm Klink," Klink said softly, voice low, warm, filled with something Hogan had never heard before. "This is Robert Hogan."

Anna's lips moved, as if repeating the names silently to herself.

"You can call me Will. Robert does. I do not mind. Wilhelm is a mouthful. I inherited it, together will a few more middle names. My family is all for traditions in that regard, though very modern in others. I think Will fits with who I am."

He smiled as he gracefully crouched down to be eye-level with the girl, despite the pain he was in.

Hogan stayed back, feeling strange emotions race through him at the words. He had called Klink 'Will' without thinking, but it had differentiated the Guide from the Stalag Kommandant. Will was the man who had killed a Sentinel, who had protected Hogan and kept him from discovery, who had protected them for so long without the prisoners being aware of it.

And Will was the man talking to Anna, his voice perfectly pitched, soothing and warm. It touched Hogan, too, and he found his senses focusing on the Guide, relaxing his body, appearing non-threatening for the girl."

"The men call you Anna."

No reaction.

"A beautiful name. Is it yours?"

She shook her head ever so faintly.

Will smiled. "Okay. Do you want me to call you Anna or another name?"

She wet her lips again, pupils so wide, Hogan wondered if she was going to have an attack. She shook her head in a jerky motion, her body starting to tremble.

"Anna," Will repeated calmly. "Anna it is then. Whatever you were before, you are Anna here. And you are safe here."

Thin fingers clenched into the blanket and suddenly tears spilled, running over her cheeks.

The powerful Guide watched her, not moving, and Hogan felt him reach for her on an empathic level. The Sentinel inside him snarled at the very idea of this man touching another gifted person so intimately but him, but a more powerful part reminded him that this was a Guide. A hurt Guide. A young woman who had been serving the asshole Klink had killed for who knew how long.

Serving in so many ways.
"Robert," Will said without even looking up. It was chastising, warning, making Hogan straightened a little.

Part of him flicked at Hogan, startling him out of his tense state. Like whacking him over the head with a rolled-up newspaper.

"Sorry," he whispered, briefly leaning closer, into the lingering touch, drawing a startled shiver that emanated from Klink.

The girl's eyes tracked between the two men and she made a panicky little sound.

"Anna," Will addressed her, immediately capturing her focus. "Robert is a friend. An ally. A Sentinel, yes. Powerful, without doubt. But not like yours. He won't hurt you. He won't claim you."

Her wide eyes bore into him.

"And not me either," he said calmly.

Hogan's eyes snapped toward the crouched man. What?

"Sentinels shouldn't hurt their Guides, whether they are temporary aides or connected for life. Robert can be trusted, Anna. You can trust him and his men."

He slowly extended one hand, holding it out to her.

Anna stared at the limb, then at Hogan, who was back in complete control. He gave her a gentle smile, one reserved for children and old ladies. Non-threatening. Just like he tried to project all that to the wide-open Guide.

And suddenly she launched herself forward, into the older man's arms, toppling them both over. Klink grimaced as his injuries flared, but he didn't let go. She clung to the German officer with a strength neither man had expected as tears streamed down her face, broken, hiccupping sobs tearing from her throat.

Klink's arms were around her as he sat on the hard-packed ground, one hand stroking gently over her dark hair and she buried against his chest.

Blue eyes filled with shared pain and empathic suffering met Hogan's.

And the Sentinel understood.

This would take a while.

His men shot him quizzical looks when he came out of Anna's room and he motioned them to follow, get some distance to the safe room where a Guide was trying to help another, very much broken one.

"She's in a bad shape, guys," he told them. "Very. We need to get her away from here ASAP. This place isn't healthy for anyone of us, but it's poison for her."

"What's Klink doing with her right now?" LeBeau asked curiously.
"Giving her an outlet."

The vortex of psychic power was contained, shielded, but he felt it. And he was quite aware of who the center was, who the shielding did, and he felt that old thrill again. He wanted this, wanted to feel it, and he wanted it with Will.

"She's injured. Mostly here." He touched his head. "And that's a wound no one here can heal."


"He's not a doctor. She needs a specialist. Let's give them some space."

There was a small tug in the back of his mind that startled Hogan out of his study of communiques that had come in over the past hour. He blinked, surprised, then suppressed a chuckle.

Kinch gave him a quizzical look.

"Klink," he only said.

The sergeant smirked. "Ah."

"Don't go 'ah' on me, sergeant," Hogan warned.

"I only said 'ah'. What you interpret is your thing."

He shot the other man a dark look, but only got a bright smile in return.

Walking into Anna's room, he saw the girl asleep on the cot, Will sitting next to her.

"You called, Kommandant," he remarked softly, tapping one temple.

Klink raised an eyebrow. "Let's leave her to sleep," he said, rising slowly, almost laboriously. One arm wrapped around his middle again, his ribs most likely painful again after Anna had hugged him so hard.

For a moment the blue eyes squeezed shut, the man stiffening, then he slowly straightened. The fatigue was plain to see.

Hogan aborted the move to help, hands clenching into fists. Klink had been through almost literal hell and back, hadn't slept, had barely had time to recover enough of himself to function, but he did function. The man was running on fumes and he was still going one hundred percent, never slipping.

Having a broken Guide with no shields to speak of crying her soul out wouldn't have been helpful either. Hogan's instincts clamored to help, to have the other man use him, the Sentinel, as a temporary crutch, but he knew it was a) too soon and b) ill-advised, not to mention c) not something Klink would accept.

Hogan wasn't even sure he knew how to be a crutch. He had never had to help anyone in that regard.

They left together, Klink with his shoulders squared. Aside from the pale skin and the cuts and bruises to his face, nothing gave away anything. Even to the outside he projected a picture of control,
refusing to show pain. Hogan fought down the almost overwhelming need to drag him into his quarters and have him rest.

Protective instinct was hell!

"You need to work on that, Colonel," Klink remarked softly, barely a whisper, but loud enough for a Sentinel to hear.

"Don't lecture me," he grumbled, a surge of embarrassment racing through him.

He let the hand that had unconsciously brushed over Klink's back fall away, feeling the heat of the bruises with his dialed up sense of touch.

"When you stop mother-henning me, Sentinel. I am fine."

"That's what stubborn Sentinels apparently do when equally stubborn Guides refuse to take care of themselves. You are not fine, Will. In anyone's book."

Klink's exasperation was almost comical in the way he over-acted it. "There is a time to break down and cry. It isn't now."

He knew the other man was probably close to a collapse. He hadn't really slept since the fight and it was going on twenty-four hours now.

Schultz was pretty much running the camp at the moment, handling whatever came in together with Hilda, who hadn't batted an eye at what she had heard. She had always been neutral, had played along with whatever crazy scheme Hogan had cooked up, though he had never involved her in any way that would make her look suspicious.

"There will be an investigation into the attack and death on a Gestapo Sentinel," Klink said, distracting from the topic, though Hogan wasn't fooled.

"Got our ears peeled for anything."

"It won't be Hochstetter coming to sniff around."

Hogan nodded. Hochstetter was a lot of things, but he wasn't a Sentinel. And when a Sentinel died, investigations were run by one.

"You'll be questioned as a possible witness. Nothing incriminates you. Your injuries are consistent with the terrible crash of your car."

Klink nodded slowly.

"Have you ever had to lie to a Sentinel?"

Blue eyes sparked with a little humor. "Every single day for the past two years."

Hogan rolled his eyes. "Aside from me."

"Some. They are not as numerous as it might seem, Colonel Hogan. The Gestapo likes to train them for their purposes, the Wehrmacht has some for special missions, like your Army."

He nodded.

"Sometimes they are used almost like cannon fodder," Klink mused. "They burn out because of how
they see Guides. A stable partnership has its merits, but if you disregard the partner, things… backfire."

"Yeah."

Klink closed his eyes for a second, looking even worse than moments before.

"Will…"

"Your men first. They want to know, I have to tell them. After that…"

"After that," Hogan agreed firmly.

Even if he had to carry the other man back.

tbc…
Having Anna unload psychically on him had been almost too much. Reporting what he had gleaned from her to Hogan and the others had been painful and rather difficult to hear, though everyone involved in the operation had seen horrors beyond comprehension already.

"Eleven," LeBeau murmured. "Mon dieu. Monsters! She was only a child when they took her! Bonding her by force to such filthy Sentinels!" A string of rather heavy, French expletives followed.

Klink didn't even wince. He just sat there, hands wrapped around a mug of coffee, pale and like a ghost in their midst. His bruises and cuts stood out even more sharply now against the ashen skin and the unshaven cheeks. Hogan was really hard-pressed not to grab the man and find them a private area to decompress.

Guide-Sentinel style.

His protection mode was on overtime and it didn't just stem from Anna's condition. Any warm-blooded Sentinel would want to keep her safe. Unlike those emotionless machines the Gestapo trained. Ice for blood and hunger for pain.

"Now what?" Carter asked. "We can't keep her here."

"No, we can't," Klink said softly, voice almost monotone enough, but Hogan detected a core of steel. "She has to leave. Preferably soon. She needs professional help, if she can even be helped. Her wounds are deep. The scars terrible. Rothenburg was only the last in a long line of Sentinels she was forced to serve in any capacity. I'm not sure she knows where she came from any more, or who she is…"

The men looked uncomfortable at the words, eyes going to their senior officer.

"We'll get her to England," Hogan decided. "Contact Command. Make them understand."

Kinch got up.

"Do you know a neutral party settled enough to accompany her?" Klink asked quietly. "Because she's a raw egg, not much of a protective shell left. It could go either way if she is triggered. She's extremely receptive and the wrong emotional surge can get her to… harm herself more."

"We'll find someone," Hogan promised.

His men didn't need prompting to get going, to arrange Anna's extraction.

"You. With me." Hogan gestured at the tired Guide.

"Hogan, I'm not in the mood…"

The brown eyes grew harder. "It wasn't a suggestion."

"I'm also not one of your men, Sentinel." Klink rose, blue eyes hard, stance firm.

Hogan pitched himself against that, met the eyes firmly, relentlessly, then pushed. Klink grimaced.

"You don't want to get into that kind of fight with me, Colonel."
"If it gets you to come with me…"

"You're the most stubborn individual I know."

"Thank you."

"It wasn't a compliment, Sentinel."

"I know it was, Guide. So, humor me just for now?"

"What I have done daily so far, you mean?"

He laughed softly. "Maybe."

But Klink followed him, through the maze of tunnels. They weren't going back to the private quarters.

It was another room, set aside, furnished like the guest quarter, but away from the bustle. The one Hogan had used frequently in his time at Stalag 13 to decompress, to unwind, smooth out his senses when needed.

"Rob…"

"You haven't slept in over twenty-four hours," the American colonel stated sharply. "This can't go on!"

"I can rest in my own quarters."

Hogan was now right up in his face, meeting the startlingly intense blue eyes. "No," he decided.

"You are not in charge of me, Hogan!" was the brisk, cool reply.

"Oh, I wish I could be, Will," Hogan replied, voice low, almost intimately so. "Because you're destroying yourself. Because you can't stop thinking. Because you can't give in and let me handle matters for once, without your supervision. Newsflash: I have run my operation without you before. There is no need for you to cover up right now. You just need to shut off that big brain and let yourself recharge."

He placed a hand on the other man's chest and pushed a little.

The contact, the warmth, was overwhelmingly intimate even without skin touching skin.

The Sentinel inside him purred. He heard the steady heartbeat, the slightly sharper intake of breath, felt the heat.

"Up to your old tricks again?" Klink tilted his head a little, looking at him like through a microscope. "You're playing a dangerous game, Hogan. One that could blow up this operation, destroy everything we have both worked for, and annihilate every chance we have to win the war."

"We're not winning this war, Will. The Allied Forces are. We're a wheel in a bigger game."

"An important wheel."

"Aren't you full of yourself." Another push and Klink moved further toward the bunk bed.

"Flattery will get you nowhere. Just once, let me aide you. I know you've been keeping me balanced,
Will. Let me return the favor." Hogan removed his hand and held both up as if surrendering. "I won't touch again, I promise."

But he wanted to. For the first time since he had come online, he wanted more than a temporary relief. He wanted Will around him; permanently. They were already so much in synch.

Klink gazed at him, then his lips twitched a little. "You're not going to give up."

"Not in my nature."

"You know it's not in my nature to… surrender to such a connection either."

"It's not a surrender because it isn't a war I'm fighting. Platonic bonds exist."

"One in a thousand. The odds are against me. Us."

Hogan felt something dark unfold, angry all of a sudden. "I wouldn't… force myself on anyone," he snarled. "I won't turn you into another Anna!"

Klink was silent, then the smile was back. "No, you wouldn't. But I couldn't be what you expect either."

"Honestly, I don't know what to expect of you," was the simple answer. "I just follow instinct here. And mine tell me that you and I… we'd be good together, whatever this would me. We can stay on top of the game. We can be more."

Blue eyes studied him, seeking out his very soul and studying that as well. Hogan let him, open and accepting.

"You're going against training and common sense."

"Yeah, I've been told so before. Reckless, too, I think."

"You can't give up what you have been for all your life."

"Why not?"

Klink stared at him. "Are you serious, Hogan? This isn't about you. This is about a war!"

"We are part of that and I know we can be stronger together!"

"It would get us killed!"

"It might also just give us the edge we need!"

They were staring at one another, eyes sparking, bodies tense and almost battle-ready.

"I'm not a possession," Klink growled.

"What I want is a partner! An ally!"

"No, you want so much more. You know it, even if you can't say it." Klink closed his eyes, looking weary, so infinitely tired, lines in his face that hadn't been there twenty-four hours ago. "You'd stake all of our lives on this hare-brained idea of yours."

"Always worked before."
"This isn't one of your crazy schemes."

"Nope."

"What you want isn't just for the mission, Hogan. You're going for something that is impossible for me to give."

"Will…"

"I can't undo everything I've so carefully crafted all my life in just a day. I'm not sure I could do it at all," he added in a low voice. "How can I know? I've never done it before."

"Even if instinct tells you it won't hurt you?" Hogan wanted to know.

"My instincts…" He looked at him. "They kept me alive to this point. You already made me go against them once."

"And look what it got you." The Sentinel slightly spread his arms, smiling.

"A dead Gestapo Major, a broken Guide, and so much trouble," was the answer.

"And me."

"I already had you."

"As a prisoner," Hogan pointed out.

"My own personal menace and the reason for less hair every month."

He grinned. "Not to mention the gray ones."

The Guide glowered.

Hogan only smiled more. "And we can talk openly about our problems now, can't we?"

Klink chuckled ruefully. "Probably."

"Definitely," was the confident declaration. "We've been one hell of a team already, and that was before knowing all I know now. Think of what we can do now!"

"I already have and it's giving me nightmares."

Hogan smiled brightly.

Klink was silent, massaging his forehead. Finally, "Ask me again when this is over, Robert."

And those few words diffused the situation like a plug had been pulled.

"Really?" And he sounded almost like a little boy, hopeful and yearning in one.

Will just shrugged one shoulder. He looked almost entirely defeated, posture slumping a little.

"Yes."

"I'll take you up on that."

"You might not get what you imagine, Colonel Hogan. I'm not…" He stopped, shaking his head
again. "I might be a Guide by birth, but I'm not what you look for."

Hogan dared to step closer again. "What I need is... different from what a normal Sentinel does. I know bonded pairs. I've seen them work together and it's equal parts respect and dependence, good and bad, like a marriage. You fight and you make up, you need one or be needed. I think we, the both of us, can't be like that. We're two islands building a bridge."

"How... poetic."

Hogan laughed. "Yes, in a way. But what I want to say is: we are fine on our own, but sometimes we need a little help. Someone to lean on. You have the right instincts; you helped me, didn't let me suffocate or burn myself out. I know... feel... something is clicking. You know it, too."

Klink didn't look at him, lines of pain and maybe some kind of confusion marring his face. "It's terrifying," he murmured.

"Yeah, tell me about it. You've become part of the Loop, which is terrifying me to a degree. It shouldn't be possible."

"Loop?"

"That's what we special ops guys call it. A Loop. We're self-contained, can handle our own glitches, all senses balanced. Some guys need to learn it. I've always been there. You broke in."

"My apologies."

"Yeah. Well, it's more of a dent." A freaking big dent, he mused to himself. One with cracks forming. Klink had impacted like wrecking ball.

The other man smiled a little. "We'll figure it out, but not today. Not right now."

"We've made it this far," Hogan agreed, hand twitching to just touch again.

Just one little touch. They had touched before, had clapped shoulders, shaken hands, shared close space, but it had never launched anything. Not a single little fizzing of a spark.

Klink raised an eyebrow and the Sentinel stepped back, blowing out a harsh breath.

"You drive me crazy, you know that?"

"Now you know the feeling." Klink turned to study the cot. "I have a perfectly good bed."

"Where you won't get much rest."

"There is a cover to maintain, Robert. I need to be in the one place where the Kommandant of a Luft-Stalag has to be. Just in case of visitors."

Hogan knew he was being beaten with his own logic, that to keep this running, Klink had to be in his place on the stage that was the prison camp.

He didn't like it, though.

The room was his; having Will in it had appeased the small part that had kept worrying over the Guide, fretted that he was too raw and hurt. The room would have given them both a little peace and quiet.
"But I appreciate the offer."

He let his senses settle on the Guide again, drawing an exasperated look.

"Humor me," he voiced silently. "Just a moment longer."

Klink did, all the way back up the tunnel and into his private quarters, where slowly and painfully changed into his pajamas. His ribs were tightly bandaged, but Anna had aggravated the injury again.

Swallowing a pill Sergeant Schultz had helpfully left with a glass of water, he wished he had the ability to switch off the pain. Klink slipped into bed, trying to breathe through the pain and discomfort.

He actually did manage to fall asleep, if only for a few hours.

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The Gestapo investigation arrived in the morning, a Sentinel, a Guide who looked just a little more like she hadn't been beaten into submission, though far from a self-assured, confident individual, and three more men who took up guard outside Klink's office.

Klink greeted them in his usual manner, in full uniform, every medal and decorative aspect in place, riding crop under one arm, the other hand on his back.

"Major Zimmermann," he called, smiling brightly, even if his bruised face looked disturbingly unhealthy behind that smile. "Welcome to Stalag 13 where no prisoner ever successfully escaped! May I offer…"

The Gestapo Sentinel gave him a narrow-eyed look and pushed past him, his meek little Guide in tow. She couldn't be older than eighteen, a thin wisp of a girl with straight blond hair, pale skin and huge, blue eyes.

Klink looked flustered, rushing after them, calling for Hilda to serve coffee and drinks.

Schultz watched them, exchanging a brief look with Klink, who went after the other officer.

Hogan, standing outside Barrack 2, putting up a good front of not caring at all about the visitors, met Schultz's eyes. The sergeant was worried. So was the American colonel.

Schultz walked over to him, joined by Carter and Kinch.

"He'll be alright," he murmured.

Hogan wished he could believe it. Klink was good. Amazingly good. He was a pro at being the absolute opposite on the outside compared to what burned inside.

"You will keep an eye on him?" Schultz asked, sounding almost plaintive.
Hogan gave him a pat on the back. "We will. Carter. Kinch." He nodded toward the building.

The men went inside and Hogan followed.

Hogan, Newkirk, LeBeau, Carter and Kinchloe were huddled around the coffee pot, listening in to the questioning, and Kinch more than once shot Hogan a warning look when the Sentinel looked like he was about to walk over and break up the interrogation.

It was hard to listen to.

Klink sounded like his usual self, with a little whine to his voice, playing on his injuries, weaving a story that had the men exchange impressed looks. He was his usual, eager-to-please self, offering his hospitality and whatever Zimmermann needed. His story of events was airtight, supported by witness stories and bodies found, as well as evidence that had been planted by the underground.

Zimmermann questioned him for three hours, but there were no signs that he suspected anything. Klink agreed with just about anything the Gestapo Sentinel stated, laughing at his own, bad jokes, wilting audibly when Zimmermann growled something else.

Schultz came into the barracks after an hour of their arrival, still looking worried, slightly pinched, and he didn't so much as twitch at the listening device.

"It'll be fine, Schultz," Newkirk tried to reassure the older man, though there were faint lines creasing his face.

"Oh, I really hope so."

LeBeau handed him a chocolate bar, trying to cheer him up, and though Schultz took it with a happy smile, it didn't reach his eyes.

He was worried.

They all were.

Hogan firmly believed the whole construct would hold up. It hadn't been their craziest plan yet.

Everything would be fine.

The whole group disappeared after those three hours, even though Klink invited them again to stay for lunch, talking about Sauerbraten and a good wine to go with it.

The moment the gates closed after the Gestapo car, Hogan was over in the Kommandant's office in a flash. Hilda looked pale and he shot her a quick, reassuring smile.

"Take the rest of the day off," he told her and she nodded.

"He's..." she started.
"I know. I'll be gentle, Hilda."

"I know you will, Colonel Hogan," she answered, smiling softly. "I didn't think it could work, but it did. He was… amazing. If I hadn't known what he could do, hadn't seen him be… so different, I wouldn't have believed this possible!"

He laughed a little, though the humor wasn't real. He felt no humor at all. "Me neither." He kissed her cheek. "Thanks for upholding the fort."

"Save it for the Kommandant," she replied.

Hogan blinked twice, but she only grabbed her coat and bag, then she was gone.

Hogan breezed into the office, a flippant remark on his lips, but it died when he took in Klink's condition. His eyes filled with suppressed anger at the gray pallor, the deep shadows under Klink's eyes, and witnessed a little tremor to the man's hands.

"Will…" he started, stopping himself from crossing personal lines by sheer force of will alone.

"Not now, Colonel Hogan." Klink shook his head, looking more drawn by the minute.

"Yes, now," he stated firmly. "How are you?"

"I'm good."

"No. No, you're not!"

His senses cast out, listening to the slightly elevated heart rate, the shallow breaths of pain, and scanning over the fine sheen of sweat.

He wanted to get closer, wanted so much closer and help, but Klink raised a hand, stopping him.

"Please, don't. I need some rest and will be in my quarters."

"I can help!" he blurted.

Klink met his gaze evenly. "It wouldn't… be the best idea."

Hogan was around the desk and standing next to the other man before he could think about how personal lines had just been annihilated. It had always been like this, being this close, always barely room between them, but now he noticed it.

He never had before.

The need had never been like that. To reassure himself that the Guide was okay, that he hadn't been hurt worse.

"I know you have no really good experiences with Sentinels," Hogan tried. "But I don't want… that kind of closeness. It was never about that."

"I know." Klink smiled tiredly, too many lines in his narrow face, too gaunt, too haggard.
Hogan frowned, then shook his head. "And it's not because you're a man, Will."

"What?" the other colonel asked, confusion written on his narrow features.

"This isn't about you and me being men," Hogan repeated. "Any of this. It doesn't play into my decisions. Gender, I mean."

Klink carefully rubbed his forehead, avoiding the bruises. "Hogan, please, just leave? I'm not in the mood for these kind of games."

"It's not a game!"

"Even if that is the truth, I'm still not in the mood." He groaned softly and closed his eyes. "I just need some peace."

"What did he do?" Hogan demanded, anger rising briefly. "The Sentinel! What did the creep do?!"

"You heard the whole conversation."

"This isn't about the words!" he snapped.

Another sigh and Klink massaged his temples. "Major Zimmermann is a Sentinel with two senses, like so many. Only his are Touch and Taste, which are a rare and rather useless combination when Sight or Hearing or Smell are so much more efficient in a military Sentinel. He is utterly displeased with the assignment to find Rothenburg's killers, but also secretly glad the man is gone. He might just take his place."

"You got all that from him?"

The raised eyebrows had him gape. Klink had!

"He has tells, Colonel. A lot of them. He also likes to play on his superiority. It's... draining, to say the least. Tiresome to listen to him rant."

"You can say that again. We almost took shifts."

Though Hogan wouldn't have left for a moment, even if some of his men had rotated in and out of his office. The second Gestapo Sentinel in almost about the same amount of days had really grated on him.

Another quick smile. "Together with all the discomfort and worry, it was... a rather crippling experience."

It was a monumental effort not to react to that confession and there was hardly room between them now, but Hogan was holding back. He was in no shape himself to be much of a comfort, mainly because there were territorial feelings welling up inside him that he hadn't experienced so far. He had always felt protective of his team, of the crew in this camp, but this, what he was feeling now, was a lot more intense.

"Will... let me help..."

Klink put a hand on his chest and pushed him back. Hogan went without resistance, stunned by the sudden touch, then the hand was gone.

"I appreciate the offer. Right now I need time to myself, Robert. Please let me."
He nodded, mouth dry. Warmth flooded him briefly, the mental touch of his Guide not at all hidden, and he swallowed. He felt the world realigning itself, the rough feeling around the edges smoothing over. Emotionally, Zimmermann's presence had left him like a tiger pacing a cage.

It was better now.

Klink went into his private quarters and Hogan left the office in a daze, the fresh air giving him some much needed clarity. He breathed it in, boxing up his feelings, the turmoil pushed into a corner and locked away, then he headed back to the barracks.

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"It's bad," Hogan muttered as he sat down next to Kinch, rubbing his forehead.

"Hard to overlook, sir."

Hogan scowled at him.

"You never had such a powerful Guide around you."

"I had him around me for two years!"

"Without knowing it. Now you do," Kinchloe pointed out reasonably. Hogan hated him for it. "You react to that knowledge, even if you can't feel it. Klink's put everything on the line for you. Sentinels react to that, too."

"You make me sound like a primitive caveman. And since when are you the resident expert?" he muttered petulantly.

Kinch raised his eyebrows.

It got him another scowl.

"Okay, alright," Hogan finally sighed. "Yes, I've never seen him like that and it's… weird…"

"For all of us, sir."

"We've protected him all that time, but now he really needs help and he won't let me in!"

Kinch regarded him knowingly. "He's injured, Colonel. He's vulnerable. He never was before. And you didn't know about who and what he really is before either. That knowledge gives you an edge and makes him even more vulnerable."

Hogan snorted. "That man isn't vulnerable! He could take me out with one mental blow and you know it."

"I'm not talking about a fight. I'm talking about emotions."

The colonel grimaced with discomfort.

"I'm not saying that you're trying to… bond with him, Colonel, but you're drawn to him, right?"
Okay, now it was getting more uncomfortable.

"You're a very powerful Sentinel. Autonomous. Never had the need for the likes of Klink. You never even considered a partner."

Hogan shrugged.

"I think part of you does now. Seriously considers it."

"I don't need a Guide," he replied immediately, automatically.

Kinch's expression said it all.

"I don't!" the colonel added angrily.

More silence.

Finally Hogan snarled a curse, inexplicably more emotional, more open in his reactions, than he would normally be. He drummed his fingers on the table, mind racing. Was he? Really? Or was it just the stress of the past days?

He didn't know.

He hated not knowing.

And he hated what it did to him. That strange feeling that he was letting Klink down, that the Guide needed him and the Sentinel hadn't figured out how to give him that help. Will was injured; hurting! And he didn't accept help.

Dammit all to hell and back!

"Give it time, Colonel. Don't rush it," Kinchloe told him.

"You're not the father of the bride, Kinch," he muttered.

"No, just the only level-headed guy in this whole outfit."

He chuckled and clapped the other man's shoulder as he rose. "Probably. I'll give this some thought."

And he would continue monitoring the injured man currently trying to find some rest over in the other building. Hogan was still tracking his heartbeat, his breaths, and he couldn't switch off that newfound protective notion.

Damn.

Damn, damn, damn!

"Follow his lead, Colonel," Kinch advised. "Even if it's hard."

"You're taking sides now, sergeant?"

"When it comes to mental sanity and safety? You bet I do. And it won't be yours."

He snorted and left the radio room. Of course Hogan knew that his second in command was right. And Klink had survived on his own for too many years to be a pushover or to be called weak.

Now, if he could just convince his more instinctual side, too.
tbc...
Chapter 7

General Burkhalter called in the late afternoon and Klink just about held back a sigh.

"General Burghalter," he greeted him with easily faked eagerness in his voice. He had played this role for so long now, it wasn't a problem at all. "What a pleasure to hear from you, sir."

"I heard some disturbing news about you, Klink," his superior started in that nasal voice of his.

"Disturbing, sir?" he echoed. "I can't imagine…"

"Yes, sadly, you can't," the other man interrupted him. "You were involved in the attack and murder of a Gestapo Sentinel, Klink."

"I… I didn't murder anyone, general!" he said quickly. "I was the one who made it out alive! I didn't even know what had happened and those two Gestapo men opened fire on me. An officer of the Luftwaffe! They were underground agents and killed their superior officer. You can't believe I had anything to do with that!"

Burkhalter snorted in disdain. "No, that I can't believe. You are a lot of things, Klink, but most of all you are not involved. In anything."

The general proceeded to ask him a few more choice questions, then muttered something about the Gestapo and their Sentinels, good riddance to one more freak, and hung up.

"More bad news?"

Klink looked up and met Hogan's eyes. The man had slipped in just as he had hurried his good-byes to Burkhalter, doing his best impression of trying to wheedle a commendation out of the man for his heroics. Of course, Burkhalter had shot him down.

Hogan had probably been made aware of the call, since his men kept monitoring what came in and went on.

"No, just Burghalter throwing his weight around. He's not too broken up about a dead Sentinel, but he was rather… annoyed it was me who was also involved. At least most of his anger is directed at Major Zimmermann, who interrogated me without his presence. Gestapo and Wehrmacht generally are their best enemies."

Hogan perched on the desk, close to the Guide, watching him. "Is he coming here?"

"No. He has other obligations." Klink leaned back slowly as not to aggravate his ribs, meeting the dark eyes. "I doubt anything but my early demise could currently get him to leave Berlin. And even that is questionable."

"Good. Not that he wouldn't be welcome." Hogan smiled brightly. "We can always use the entertainment. I'd also prefer if there isn't anything like your death involved."

While the words sounded light, the expression was anything but. Klink met the dark eyes, saw the burning intensity, and he calmly pushed his mind against the Sentinel's smoothing the waves. Hogan's protectiveness had risen a few times in the past years, whenever Klink had been threatened to either be transferred to an unsavory position or promoted, or even be tried for something he hadn't done. Back then it had been mainly to keep their seemingly incompetent and easily manipulated
Kommandant. Now…

This surge had been different.

"I'd rather not have to deal with him on top of so many other things," Klink said. "The man is taxing."

"Understandable." Hogan glanced at the papers on the desk, fake casual as he leaned a little to catch a better look.

Klink scowled at him and piled them all together.

Hogan's chuckle was warm, the colonel shaking his head. "Still want to play?" he asked.

It got him raised eyebrows. "I don't want you to lose your edge."

"I appreciate the thought, Kommandant. You're too kind."

"And don't you forget it," Klink wearily rose from his chair, one arm around his middle in a protective gesture. His ribs were still wrapped and they still hurt whatever he did. As did so much else. "Anything you wanted, Colonel Hogan?"

Hogan looked at where the arm was supporting and protecting the bruised area, visibly drawn between saying something and ignoring the injury. His fingers twitched a little. In the end he said nothing.

"Just see what you're up to. And to tell you we're about ready to get Anna out of here. Thought you wanted to know, in case you want to say good-bye."

Klink was silent, looking at the Sentinel, aware what he was being offered. Anna was a Guide, like him, but not at all like Wilhelm Klink when it came to abilities and shields. She was a child, her mind fractured from the continued abuse by a Sentinel, and Klink doubted she would ever be able to heal fully. Even if she could recover, she wouldn't be able to trust anyone in that capacity ever again.

He had felt her torment and pain, had held the thin, shaking form, and he had seen just the same in the nameless Guide Zimmermann had dragged along.

Lost, broken souls beyond repair.

It was a reminder that this could have been him. In another life, one without protection, one where he wasn't as strong. Anna had suffered a fate his family had spared him. Klink knew Robert Hogan wasn't like Zimmermann, but the life-long wariness was hard to lose. Logically he also knew that he could wipe the floor with Hogan, could wipe his mind from existence if he wanted to.

"Where will she go to?" he asked, trying not to think about trust and emotional attachments too much.

"England first. London said they have a possible home for her, with a Guide specializing in trauma of that kind."

He nodded. "When?"

"Tonight."

"I'll be there. Thank you, Colonel Hogan, for letting me know."
"Hey, you saved her. It's the least we could do."

Hogan looked rather somber now. He had seen as much suffering and pain as all of them, maybe more, but the girl was a Guide on top of that. It triggered something.

"How about drinks after that? We found a nice bottle in the cellar. But if you prefer being head of the Secret Santa committee…"

Klink had to laugh softly. "No. Judging a basket weaving contest was enough already. Drinks sound just about right."

*

It was after nightfall, with everyone confined to the barracks, and the guards doing their rounds, that Hogan led the Guide to where Anna was waiting.

Klink, in full uniform, but missing the riding crop and for once not so stooped over, smiled at the young woman, who had yet to talk. He was missing the monocle, too, which left him without the perpetual quint and scowl.

A different man.

For now.

Because he couldn't be that person when visitors came around.

The girl looked at him, a flash of fear quickly replaced by recognition, but she couldn't even smile. Her lips twitched, but she didn't manage.

"Take care, Anna," he said softly. "Trust them to take care of you, too. You're free now."

Still thin and pale, still scared, she nodded. Newkirk had outfitted her with civilian clothes that looked bland enough that she would be overlooked, but they were functional and kept her warm.

Hogan stood to Klink's right, just a little behind him, keeping himself in neutral, so to speak. Anna's eyes flickered between them and she formed silent words that the Guide could apparently pick up easily.

Will chuckled softly. "No."

Her forehead creased in a tiny frown. For a moment her eyes turned more focused, intense, and bore into Klink's.

He shook his head, the smile twitching at his lips almost sad. Anna nodded, eyes on Hogan once more.

"Good-bye," Klink said.

Kinch gently took her arm and guided her through the tunnels. She would be picked up on the other side of the camp by underground agents, accompanied to the next stop, from where she would be flown to England.
"What did she say?" Hogan asked when they had made their way back in the dark to the Kommandant's office.

"That you should learn to read lips, Colonel."

He grinned. "I lip read just fine. What did she say? 'Cause she clearly did some Guide thing."

"Guide thing?" Klink raised an eyebrow.

"You know."

"That's for me and her to know, Colonel Hogan. Now, I have a prison camp to run. As long as I can anyway."

"Which will be to the very end," Hogan quipped. "We took care of it. All of it. We're in the clear, all suspicion diverted."

"The next weeks will prove that."

Klink's eyes swept over the dark compound of his POW camp. The search lights kept tracking over the silent barracks and guards patrolled. Like always, as if nothing had changed.

Hogan stood next to him, hands in the pockets of his jacket, like it was his rightful place to be.

No, nothing had changed and still so much.

The next day was sunny but cooler than expected. The sky looked a little hazy, filtering the light, and the wind started to pick up right after roll-call. There had been a forecast of rain.

Klink inspected the rows of prisoners, meeting Hogan's eyes, and he felt the Sentinel's attention on him.

"Sergeant Schultz?"

The sergeant of the guards stepped forward. "All prisoners present and accounted for."

He nodded. "Dismissed," he told the men, then looked at his sergeant, who was joined by Hogan and his core crew like it was the most natural thing in the world.

And it was. Had always been.

"Herr Kommandant?" Schultz queried.

"We'll start with the… evaluation now. Please call in the men as listed."

"Yes, Kommandant." A worried expression appeared on the round features. "You are sure?"

"Yes, Schultz, I am. Better start now. Get it over with."

Hogan was still at his side as he walked into his office, a silent shadow, watching the Guide.

"I feel it would be a bad idea for you to be here," Klink remarked as he sat in his chair.
"I feel it would be a bad idea to leave you alone, Herr Kommandant. Word spread and my men made damn sure everything was kept within these fenced perimeters. You and I both know your guards are the least likeliest to run and tell. None of them are true believers in your Madman's cause. This unfortunate event raised the stakes and has brought both sides together, Will. We stand together now. All of us. Prisoners and guards. Stalag 13 is important and we need to protect it as long as we can."

"You don't need to protect me, though."

He expelled a breath. "No. I don't. I just… want to be here."

"A prisoner."

Hogan smirked and perched on a corner of the desk. "Senior and highest ranking one." He raised a finger. "And a Sentinel."

Klink scowled at him. "How could I forget about any of that. Neither makes you eligible for being in my office throughout the interviews I conduct with my men, though."

It got him a careless shrug. "I promise to be as silent as a mouse. You won't even know I'm here."

Klink snorted. "Like that is at all possible."

"What will you do if one of the candidates fails the interview?" the American demanded.

"We handle it the way we always handled them."

Klink was silent, then nodded. "To be seen together, to show a united front, would kick-start another rumor."

"It's not a rumor."

"Hogan…"

He grinned.

"This is not good."

"Let them talk."

"Let them," Klink echoed, shaking his head in annoyance and a certain amount of fatalism.

Hogan leaned forward. "We can do this, Will."

"I sometimes wonder if you were dropped on your head as a child. That would explain so much."

The Sentinel just grinned brightly.

*

The evaluation and interviews went well. Some were surprising in their revelation about the men under his command, some not so much. Like Corporal Langenscheidt. The man was rather relieved that things had finally come to light.
"I knew stuff was happening here," he told both men, eyes flicking back and forth between Hogan and Klink. "Many of us did. We just… thought we better ignore it."

Hogan chuckled silently. "Yeah. Thanks."

"Sergeant Schultz always said he didn't see or hear anything. We decided to adopt that."

And Schultz had always seen a lot. A whole lot that would have gotten the prisoners into trouble and Schultz probably shot for treason.

Klink had once commented that only the dregs were posted in POW camps and while that was marginally true, it was also true that many of those men had never joined the party. In his camp no one had. In his camp, everyone was keeping their heads down, trying to survive the war. Those transfers that had proven to be pro-Hitler had been quickly transferred out again.

Five of his men worried about their families, their safety, and only one was seriously considering transferring to another post, but he was indecisive because like every single one here, he wasn't a Nazi. All of them wanted the war to end, to return to a peaceful life after the terrible war, to be rid of Hitler and his insane ideas.

Klink offered the man help should he want an out.

In the end he decided to give this a chance.

"Better to die fighting to free our country than to run," Lenker said, meeting both men's eyes firmly. "I already lost my children. My wife is all I have, but she is the stronger one of us. We will see this through."

"Thank you."

"I know what we saw is nothing we can ever tell anyone about. But, sir, please let me tell you that all of us respect you. There had been rumors about underground and sabotage activity coming from this very camp, but no one would believe prisoners to be capable of such complicated operations. We kept turning blind eyes to a lot of suspicious behavior. Some thought the escape attempts were strange, phony. We didn't talk about it outside. Anywhere at all. I think we are doing good work. The right work and the right cause."

Hogan could see Klink's fight to uphold his façade, the one of a superior officer, not the one of the idiot.

"This is an elaborate game, Lenker," Hogan said, voice quiet and commanding. "There is no backstage. There is no time out. As long as the war cannot be ended, it will be a play you need to keep playing. Wherever you are."

It was the same they had told everyone.

Lenker nodded. "I'm prepared to do so."

Klink closed his eyes and sank back into his chair, looking worn out. Hogan had felt the tiny, empathic eddies, the way the Guide had looked at each and every soldier, deeper than the surface, scanning for lies and deceit.
His own senses were stretched just as thin, listening to the men's heartbeats, looking for tell-tale signs of lies with his sight, scenting for any trace of fear or deceit. Hogan knew they were both paying for overdoing it, but they had managed the impossible.

Like many times before.

"We make a damn good team," he remarked.

And speaking the words out loud had him realize how often it had happened before. One playing the other, never aware that the game was played on both sides, and together they had done some pretty amazing stuff.

How often had he stood by Klink, facing high-ranking officials, manipulating them, thinking that it had saved their favorite POW Kommandant? How often had the two men been right next to each other, Hogan running the game, Klink doing his part? How often had he thought it was his perfect plan and his master manipulations? And how often had Klink let him believe that while steering Hogan back from destruction to victory?

Hogan really had to take the time to go back through the missions and see for himself. Just now he could come up with a dozen situations where the Guide had probably intervened to save the Sentinel.

Right now they worked like a seasoned Sentinel-Guide team. Perfectly in tune. In synch. As if they had always known each other. It just felt like that. So familiar. So normal. Absolutely normal.

Hogan felt that tremor deep within his very soul, his stomach clenching at the thought. He was leaning close to the Guide, pushing toward the fine waves that he was allowed to feel, supporting and focusing in one.

Klink loosened his tie and undid the top buttons of his uniform shirt. "Always did," he agreed. "Senses?"

The scan felt just as familiar. Open, perfect, not the least bit guiding.

"Are you babysitting me, Guide?"

"Only because you need it, Sentinel."

Hogan felt weirdly happy at the comeback, especially since the glint in the blue eyes was back. "I'm good. You?"

"Getting there," was the honest answer.

"Anything I can help with?"

"Hogan…" There was a tiny warning.

The American colonel raised his hands. "No strings attached."

"I'm fine. Now go to your men. Dismissed!"

"No."

"I'm still the Kommandant of this camp, Colonel Hogan. Are you refusing my orders?" Klink asked, for a moment slipping back into the old role.

"Yes, Kommandant. I am. The answer is still no." Hogan leaned over the seated man, senses firmly
locked on him, meeting the startled expression calmly. "If we are to survive this, we need each other, Will. Trust each other… support each other."

"Not like this."

There was a tremor the Sentinel didn't like in the other man's voice, but he couldn't stop now.

"I don't want… to take something away from you. I have no experience in forging these kinds of bond, yeah, but you… this is different, Will! I know we can do this, see this through to the end, if you allow it. You already made allowances in so many small ways throughout the years we've run this camp together. Even Sentinels can't work alone indefinitely. I didn't believe it when my old instructor told me, but I believe it now. I reached a point of no return and you were there. And Guides aren't tools for me! I wouldn't use you, abuse you. All I ask for is… a partner. Nothing more."

"Your instincts have been fine so far, Robert. You don't really need a Guide," was the calm, even reply. "This is you reacting to the psychic echoes, to Anna's distress due to her missing shields, to Rothenburg's fury and hatred, and to the many men you just scanned. You overtaxed yourself. It'll wear off."

Hogan bared his teeth in an almost animalistic snarl, then stepped away quickly, taken aback by his primal response. Klink regarded him curiously.

"You are crossing a lot of lines here," the Kommandant stated calmly. "I am the enemy and male. You are an exceptionally strong Sentinel, Colonel Hogan. A troubleshooter. Four senses and possibly a developing fifth one, if you are honest with yourself. I know you Americans can accept a lot when it comes to military Sentinels, but this? No."

Hogan glared. "It doesn't have to be sexual, Will. I'm not asking for a warm body in bed!"

It got him a tired smile. "I know you, Colonel Hogan. You are sexual. I've seen you with too many women not to believe it would be sexual. Maybe not right now, but in the end. I'm not that person for you. A man. Not a curvy, beautiful woman."

Hogan swallowed. Yes, there had been many women, sometimes just a kiss, and he had never intended to have a relationship with any of them. Except for the purpose of a mission.

"It doesn't have to be physical, Will," he repeated, voice rougher.

"You don't want this. You are one of the few born with everything he needs to be independent, Robert. Yes, you faltered because you didn't take care of yourself, but that's not a one-way road. This cannot work."

"You're not listening! I don't want a permanent bond! You told me what an idiot I am not to have a low-level Guide to balance my senses on. You repeatedly lectured me on the possibility that I lose my edge, endanger everyone around me. Command placed me here, Will! Here! With an apparently dim-witted, incompetent Kommandant, who just so happens to be anything but all of that! Who happens to be an ally and a Guide who would probably classify as A-level material if tested! Who can be my focus, my help. My partner, damnit!"

Klink leaned back, arms crossed in front of his chest, glaring at the American pilot.

"You always helped me before!" Hogan pulled out his last argument.

"Because you're an overbearing moron and I couldn't let you endanger everything!"
Hogan spread his arms. "So help this overbearing moron again! Or do you want to leave me on my own now?"

It got him a weary sigh. "That I did not say. I would never turn my back on you, Sentinel. This isn't just about you, though. This involves everyone in this camp. Coming too close is extremely dangerous for both of us."

Klink finally rose, looking more undone than ever before. With the top buttons opened, the tie loosened, the uniform looked so much less imposing. Fatigue had set in again, the pain demanding its price.

"Our minds are… strong. We would start a catastrophic event," he stated. "Something that would end in permanence. Something we might not want."

Hogan approached the other man again, feeling the first eddies of a tiny crack in the ancient shields. Klink was opening up consciously, not by accident. This was deliberate.

He was strong, his mind powerful, and he felt so incredibly, intimately familiar.

They just fit. Like a glove. Like a second skin. Klink felt so right. And it was just a sliver of what lay behind those impenetrable walls.

He shivered. Deep inside him, the primal need rose.

Hogan wanted to reach out and wanted to touch bare skin, but then stopped. He inhaled sharply, shaking his head like it had been a bad dream, and stepped back.

"Damn!"

Klink smiled humorlessly. "You see what a supremely bad idea this is, Robert? I can deal with the strain of this on my own. You can't help me."

"I could, Will. It's called balance. The Sentinel can help the Guide. If you trusted me."

"I can't."

He scrubbed a hand over his tired face and shot Klink an annoyed, frustrated look. The Guide shrugged.

"Then we do it like before?" the American colonel asked finally.

"You mean a swift kick in the balls to get you back on track?"

He laughed out loud at the crude words, nodding. "Yes, that. Psychically speaking."

"I never did more than that. I can do it again. So… an arrangement?"

Yes, an arrangement.

Hogan closed his eyes, senses swiftly sweeping over the Guide, feeling them settle on Klink's heartbeat and breathing. Not as much as he wanted, not as smoothly as touch would have managed, but they did. The sandpapery feel of before was gone. Looking at the other man, he saw the sharp lines had relaxed, too.

They were helping each other. By arguing a lot. Like they always did. Pushing and pulling, back and forth. Their approved method.
And, looking back at their interactions of the past, a fun game for them both. Hogan had always enjoyed pitting himself against the Kommandant, finding ways to manipulate him, and Klink had rolled with it. He had danced the dance.

Like now.

"You might want to go back to the barracks now," Klink suggested calmly. "Check in on new orders or news."

"Is that an order, Kommandant Klink?"

"It's a suggestion, Colonel Hogan. It was a long day. We both need the rest… and you need to know if anything of importance happened."

"My men would have told us."

Eyebrows rose over clear blue eyes. Hogan did a sloppy salute.

"How much do you want to know?"

"I'll know as much as I need, as usual."

"Yessir."

Klink rolled his eyes. "Dismissed, Hogan," he spoke the well-known words.

Hogan left, a lightness to his step that hadn't been there before.

The guard outside just shot him a quick look, face neutral, but there was a tiny nod before he returned to his watch.

Hogan's eyes swept the compound as he walked over to the barracks, taking in the way everything looked so normal, with patrols, guards on the watch towers, and his crew milling about. Smoking, bouncing a ball around, reading papers.

His inner circle surrounded him.

"We good, sir?" Newkirk asked.

"Yeah. All good. You heard?"

"We heard. Just with our ears. And just for the interviews."

He chuckled at the words. He had counted on having privacy. "Let's say the verdict is in our favor. Nothing changes, though. Same roleplaying as always."

"Understood."

"Lots of stupid going around these days," Kinch remarked with a smirk.

"Especially in such a contained area," Hogan agreed.

"London's not absolutely happy with recent developments, but they aren't pulling the plug on things," the sergeant continued. "They said to tell you that you're crazy, probably went off the deep end, but well done."
"I'm honored."

They headed into the barracks where Hogan poured himself some of that god-awful coffee. He settled down at the table, unconsciously still tracking Klink's heartbeat.

"What?" he growled in annoyance when he caught Kinchloe looking at him.

"Nothing." The man took his coffee and disappeared into the tunnel system.

Hogan just scowled.

tbc...
Chapter 8

The camp routine was back.

As if the fight had never happened.

The guards kept their usual distance to the prisoners and the prisoners treated the guards as before. Nothing told of the sudden shift in power, the respect the men had for their commanding officer.

No one had left. No one had asked for a transfer.

Klink's old persona was firmly back in place, monocle and all. No one could tell that there was a completely different person underneath all that military strut and posturing.

It hurt Hogan to see him like that, knowing the power that lay behind the, still decidedly bruised, façade, but he wasn't any better.

At least when the doors closed behind them, masks fell.

Never the shields, but at least Wilhelm Klink was Will, the man who was so much deeper, more passionate, more talented, and downright scary sometimes. So many layers and still not the truth behind all of those carefully crafted tiers that overlaid neatly, created an illusion everyone had firmly believed in. Never any doubt.

When they sat together, talking, Klink looked taller, more open, more at ease, losing traits Hogan had thought were the German officer and had been nothing but props for the role.

"All those times," he told him one time. "You let me think I was saving your bacon and you had it all in hand, right?"

Klink smiled. "It kept you sharp, Hogan."

"Yeah."

It had.

"So… no more basket weaving contests?" he asked playfully.

"Or Easter egg hunts."

"Damn shame. My men enjoyed that."

"I believe you'll find something else to do."

He grinned brightly. Of course he would.

"We could throw another party. For anyone's birthday or anniversary," he offered. "Or wedding."

"Please don't."

"Hey, we're really good at it!" he protested.

Klink's sour expression was all playful mockery. "Yes. Yes, you are, Colonel Hogan. Frightfully so."
Neither man mentioned the intense moment between them. Hogan understood Klink's inability to trust him in so many ways, but then again, he had entrusted him with his life often before.

Just never as a Guide who had had his coming out, so to speak. The Guide was more vulnerable, despite being so much stronger than anyone Hogan had ever met, and that person was distrustful of Sentinels and anyone associated with them.

Because of his past.

A past that Hogan didn't share. His own experiences couldn't compare to Klink's and he tried to understand, while part of him wanted that balance Will offered to his Sentinel side.

Klink never remarked on how Hogan focused on him instead of the men who had been the stand-ins for so long.

And then again, not so long. Things had shifted a while ago without his knowledge and it drove home the point that he and Klink would be perfect together.

As partners.

Just a surface connection to take the edge of.

Hogan pushed those thoughts aside. They cluttered his mind and he needed all his wits to deliver what London always ordered or suggested they do.

Business as usual.

*

Klink was busy filling out forms, signing reports and keeping matters as smooth and uninteresting to Berlin as possible when Schultz walked into his office with a smart salute.

"Herr Kommandant."

"What is it, Schultz?" he asked, not even looking up.

"The prisoners have finished restocking and clean-up is complete."

"Good, good."

"Nothing is amiss. Everything is exactly where it is supposed to be."

He looked up, eyes narrowing a little at the wording. "What is he up to now?" Klink sighed, shaking his head.

"Herr Kommandant?"

"Of course you know nothing."
Schultz was the perfect picture of absolute innocence.

"Nothing is amiss? All packages counted and accounted for?"

"Yes."

"Prisoners?"

"All there."

Of course. The numbers were always correct. How Hogan had believed that his switching of prisoners would remain undetected was anyone's guess, but Klink had played along. Schultz had been happy not to get into trouble anyway, so he had turned more than one blind eye on a lot more than one occasion.

"And Colonel Hogan?"

"Probably up to something," Schultz murmured. "I mean, he is in the barracks, Herr Kommandant. As are the men. But I would know nothing of any… activities."

Klink looked heavenwards. "Of course."

"But I think he mentioned lifting morale with a friendly game between Germans and prisoners."

Klink let his eyes wander over to the window, then back to the hidden mic which he had never removed and wouldn't.

"I see," he said slowly, carefully. "A game."

"A friendly game."

"Ah."

"With prizes, Herr Kommandant." Schultz smiled widely. "First prize is a three course meal made by LeBeau. Dessert could be Apfelstrudel." The last was said with a note of longing.

He made a non-committal grunt. Part of him was counting how long it would take for his personal pain to get here, wheedle and bargain, and he was already looking forward to it. It had been the daily routine for two years, with lists of complaints, with longer lists of demands, favors and privileges, and sometimes a shouting match that had ended in high spirits and some serious acting on his part not to seem too happy.

"What should I tell Colonel Hogan?"

"Request denied."

"But it would raise morale."

"Dismissed, Schultz."

The guard snapped a salute, then hesitated. "About the Strudel… would you think about it?"

"No."

"No?" Hogan cried, a shocked expression on his face as he breezed past Schultz. "How can you say no to Strudel? We'll even let you win!"
Klink had long since given up on keeping the other colonel out of his office. Before Rothenburg, before so many things. Hogan had always found a way, past the guards, past Helga, past Gestapo and field marshalls or generals. He was simply there, like he belonged.

He almost cracked a smile.

Yes, the man belonged here in so many different ways.

Schultz wisely closed the door as the two men went into the spiel that had been going for too long for them to stop.

"Easy," Klink replied. "No. See? Very easy to pronounce. Two letters. I can also give you a very firm Nein, if you prefer."

"I'd prefer you let me lift morale and have a friendly game, Kommandant."

He met the eyes of the Sentinel, glancing at the mic, and Hogan shook his head. No one was listening at the moment.

"What's the game?" Klink asked calmly, folding his fingers and looking at the other man. The fading bruises on his fingers still stood out as they healed and Hogan's eyes briefly tracked over the reddish lines that spoke of the split skin that had been there before.

They were all on the same page and Hogan could just go ahead and do what he wanted, with no one seriously attempting to stop him, but that wasn't how this, and his mind, worked. He needed the challenge, needed to pit himself against overwhelming odds.

"Basketball. Or baseball, if your guys know how to play that."

"When?"

"Day after tomorrow?"

"Ah," Klink understood and he tried to keep his lips from twitching into a smile. "We might be a bit tight for room to play that day, Colonel Hogan."

"You mean all those mysterious boxes that were brought in by an unmarked truck, Colonel? The one we weren't meant to see? No problem. We can make room. My men can just push them aside."

Boxes filled with what Klink had already suspected was stolen art, robbed from Jewish families and enemies of the Reich. General Stein had personally called Klink a few days ago, arranging for the depot, until they would be on their way to some secret storage in Berlin.

He felt Hogan's eyes on him, saw the cocky little grin, the light in the brown eyes, and he felt the Sentinel's presence grow closer. The man was excited for this chance to figure out what to do and how to handle it.

"We could move them over to the old munitions depot. No trouble."

Klink had to bite back a laugh, and he kept his face as pinched and suspicious as always. It kept him in practice and it seemed to amuse Hogan even more.

He gave the Sentinel a little mental smack. It had Hogan light up, eyes alive. The man was hatching a plan and it would be crazy, as well as impossible, but it would work.

"I see."
"Oh, please! The exercise will do all of us some good! How about a few rounds of soccer? Pick some of the guards, let them play against us. We'll give them a head start in goals, too!"

Hogan had by now migrated to stand next to him, his presence comforting and overwhelming in one. Klink shot the American colonel a measuring look. Brown eyes danced with mirth and the Sentinel leaned closer, mentally and physically.

"How can you deny your men Strudel, Kommandant?" he asked slyly.

Yes, how could he? And how could he think his denial would stop this man? He would simply come up with an even better plan, or pull off a hair-raising middle-of-the-night stunt.

"You are a nuisance," Klink said under his breath, aware that the Sentinel could hear him just fine.

"You wouldn't have it any other way."

No, he wouldn't. Hogan walked out with a rather victorious air around himself and a spring in his step, shooting Hilda flirtatious looks. Klink sighed and shook his head. He returned to the requisition forms and reports.

He really didn't want to know what was going on.

In the end he would, though. One way or the other. Nothing would fall back on this camp, that was for sure. Whatever Hogan and his crew were doing, it would be blamed on anyone but Wilhelm Klink, Kommandant of the toughest prison camp in Germany with no successful escape ever.

* * *

Hogan looked absolutely pleased. Cat, canary, Klink thought with amusement as he watched the Sentinel lean back in his chair, hands folded over his stomach, smiling at their Kommandant. The man had a confidence in himself and his team, as well as such a penchant for doing the impossible, it was a miracle he hadn't won the war single-handedly from within a German prison camp.

"Worked like a charm," he declared, eying the humidor.

"And a general takes the fall should it ever come to light." Klink didn't so much as react to the blatant quest for a smoke.

"Yep. Easy as pie. Piece of cake."

"Only you would call switching out priceless works of art against perfect forgeries made in the underground easy, Colonel Hogan."

It got him a careless shrug. "It was. With a few hiccups, sure, but still easier than, let's say, blowing up a rocket launcher or destroying a munitions depot in the middle of a heavily guarded compound. Or getting codes off some scientists. Steal a tank… a plane…"

Klink shook his head with a little laugh. "Yes. That." And so much more.

Hogan, for now disregarding the challenge of a locked cigar box, stole a cookie from Klink's plate and munched on it. He had earned it. As far as Klink knew, the art was already on their way to a safe place, to be returned to the families it had been stolen or robbed from later. With any luck, and
knowing that the forger was really that good, Berlin would never find out about the truth.

The game that had been the cover for the extensive art theft and replacement had ended with a tie. Neither side had won, but there had been Apfelstrudel, much to Schultz's delight. LeBeau had made enough for everyone to get a piece, which had been impressive. He had recruited prisoners and guards alike to help him.

The Sentinel made himself more comfortable, settling in for the evening it seemed, and Klink let him. He felt him close by, empathically speaking, leaning against the Guide and relaxing his guard.

They migrated to Klink's quarters not much later, Hogan following him like it was the most natural thing in the world.

The German colonel picked up a book he had been reading for a few days now and continued where he had left off. He didn't push the man away, mentally or physically, and when Hogan switched from the chair to the sofa with him, he looked absolutely content.

Hogan returned to the barracks just after lights out and lock down.

Newkirk was playing with his cards, doing tricks 'to keep his fingers agile', as he always claimed. When Hogan walked in, he cocked an eyebrow.

"Late night date already over, Colonel?" he taunted.

"Shut up, Newkirk."

Carter, who had been whittling away at a piece of wood, which looked more and more like it had been attacked by a beaver and termite colony, watched them. LeBeau was still ironing shirts, the picture of innocence. The other men in the barracks were already on their cots, but they were mostly still awake.

"Just sayin'."

"Then say it."

"It would do all our sanity some real good if you stopped pining and just got on with the show," Newkirk told him.

Hogan glared at him. "I am not pining, Corporal," he stated levelly.

"Tell it to someone who believes you, sir. He's your Guide. Nobody's batting a bleedin' eye at it. We all know it."

There were affirmative grunts from all around the room, even from those already in their bunks. Hogan dared the others to speak up, too, but no one did. Not that they needed to. It was plain to read in the way they behaved and looked at him.

"It's just you two who're such daft idiots that it hurts to just watch you circle each other," Newkirk
added. "No one in this place gives a flyin' shit, pardon my language. We all know about Sentinels and Guides. You've been ours for two years running, Colonel. Klink might be a Kraut, but he's our Kraut now."

"Like Schultz," Carter added, nodding sagely. "Though he's not a Guide or something. And we all know Sentinels and Guides bond."

"We are not bonded," Hogan stated coolly. "And we won't. This is a work relationship, a surface connection that helps both of us."

"Sure, mate," Newkirk drawled. "I mean, yes, sir." He pocketed the cards and went to his bunk bed. "You just keep tellin' yourself that."

LeBeau folded the last shirt. "He's right, mon Colonel. It's painful to watch. You care. So does Klink. I mean, it's Klink and we don't understand for sure, but I know enough about how le protecteur fits le guide."

"Well, it's not like that here," he snapped and stalked into his office, slamming the door after himself. Because it wasn't.

This was for both their benefit, sure, but not in any way that would go deeper than a surface awareness.

In the barrack's main room, the men exchanged exasperated, plain annoyed or slightly worried looks.

"He should know best," Carter finally said slowly. "He is the Sentinel."

"He knows nothing, Andrew," Kinch stated. He had been silent the whole time. "It should come naturally to people with his skills, with his abilities, but being a troubleshooter, working special ops, is complicated."

Newkirk snorted. "We can all see that. Gives me a darn headache. Complicated my arse."

Kinchloe chuckled and went over to his bunk to grab some sleep before morning roll-call. He, of all of them, knew what a headache it could be, especially for the parties involved.

"Do you think he and Klink are…?" Carter could be heard.


The other man raised his hands, shaking his head. "Hey, I've got no trouble at all with that kind of bonding. It's what Sentinels and Guides who find themselves do, right?"

"What magazines have you been reading again?" Newkirk asked.

It got him a shrug. "It's just… what I know? What I heard? That they bond and it's more than just a handshake?"

Kinch had to laugh. Yeah, definitely more than that. "Some only work together," he said out loud. "It's a surface connection that allows a temporary link, mostly for the Sentinel to function for a mission. Colonel's a troubleshooter, so he doesn't need that."
"That ain't surface," Newkirk remarked. "Those two jumped right off into the deep end of the pool. They're just treading water and telling themselves it's the kiddy pool."

"We all can agree on that," LeBeau spoke up.

Carter gave them all a pointed look and the Frenchman rolled his eyes.

"They're not sleeping together, Carter."

"How would you know?"

"'Cause then the colonel wouldn't be bloody courtin' the Kraut," Newkirk snapped. "Guide," he corrected himself.

Yes, Kinchloe mused, it would be different. He knew enough about Sentinels and Guides to realize that should those two finally get their acts together, London might have an Alpha Pair on their hands, unique even among other alphas because of their independence. But Klink had grown up hiding himself from Sentinels. Hogan had never felt the need to connect on more than a surface level.

It would be interesting, as well as painful, to watch future developments.

*

No one mentioned the conversation in the morning and everything was back to normal.

But Hogan knew there was a grain of truth there. It had also shown him the complete support of his crew when it came to accepting Will as the Guide, as the ally and more.

*

Hogan had checked back with Command to see if anyone had ever tried to classify their Kommandant, but there had been a negative. The Nazi regime used Sentinels as weapons and Guides as their disposable tools. No classification was needed for the tools; they were required to function, to live long enough for the Sentinel to do what needed to be done. Sentinels were registered by their senses, not the strength they operated with.

The American system was still sketchy in many areas and heavily adapted from the known tribes where Sentinels and Guides were treated as the protector and his shield. Native cultures didn't so much as blink at same-gender pairings that were usually taken to a sexual level. Researchers had written a lot of papers on how the tribes saw the shared strength in that, not a taboo.

Hogan had spent a lot of his time in basic training reading up on Sentinels and Guides throughout time and in different countries. It was fascinating and horrifying in one.
"What do unbonded, autonomous troubleshooters do when they retire?" Klink asked him over a late drink.

Hogan shrugged. "I haven't really thought that far ahead. I'm too young to retire."

"I thought you would be looking for an end of this existence?"

"Why?"

"It is lonely. Wouldn't you want a wife and children? A house? Peace?"

Hogan studied the narrow features carefully. "Not really, no. I've had a few goals in my life so far and they always changed. Just lately once more."

The blue eyes crinkled with amusement and almost fond annoyance. "You're nothing if not persistent in your pursuits, Colonel Hogan."

"Why, thank you, Colonel Klink."

"Like a dog with a bone."

"Stop it with the compliments. You're making me blush," he quipped.

But the truth was, it was the truth. He was too young to retire. He would continue to work for the military as long as he was capable to do so, which meant probably for a few more decades. Sentinels were always useful, even in command positions, away from field work. The wife and kids theory had been part of his goals once, but with the war and his work here, things had changed.

Just three weeks ago, matters had taken a new turn and his goals had realigned with the new information they had been given. He had found something he hadn't needed in all his life, had never had any use for, but now it was an integral part of every single day.

Hogan looked at the man who had changed his life. He recalled Newkirk's words. LeBeau's. And the way they had all looked at him like he was purposefully out to hurt himself by denying what a Sentinel wanted.

"What about you?" he finally asked into the silence. "Wife? Children?"

"Not even for show," was the calm answer.

"What if she was a Sentinel?"

Klink shook his head slowly, raising his eyebrows.

Yeah, the trust issue.

"Maybe you haven't met the right person yet," Hogan added with a half-smile. "One you can trust implicitly."

"Maybe."

"Or you have and didn't know?" he teased.

Klink chuckled. "It is a possibility, but I never pondered it."

"It's lonely," Hogan mused, almost to himself. "Being what we are."
"For you, it's your job, Robert. It's what you were trained to be."

"Not for you, though."

Klink shook his head. "I had to make a choice."

Live alone, hide who he is, or die at the hands of those who didn't understand what Guides represented. Hogan felt the tension rise through his body again, at the thought of creeps like Rothenburg or Zimmermann laying a finger on this man. The possessiveness surged and he fought it down.

Blue eyes regarded him curiously, a spark in their depths that had Hogan want to…

He exhaled slowly.

No.

"We live by the choices we make," he heard himself say.

"But we don't have to die by them," Klink added with a fine smile.

tbc...
The morning had come with heavy fog that shrouded everything in a kind of puffy, white world, dampened noises and obscured the view. I didn't look like the sun had any chance to pierce through it any time soon and Hogan mused about how fog would be helpful tonight for their little operation of smuggling four downed American pilots out of Stalag 13. The men had been confined to the tunnels because they had never officially been brought in through the gates and so far there had been no way to get them out.

By now they were going stir-crazy.

Tonight would be the night. The underground was ready and a sub had been deployed to pick them up.

"Do you believe in spirit animals?" he asked while mentally going over the plans. Everything would have to be timed perfectly.

Klink looked up from his paper work. Hogan had spent the past hour in the presence of the Guide. He had been doing his own paper work, which meant going through reports and letters that had come in to the attention of Colonel Wilhelm Klink, Luft-Stalag Kommandant. Hilda had delivered them with a charming smile. A smile Hogan had automatically returned before opening the important, personal mail and keeping an eye out for anything that might be of importance for them.

Klink had barely even looked at him the whole time, but Hogan wasn't fooled. The man was perfectly aware of what his American counterpart was doing.

And what he tolerated him doing.

Like he tolerated that the Sentinel was anchoring on his heartbeat and breathing while he cast out Sight or Hearing to check on matters. Hogan was aware of his little safety net, even if he didn't need it. He had never been in better shape senses-wise.

"Why?"

Hogan made a neat little stack of some already signed forms. "Apparently strongly gifted individuals see theirs."

"So you should have seen yours then, Colonel Hogan," Klink concluded, raising his eyebrows.

"Nope. Never triggered. I knew someone. Bonded pair. They described them to me. Sounded like a hallucination, but then again, what do I know? I read a lot about it, mostly from Natives. They always have theirs. The guy who wrote the book claims we modern, civilized versions of the ancient Sentinels and Guides are too out of touch with our primal sides to truly see them."

Klink put down the pen, looking intrigued and amused in one. "You read interesting books."

"Had a lot of downtime in training between exercises."

"I thought you'd be very much in touch with your primal side, Hogan."

"Yeah, well, probably not as much as would be needed, though sometimes a little too much to be safe. Troubleshooters have to retain a few shields or we'd blow our cover right away. From what I've been told and read it's equally possible to see yours or never see it in all your life. Figuring I've been
online for so long, maybe not."

Klink nodded slowly. "What do you think would yours be?" he asked, openly curious.

"No clue. Probably a predator." He grinned all of a sudden. "You think yours would be a bald eagle?"

Klink huffed a little laugh and shook his head. "Too American, don't you think? More befitting of you. But I think you'd be a wolf, maybe a fox. Cunning, fast, a hunter."

Hogan smiled at the praise.

"You have a Sentinel bloodline. Have any of your relatives ever mentioned a spirit animal?"

Hogan shrugged. "It's probably kinda private. My uncle is a strong three senses Sentinel, but we didn't talk for a long time. He was always overseas. Specialist, too. Runs in the family, it seems."

"Apparently."

"When we did, it was shortly before I left for England. The topic didn't come up."

"I see."

"Your side?"

Klink shook his head, looking a bit pinched at the mention of his family.

"My grandfather liked owls. He talked about them a lot. Maybe it was his way of speaking of his spirit. I will never know."

He visibly pulled himself together, the talk about family and home probably hitting a lot of raw nerves. Klink's eyes were on the whiteness in front of his window and he shot Hogan a brief look.

"Be careful, Robert," he only said.

Hogan smiled. "It's just a brief trip."

"In this weather, conditions can be… intense."

He nodded and rose, so very tempted to reach out and reassure the Guide that they were okay, that Klink would be fine, that Hogan understood, but instead he gave a sloppy salute that Klink returned with military precision.

"Just get out, Hogan," he said with his usual annoyance. "Dismissed."

The American colonel grinned and shot Hilda the usual, flirtatious look. Her fond expression told him enough.

The job went perfectly fine.

They handed the four flyers off to the underground contact, then returned to camp as if they had never been gone.
Hogan didn't hear much about the old aristocratic line Klink stemmed from until much later. A very old line, going back to times when Sentinels and Guides were tribe protectors, when they were elected by a town council and held powerful positions in Medieval settlings.

Klink's grandfather had been the last of his line, powerful and without a Sentinel, a Pretender, as he had told his grandson when Wilhelm had presented as a strongly empathically gifted boy.

"He told me to hide. Always. That fear of what we are is what killed our line."

"Because you are powerful," Hogan stated. "Alpha level."

"We don't classify, Hogan," was the mild reproach. "That's the American system to put a label on things, to understand what seems too spiritual. What does a troubleshooter classify as?"

He chuckled. "They never put me into a handy box either. Too troublesome."

"That I can easily believe."

"Four senses make me prime material for a top spot, I was told."

"Five, Robert. You could hone your sense of taste."

"Nah. I'm good. I really don't want to taste more of that sawdust in my meals than I already do."

Klink closed a folder and sealed it. "Should you want to train, let me know."

Hogan perked up. "Is that an offer?"

"To train. Nothing else. Relentless bastard."

The grin spread immediately. "Well, I'll see if I can take some time out of my busy schedule."

He found the time and it was an eye-opener. Klink had never had a Sentinel, but his instincts when it came to guiding Hogan's senses were spot-on.

Hogan felt the development, felt how more in tune with himself he was, and he didn't want to let go of that feeling any more.

He held on to his reaction to the Guide with him, tried not to push, but it was so hard. He knew they would be amazing together, that this partnership would be perfect, but so far it was just an arrangement.
"What are your plans for after the war?" Hogan asked one rainy evening. It was pouring down steadily outside, turning the camp into a mud pool.

Temperatures were dropping by now, heralding an early fall. Klink was already requisitioning heating fuels, but nothing had come in on any trucks so far. He was persistent, though. Hogan's men had started to collect wood in the tunnel system, as well as store some extra gasoline, though that was as dangerous as Carter's little chemistry set he called a lab.

"I haven't thought that far ahead, actually."

"I thought you wanted an accountant position with Schultz," the American teased. "Big toy factory and all. You'd have a job for life."

Klink smiled wryly. "Maybe."

Hogan leaned forward, holding the other's gaze. "You could leave."

"Germany? Possible. But to do what?"

"Work with me?"

"As what? What are your plans for after the war, Robert?"

He shrugged. "I'll be recalled. My mission will be over. I might be here for special purposes, but Command will tell me."

"And why would they require me?"

"Because I'd tell them I need you, Guide."

The exasperation was almost comical, but there were no verbal protests anymore.

"I'm growing on you," Hogan teased, eyes lighting up.

Klink chuckled. "Like a bad case of foot fungus."

"Just as persistent, too."

The weather didn't let up. It turned even worse the next day, the rain never stopping, the cold seeping in, and the men stayed inside the barracks or the tunnels in shifts.

They only hurried outside to unload two trucks with food, clothes, medication and other essentials.

No heating fuels, though.

The Sentinel scanned the rain-drenched grounds, his eyes tracking along the fences, the guard posts, the barracks, head slightly tilted as he piggy-backed Sound to Sight. He finally shot Klink a brief look through the downpour as the man watched the progress, his own men as drenched and miserable as everyone.

"I keep my promises," Klink said when they met up later on.
"I know you do. What papers did you have to forge to get the camp all that, Colonel Klink?" Hogan asked playfully.

It got him a silent smile, but no answer.

*

He kept bringing up their partnership occasionally. Klink rarely ever fell for the bait, but he no longer rolled his eyes when the Sentinel used him as his base line and anchor after a mission.

He never dropped his shields, never gave Hogan even the smallest glimpse into the true depths of his mind, but whenever Hogan was in the office or the private quarters, playing chess, reading a book, enjoying a pleasant conversation, he came out feeling more at ease.

And at peace.

With himself.

Just like before.

Whatever Will was doing, it was undetectable, though he kept his senses primed for it, and it was absolutely smooth.

Everyone in the barracks was giving him those knowing looks. Newkirk never held back when it came to remarking on it, but Hogan ignored the man. Kinch's expression said it all.

But he didn't rise to the bait again.

Deep inside the Sentinel knew that things had forever changed between them. He couldn't imagine not having Klink there, lean against the support the Guide gave him, help him anchor and decompress, without actively entering his mind. He also couldn't imagine using anyone else for that task.

Lying in the top bunk bed, staring at the wooden ceiling not far above, Hogan stretched his ears, catalogued the guards in camp, tracked their movements by sound alone, then found himself following the steady heartbeat he knew inside out.

Fuck, he thought faintly as he settled on that sound, calm and soothing him.
Chapter 10

Two successfully destroyed German transports that had planned to deliver new weaponry to an airfield and one assassination-looking-like-an-accident of a general later, Hogan felt like they were back in the game for real.

No even the inspection of the camp on a day the first snow came down like sleet gave them any trouble. Klink came out of it with flying colors and a commendation that wouldn't get him transferred anywhere, though he did his usual spiel at a promotion. General Burkhalter, who had been present throughout, had only sneered at that and driven off without so much as a dinner. He claimed he had another appointment.

Hogan knew he was staying in town and there would be an excessive party, the inspector included.

"Don't you think they might one day just make you a general to shut you up?" Hogan teased as he joined the other man.

They watched the car disappear down the road, flurries drifting through the wind. It was getting uncomfortable and while they had been given some fuel to run their ovens, Hogan knew they had to fall back on their emergency storage soon. With the way the war was going for Germany, the men in charge had other problems than keeping their prisoners, and their guards, warm. Everyone was by now aware that things were turning around, were taking a downturn actually, and that the Allied Forces were pushing forward.

Still, for all the cheer after those news, they were cold.

"If the war efforts get any more desperate, maybe," was the amused answer. "But I suspect I would be a general near the front lines."

Hogan's eyes narrowed and there was a surge between them, but Klink's smooth little slap had him startle. He chuckled.

"Don't worry, Robert, I'm not going anywhere," Klink said softly, just loud enough for a Sentinel to hear.

"Damn right you aren't," was the fervent reply before the American colonel caught himself. He drew in a brief breath, expelling it again. "By the way," he said more cheerfully. "I have a request."

"Whatever it is, the answer is no," Klink answered automatically, shooting Hogan a warning look.

"It's more of a favor, really."

"Even worse. Denied."

They headed toward the Kommandantur, Hogan accepting the challenge.

The men watched the Sentinel and his Guide walk away. Newkirk was playing with a coin, frowning.

"They do realize how in sync they are, right? Or is it just me?"
Carter shook his head. "Nope. Not just you."

Kinchloe leaned against the barrack's wall. "It's complicated, guys."

No one had ever tried to talk to their commanding officer about the arrangement he had with Klink again. Not even Kinch. They just watched, shook their heads, waited and shook their heads some more.

"It's daft. Colonel's got instincts, even if those troubleshooters think they don't. Klink's a bleedin' Guide and you can't tell me he's not Colonel Hogan's. Everyone can see it! It's been how long now?"

"Complicated," Kinch repeated. "But I'll give it to you, it's painful to watch. Not getting better in time."

Newkirk pocketed the coin. "They'll blow up before they get anywhere," he muttered and disappeared in the building.

Carter shrugged. "Or they won't. I mean, they haven't so far. And the Colonel still enjoys playing the game."

Kinch stuffed his hands into his pockets. "Yeah, the game."

They migrated back inside, escaping the cold that was common this time of the year.

*

The game was getting serious when Hochstetter made another appearance, but Klink was Klink. He played the Kommandant flawlessly, the whine and wheedle to his voice so real, even Hogan was convinced.

It was also the first time he felt the soft empathic pushes, the way Will wrapped this persona around himself, let it seep into his very being, reflected it at the people he met, and it was jaw-dropping.

Hochstetter believed it. Absolutely.

It was amazing.

Terrifying, really.

It cemented the fact that Klink wasn't just any easily overlooked, normal Guide. And he was just as manipulative and good at it as Hogan had always believed himself to be.

This was more than just good acting. It was a mental effort, one that encompassed the whole visiting cadre of Gestapo officers, and it looked so damned easy, too!

The Major appeared a lot more distracted than usual, but that could be because the war was not going Hitler's way. There had been more and more – not faked – reports about losses, about the Allied Forces gaining ground in the west and the Russians approaching from the east.

Unrest was growing.

And worries.
Hochstetter made rather superficial inspections and was gone within hours, proclaiming an important guest would be housed at the Stalag within the next week before he was flown out of Germany.

"Interesting," Hogan murmured and glanced at Klink, who didn't twitch even the slightest.

He was in the Kommandant's office no fifteen minutes later, eyebrows rising in a silent question when he walked into the room, past a very watchful Hilda.

"You are good, Will," he said when the doors were locked.

"You had a doubt?" was the light reply.

"Nope. First time I saw it on a different level, though."

"With your senses." Will nodded. "You never let them roam before."

"I never had reason to believe there was anything out of the ordinary going on. You're amazing."

"Anything to survive."

Hogan stopped next to the desk where Klink was standing, getting as close as he dared without actually touching the other man. He had respected him before that, but now he was in silent awe, maybe even a little scared what the other Colonel could do. It was a scare that had him want to see more, walk that fine line between safety and danger, feel the thrill. The adrenaline was addictive.

Something shivered between them and Klink gave him a startled look. Hogan frowned in confusion.

"You're pushing it, Hogan. Dangerously."

"I didn't do anything!"

"You're getting too close," was the soft sigh. Klink didn't move away, though. He leaned against his desk, Hogan perched slightly on it, too. "You've always been too close."

"You let me."

"Yes. Lately it has been… more. The training, the talks, spending time together."

"You're not saying no to it."

"It's a supremely bad idea."

"You're not saying no," Hogan repeated.

"I can't."

He cocked his head, suddenly curious, attention focusing more on the other man. "How so?"

Klink didn't look at him. "I had a lot of time to be introspective lately. Maybe too much time. With everything that happened, how open we are, vulnerable…" He stopped and removed the monocle, sliding it into a pocket. "In this game, we both need every edge we can get. I confess to… finding your openness balancing, too. In all that time we went up against the likes of Hochstetter and
Burkhalter, I was never alone. You were there. You didn't know about my abilities to get out of those perceived tight-spots back then, but you bent over backwards to save me. I started to rely on you, in a way. It… helped… to have you there as I played them."

Hogan opened his mouth to say something, then snapped it shut again. "Oh," he managed.

"I've always only manipulated or shielded. I'm on my own. I know myself, my strengths, my weaknesses. I never let a Sentinel as close as you have come already. I didn't think much of it, having a troubleshooter here in the camp, working alongside but blind to me. Unaware of the other operative with him. I was probably too secure in my abilities to hide. You broke in, Hogan."

"I… really?" he blurted. Something that could only be described as warmth blossomed, for some reason.

Klink laughed humorlessly, slowly shaking his head. "And you didn't even know. I knew I could trust you to keep me in the camp, as your slightly too incompetent keeper and Kommandant. You wouldn't let them remove me, replace me. You wore down something…" He briefly closed his eyes and sighed. "All those arguments, the wheedling, the demands, the back and forth between us… I know it set you back on track, kept you running for one more day, one more week, until I had to prod you into the right direction again. But me… I feel like I'm heading somewhere I never wanted to end up, facing a situation I never wanted to be confronted with." Blue eyes opened and looked at him. "You're asking for more than I could ever fathom to give you, Robert. But it… makes manipulating Hochstetter or Burkhalter so much easier when I let you in. It's a safety net I never thought of before. It's also a chain that promises freedom and imprisonment in one."

Hogan pushed off the desk, agitation racing through him. "I wouldn't put any chains on you and you know it! We talked about it, Will! I'm as independent as you are! For different reasons, sure, but neither of us needs a permanent partner! I don't want this to be more than a surface connection!"


Klink slowly shook his head. "That is your illusion to maintain, Hogan."

His breath caught at the words. Too much. It was too much. The emotions were boiling up, seeking an outlet. They had been dancing this dance for so long, and now that he knew his dance partner, he wanted so much more. Hearing that Klink had leaned on him as much as Hogan had on him, though the Sentinel had probably been a lot more work already, gave him hope.

"We're on a one-way street," Klink continued softly. "Don't tell me you haven't noticed changes in you, too?"

He had. So many. How he thrived, how he was sharper, more focused, than ever before. It was so much like back in the States or in England, before his assignment to Stalag 13. Missions were still complex, needed all of him, on point and sharp, but decompressing was different. Easier. So much easier. He was on top of his game, better than ever before, and he knew it. His men had remarked on it.

Because his anchor was no longer Kinch or someone else he knew. It was Klink. He focused on Klink, his heartbeat, his presence, and things evened out, slipped in their places, and Robert Hogan was calm, even-tempered and rebalanced.

"I dropped my guard, Robert. That's why."

"I… I'm not aware of less shields," he murmured. "I mean, I still barely get a whiff of the real you,
There was a sudden warmth, a sensation of someone close and touching, and Hogan whirled around, breath quickening, then his eyes were back on the Guide.

Klink smiled ruefully.

"That… that is what you do to Hochstetter?"

"No. Him I manipulate, push and suggest, brush away suspicion and keep him confused. You… I balance. You are familiar now. Eerily so. You feel comfortable to me. I'm comfortable to you. Which is why you don't realize how much you psychically lean on me. It's why you can't feel my touch, even if I leave the door open."

"Because you can… trust me?" Hogan breathed, daring to hope.

"I'm beginning to."

His hands balled into fists and he fought down the impulse to touch again.

Wilhelm Klink trusted him. This powerful Guide had started to trust him! Robert Hogan!

Fuck! he thought viciously, cursing the war, this situation, his inability to handle coming into contact with the one gifted individual who was his counterpart. They were dancing around what was happening in ever-tightening circles, but Hogan had no idea of the outcome.

"I can see the… benefits of such a partnership," Klink went on slowly.

Partnership…

Hogan was really hard pressed to stay where he was, not to touch or just surge forward and…

"Not an arrangement?" he asked, proud of how calm he sounded while everything inside him was total chaos.

The smile was almost regretful. "Not for a while."

"So I'm helpful?" he added, the hopeful note quickly squashed.

"Yes, Colonel Hogan. You are actually helpful."

He beamed.

Not a threat, he thought giddily. He wasn't seen as a threat alone. He helped Klink, he supported him, just like the Guide had become his safety net and support. His Guide.

The next surge held a possessive note and he ground his teeth briefly.

"Who is coming for dinner?" Hogan asked, abruptly changing the topic before he did something they would both regret.

He was still on a mission.

Klink looked a little startled, then nodded his acceptance of the rather blunt change. They both needed time to digest the open words, what they actually said, and what it would further and irrevocably change between them.
"Dr. Karl-Heinz Günter von Haupt. One of the lead scientists of bio weapon research."

Hogan frowned.

"Together with Dr. Wolfram Baumann. He's apparently developing a new kind of rocket that is supposed to deliver these bio weapons."

The frown grew deeper, Hogan's expression colder. "And they will be here?"

Klink nodded slowly.

"For how long?"

"Apparently for a while. Other locations have proven to be... less secure than this camp. Everyone knows I run a tight ship that no one has ever escaped from here." There was a glint in Klink's eyes.

A slow, dark smile crossed the colonel's lips. "Well, yes, we are a perfectly safe place to be, aren't we? Especially for Hitler's science division."

Klink reflected the smile.

It had Hogan shiver. In a really good way.

He clenched his teeth.

"I'll have a few plans to work on," he managed instead.

"I'll see you around, Colonel."

When he left the building there was a spring in his step and he knew he was smiling, both because he had a new, insane plan to hatch, and because of what had been said, even between the lines.

His men noticed the chance immediately and while no one mentioned it, he got some approving nods.

Right now they had to talk to London, wait for their decision on what to do about the scientists.

London decided the men were too dangerous. They had to be removed from the equation as soon as possible; permanently. And before they arrived at Stalag 13. It would be too dangerous to plan a hit within their moderately safe little haven.

* * *

For all his detailed planning and genius ideas, sometimes things went wrong for Hogan.
Like this night.

It had all been running perfectly, keeping the action away from Stalag 13, grabbing the scientists en route and far enough away from the camp to divert suspicion.

Except for the sudden appearance of an additional security detail they hadn't known about and a patrol unit that shouldn't have been in the area, and that wasn't from Stalag 13.

Adjustments had been made, but not before matters had sped up and required Colonel Wilhelm Klink to interfere and distract the men, who were confused about the Luftwaffe Colonel in their midst.

When Carter's bombs blew up, it was right on time and still too early.

Hogan grabbed Klink and ran, but they didn't get far. The explosion rocked the very earth, shattering windows of near-by houses, leveling the shed, turning everything inside to dust.

Including the research and the researchers.

Hogan felt the breath leave his lungs as he was thrown against a wall, the ancient bricks buckling under the impact. He slumped to the ground, groaning softly.

A sharp pain in his side had him breathe out a curse, but there was no time to check what else might have happened.

They had to go.

Now!

"Will," he breathed.

"We need to go," the Guide agreed, sounding shaky but determined.

Running, senses spread out to evade human encounters or obstacles, he tore through the forest, Klink right behind him, easily keeping up. His Guide kept him focused, Sight and Hearing primed, perfectly balanced within, and Hogan gave his absolute trust in Will's abilities to not let him lose himself.

It took them barely five minutes to find their way back to the clearing where the car was parked, and LeBeau was rolling before they had even closed the doors.

Hogan let out a breathy laugh, followed by a groan of pain.

"Colonel?"

"Just a graze, LeBeau. Drive. Get us out of here before this place starts swarming with Germans."

Klink didn't even look at where they were heading, simply turned to the Sentinel and pushed aside black fabric to get to where a piece of shrapnel had torn into the vulnerable human flesh.

Hogan had to bite down hard and his fingers clenched around Klink's wrist.
"Let me go," Klink said, voice low and hard, pushing the order at the injured man. "This needs to be treated."

"It can wait. We have to get back."

"LeBeau is driving. Let me see."

He closed his eyes, fingers still holding on to his Guide's wrist. He blew out a breath, then sucked it in sharply again when Klink pushed down to staunch the still freely flowing blood.

"Bad?" LeBeau asked, glancing into the rearview mirror.

"Not good," was the clipped answer. "I think we can handle this without an outside doctor."

"Good," Hogan groaned, senses starting to swim.

Klink pushed down harder and the Sentinel cursed vividly. There was another push, this time against his mind, and Hogan dropped his shields before he could even think about it. He wasn't even sure he had been the one to do it.

The sensation was like a rush, like getting high or drunk, like flying, like falling through the sky with a parachute on his back. His eyes snapped open and met the bright blue ones of his Guide. He was suddenly aware of their continued contact of skin against skin, his fingers clamped around Klink's slender wrist.

"W…"

"Concentrate, Colonel. Tune down the pain. Dull your senses."

He wanted to snarl at Klink that he had been doing just that for ages, but another part was fascinated by the power he could perceive just inches away from him. Klink had lowered his shields, gave the Sentinel a good view of him.

A show of absolute trust.

Not the final step, not inside a moving vehicle, racing back to the camp and away from the very place they had just killed two people and destroyed years of excellent work.

"Dial it all down to zero."

"Zero," he echoed breathlessly.

"Klink?" Le Beau could be heard.

"Drive, Corporal. I'm handling the rest."

"Relax," Will told the Sentinel. "Trust me. I've got you."

A very primal part inside him wanted to grab what was so enticingly close, what he yearned for, what was his to claim. It boiled up from the darkness, ancient, like a shadow, but powerful on its own. Its claws stretched toward the alluring mind so close, hungry and salivating to possess and never let go.

It got slapped so hard, Hogan rocked back and cried out from the physical and mental pain.

Then there was nothing at all.
tbc...
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Big chunk of fic today!

I'm still so absolutely amazed that I got more than ten hits :) Thank you for reading my fic! It still has a few more long chapters to go.

He woke to a world of pain, to a pounding headache behind his eyes, to the sensation of torn flesh and abused muscles. Everything that wasn't bruised seemed to be torn, and whatever wasn't torn had been beaten to a bloody pulp.

He couldn't remember a time he had ever felt this bad and with every breath he took, with every fiery pulse that ran down his spine, it grew worse. Everything was too loud, too bright, smelled too intense, and his skin was overly sensitive. His senses were running haywire.

He heard a soft groan that had to be his own, heard whimpers and protests, and he felt gentle hands on his too sensitive skin. There was a shooting pain coming from his hip and he fought against whoever was hurting him, but his limbs were leaden, just flailing.

"Robert, calm down."

Coolness touched his mind, softness, a cocoon of safety.

"Dial down."

He did. Without questioning. It was easy, feeling a guiding hand as he gathered his senses and finally managed to control them.

"Good. You're doing good. You'll be okay."

And he drifted off once more.

He was going to be okay.

He was safe.

Everything would be okay.

And he believed it.

The second time he came around, the pain was manageable. Dark eyes blinked open, met by filtered, artificial light.

He was still alive; had he expected anything else?
Kinda. In a way.

There was another thought pushing to the forefront.

Klink? Will? Where was…?! He remembered the explosion, the terrible shock wave, then pain. He could remember his Guide, close by, and now… gone?

Something touched him again, in his mind, calming the agitation that tried to surge. It was there, right there, and like a physical presence.

Hogan's thoughts started to swim, moving away from him. He weakly turned to the presence, so familiar and calming.

And he drifted off once more.

The next time Hogan woke, on a cot in the safe room, still feeling weak and slightly disoriented with a dull pain radiating from his side, he felt a lot more clear-headed.

"Colonel Hogan?"

He blinked and looked at the face hovering above him, trying to get it into focus. "LeBeau," he murmured.

"Oui."

"I'm in the tunnels?"

His mind was sharpening, switching on seamlessly, following ingrained training and Sentinel instinct. He cast out Hearing and found nothing but the familiar sounds of his men and the equipment.

"We thought it better than the office. Or even Klink's quarters."

That said so much in so few words. Hogan forced himself to concentrate, to focus his thoughts. He was still trying to find that one sound he needed to hear, that calming thump of one particular heartbeat, and suddenly it was there.

Far away, faint, but he heard it. Part of him let out a slight sigh of relief.

And it should tell him just how irrevocably screwed he was when it came to Klink. He was underground, but he had found his Guide. Through tons of earth and across half the compound.

Screwed, screwed, screwed!

"How long was I out?" Hogan asked out loud.

"After you got into the car, you blacked out. We got you back, but Klink said not to try and get you awake. Brandon treated you. You slept through the night. And morning roll-call. We got it covered." LeBeau gave him a small smirk. "It's good to have some freedom, non?"

Hogan touched the throbbing wound and felt the swelling, the pulse, even through the bandages. It was a deep wound, deeper than he thought it had been, and expertly stitched. The rest of his body
was one huge bruise, though.

"Brandon took really good care of the cut," LeBeau explained hurriedly. "He said it should be fine, but he's only a medical student, so if it gets worse, we need to get you to a doctor. Or a doctor to you."

"I'm okay," he replied automatically. "Klink? The mission?"

"Our Kommandant is back to his post, though he had a few words for you and your plans." LeBeau looked way too amused. "He also received calls about what happened, was told to secure the camp. Apparently two very important scientists who were on the way here were killed when the place they were staying at was struck by tragedy. It looks like material they were carrying was too unstable. Mon dieu, n'est-ce-pas?"

"He was here," he murmured.

"Mon Colonel?"

"He was…"

Klink. Will. He had been there. With him. The Sentinel remembered. Vividly. An intimate, very personal touch, reaching into his mind and calming the havoc senses.

"Was Klink here with me?" he demanded.

The Frenchman blinked. "Oui. Yes. He waited until Brandon was done, then left for his office. He looked a bit pinched, but otherwise good. For Klink, that is. He hasn't been back since. With all the traffic in this place there was no way to cover the absence."

Hogan sat up, expelling a sharp breath as the pain increased, but he dialed down and it became bearable.

No, Klink had been with him longer, not just for the hour it took to clean him up and put a few stitches in. He remembered someone there, always there, keeping him calm.

"Any word on visitors?" he asked, diving deeper into his memories, trying to understand.

"Not so far. Kinch is keeping a close ear to their communications. Hilda hasn't heard anything either and all Klink has is the usual: lock-down. Heavy patrols. Maybe send guards out with dogs."

"Okay." Hogan pushed himself to his feet, feeling a brief rush as blood seemed to leave his head and pound through the wound.

LeBeau muttered something uncomplimentary about stubborn Americans and helped him not crash back down onto the bed.

"You should rest."

"I need to talk to Klink."

"He is doing fine, Colonel. He is the one who told us not to let you push yourself."

The Sentinel felt a surge of anger, biting through the dizziness, briefly lifting the fog. "I'm still your commanding officer, Corporal LeBeau! Get out of my way! That's an order!"

LeBeau looked far from happy, scowling at the colonel.
"Thank you!" Hogan snapped.

With that he limped out the room, down the tunnel and toward the next, huge obstacle: the ladder. It took all his willpower and dialing down to absolute zero to make it up the few steps. His leg had to be screaming at him, but his nerve endings were currently numbed.

He would pay for this. Hogan just knew it.

But anger drove him on.

He almost snapped at the helping hands that had him out of the tunnel faster than his own stumbling would have gotten him.

His men were watching him cautiously, Carter frowning in what looked like confusion. Kinch stepped out of his way, but only slowly. Hogan glared at him, furious, but part of him was trembling with something else. It homed in on where Klink was, just across the open ground.

Miles and miles away in his condition, which was getting worse and worse.

He needed to see him.

So Hogan doggedly stepped out of the barracks, into the cold, drizzly day, only to almost run into Schultz.

"Colonel Hogan," the guard admonished him, sounding like a parent to a small, misbehaving child. "You should not be walking around. You were injured."

"Out of my way, Schultz."

"I am not stopping you from undoing everything Corporal Levis did. Good work there." His eyes widened a little at the confession. "Though I know nothing. Nothing at all!"

Any other time Hogan would be amused, but right now he had only one goal:

"I need to talk to Klink!"

"Everything is quiet and taken care of, Colonel Hogan. Every little thing. The Kommandant is fine. Please…"

He bared his teeth, the Sentinel angrily rising to the forefront. "I need to see my Guide!"

The second time. The proprietary word. The open declaration, spoken out loud.

Things were going to hell. One way ticket. Gaining speed. He felt an almost overwhelmingly physical need to see the other man for himself, to make sure… just to make sure…

"The Kommandant needs to be in control to handle matters, Colonel Hogan," Schultz tried again, voice harder, more commanding than ever. "You storming in there… after you were hurt…. Colonel, you didn't see him! I did. Your men did! He was…" Schultz looked distraught. "Worried. So very worried."

"Sergeant Schultz!"

The portly man closed his eyes and sighed at the voice carrying over from the Kommandant's office.

Hogan's eyes, actually all his senses, homed in on the tall figure immediately. Klink's cool, controlled
expression met his. There were no emotions there, but it was more tell-tale than anger or fury could have been.

The Sentinel reacted with a snarl, muscles tense and battle-ready, adrenaline running through his blood. Hogan pushed past Schultz, who groaned softly in German about idiots and Sentinels and everything in between.

Klink waited a few heartbeats, then went back into the office building. The American colonel gritted his teeth, doggedly walking on, up the steps that seemed like mountains, and through to Klink's office. One hand pressed against the wound, feeling it pulse with every breath, every beat of his heart, and he knew he was going to absolutely pay for this. The moment his primal side powered down again, he would probably collapse and never get up again. He might just have undone all his men had done for him.

Hilda stared at him, rising a little out of her seat, but he was past her and had slammed the door shut before she could utter a word.

"If you pulled your stitches, I am not going to get you a free pass to town, Colonel Hogan," Klink said as a greeting, scowling at him in a very Klink-like manner.

Hogan was breathing more heavily than he wanted to, but determination and his dials all the way down to zero kept him from falling flat on his face.

No, it wasn't a good idea.

No, he shouldn't be doing that.

Yes, he wouldn't be able to make it much longer.

The fire burning through him had nothing to do with numbing his senses. It was a primal drive, fight or flight, and it was fight right now. Against his Guide. Against being overrun in a life-and-death situation. Against having control taken away from him.

Eyes zeroed in on the slightly taller man, took in the as usual spotless uniform, the way Klink had straightened as he was confronted with a Sentinel on the hunt, the way his eyes had taken on a harder glint. He was a little too pale, but Hogan saw no cuts or abrasions. At least in his face or on his hands. He also smelled no blood from open wounds, aside his own, which was just another worry he pushed away.

"You…!" he whispered harshly.

"Eloquent as ever."

Hogan cast out, a little inelegantly because of his currently weakened condition, and he felt the connection flare to life, centering him, even if he still felt off balance. Klink's expression didn't shift as he let him, as he reached back empathically and anchored the other man, but there was something deep in his eyes.

And between them. More than just the anchor line. So much more now.

It had Hogan whine with confusion and snarl in rage at one.

"You dropped your shields! You went past mine! You pushed into my head!" Hogan accused, limping closer. "To knock me out! That was cheap, Will! Really cheap!"
The Guide, his Guide!, his mind clamored, watched him silently. He was like an island of power, radiating it from behind those walls, and it should be frightening, but Hogan was past that. Right now it was righteous anger and something that felt like betrayal, though he hadn't thought about it too much.

"Really cheap," Hogan repeated, remembering the sensation of such a close connection only too clearly.

"First aid, nothing else," Klink said in such a reasonable voice, Hogan wanted to punch him for it. "You were agitated. I was afraid you might go a little over the edge."

Yes, he hated Guide Voice. He had hated it throughout basic training, throughout all his life actually, and to have Will use it on him, of all people, had Hogan want to do some really violent things.

"That wasn't just first aid! You were with me!"

Facing his Guide across the desk, looking at the calm, centered individual who meant so much to him, Hogan tried to control his chaotic emotions. Never in his life had he been this off center, so invested in one person, so focused on one, that their actions affected him this personally and emotionally.

Klink had managed that.

Because they were in too deep, had gone too far, and matters had picked up speed in a way that wouldn't let them stop any more.

"Of course I was. We were there together."

Yes, very violent things, Hogan mused, using the anger to keep himself upright. "You were here," he tapped his temple. "Not just a little push or poke! You were with me, Will! All the way! You went into my head!"

Klink sighed tiredly. "Yes, I did. It was necessary."

"Necessary?!"

"Quite. You became a little, let's say unreasonable. Primal."

Memories teased and Hogan froze in horror as one memory became quite sharp: the primal Sentinel making a grab for the Guide. He remembered that animalistic need to bond to that powerful core of energy, to use it, to strengthen himself, to survive. Just the echoes of it had the Sentinel tremble, disgust rising. It was the first step to becoming feral and taking another mind by force…

"No…" he managed. "I… did I…?"

"You did nothing."

"I wanted…"

"Nothing happened," Klink soothed him, still with his Guide voice and all.

"Nothing?" It was a pained little whisper, filled with slivers of hope.

"Nothing," the other man repeated. "I'm fine. You are… going to be fine if you start taking better care of yourself."
"I didn't hurt you?" he pushed forward.

"No, Robert. You didn't."

He hadn't hurt him. Hadn't… forced…

Hogan felt his strength leave him, swaying a little, as dizziness hit him. Klink was suddenly there, moving faster than Hogan had thought possible, but maybe his senses were playing tricks on him. The world felt suddenly a little… off. Hogan's left hand clenched into the spotless uniform jacket, holding on for dear life it seemed.

He had assaulted a Guide. His Guide!

He cursed softly under his breath as his knees buckled. Then he was sitting in a chair.

"You did nothing, Robert," Will repeated, voice firm, leaving no room for argument or doubt. "Your reaction wasn't conscious. And nothing I couldn't handle."

Hogan's head hurt and he squeezed his eyes shut. It was a pain he couldn't dial down. "Yeah, right," he breathed unsteadily. "Just a Sentinel who attacked a Guide, right? Like one of those Gestapo fucks, hurting and abusing their Guides, making them bleed and burn out their minds!"

"Robert."

The grounding touch was warm, in his mind and everywhere else. It caressed him, held him. The tightness in his chest, one he hadn't really been aware of until now, suddenly eased. A solid presence seemed to settle next to him, behind him, around him. It soothed the agitation, warmed him, relaxed him, and he closed his eyes. Exhaling softly, Hogan leaned against the other mind, against the other body, and he felt something click back into place. Into the right place. Where it belonged.

"Do you really think so little of yourself?" Will asked calmly.

"I am what you never wanted. And that thing attacked you."

"You, Robert Hogan, are not a thing," Klink stated firmly. "Nor did you attack. You were in pain and you latched onto a familiar presence. You needed an anchor. That was me."

The familiar presence was there now, strong and powerful, unmovable, and Hogan knew he would never be able to take that on and win. It held him, calmed him, focused him.

"So it only took me getting halfway blown up, huh?" he murmured, rallying for humor. "For you to open up to me?"

Klink met the slightly blurry gaze. "Not your best game plan."

"It worked." Hogan managed a cocky smile, though it was shaky at best.

"Crazy American."

"My trademark."

"It was insane, Robert."

"Off the top of my head…? I think my men would all agree."

"Yes, they would."
"Still not my worst plan. Or craziest."

"Probably."

He felt more of Klink, of that power. "You are amazing," he murmured. A light flush crept over the narrow features.

He wouldn't be able to take this, the Sentinel mused faintly, almost absently. Anyone trying to overpower Klink and make him his would end up braindead. Or worse. Klink had had all his life to hone his abilities, hidden behind massive shields that allowed nothing to leak. Few were born with such power and all were alpha level.

No, even in his primal mode he wouldn't have been able to take what he wanted, what the hunger wanted. He was a small fish and Klink was a shark.

"What changed your mind, Will?" he asked, catching the clear gaze, feeling his own shields slide away almost unconsciously.

Offering. Showing trust.

He was wide open to the power that sat so deceptively calm and docile just next to him. He had never been a challenge for Will. This man could take on anyone and deliver crippling mind-blows.

There was a moment of silence, of Klink meeting his gaze and just watching him. Then,

"Time. You wearing me down. The faint possibility to survive this war, maybe. And if I can't, if it ends in my death, I don't want to regret not trying. Lots of things. I have trusted you with enough of my life already. Now you have all; at your disposal, Sentinel."

Hogan swallowed. "No. Not at my disposal," he argued. "I could never… take this. It's… I can't describe what it looks to me, Will. I just know it's…" He stopped, unsure how to put into words what he could feel. "I'd never be a danger to you."

Klink slowly shook his head. "Empathic power isn't all that comes into a connection, Robert," he explained gently. "It's mind, body and soul. You're no less… impressive."

It had the American colonel give a breathy laugh. "Impressive?" he echoed.

"Your mind is like a steel trap, Rob." Klink's expression was mildly amused. "I have sincere doubts it would… submit should I… let go."

Hogan swallowed, meeting the steady gaze, and his thoughts were racing. The rise and fall of the empathic waves had him almost hypnotized. So soothing. Caressing over his hurt body and mind. It surrounded him. Held him.

"We're good together," he finally said, not avoiding the blue eyes.

"Yes, we are."

Both men were aware that this was far more already. Hogan expelled a breath, feeling the wound throb.

"Dial down," the calm, reassuring voice said.

He shouldn't feel so… so warm. So amazed.
But he did. It worked so easily.

"You make it easy," he murmured.

"I'm not easy."

"Not what I said." The man was a puzzle. Still not yet solved and maybe he never would solve it. So much had been said and revealed, but both had balked at going deeper. “Can we work with this?” he asked.

“We have already.”

"Things have changed."

Will had taken a monumental first step that had been more like a running start. He had consciously dropped his shields, walked into Hogan's mind, and knocked the Sentinel out. It hadn't been a prod or push, or even a slap. It had been Klink flipping a switch and incapacitating Hogan completely.

Not a good first date, in so many ways, but it had been a first, the colonel mused with faint humor.

"I can live with the changes," Klink said calmly.

"Yeah?"

Because it was amazing. And frightening.

There should be so much more to say, to discuss, but Hogan couldn't. His mind was still busy being blown away by everything else, but what he was allowed to feel so openly, no restrictions, just them.

And it was still just a part.

"Get the wound checked, Colonel," Klink said as shields slid back into place.

It didn't break the moment. Actually, nothing broke at all. Hogan still felt them together, the mind-touch, Klink's empathic embrace.

"You're not going to check it?" Hogan asked playfully.

"I’m not your nanny, Colonel Hogan. You have men for that. With medical knowledge."

He pushed himself up, suppressing a groan, but just barely. The wound hurt and while he wasn't as woozy as before, he knew he needed rest. Adrenaline only got one so far. Luckily he smelled no new blood, which had him hope that nothing had opened up again.

"Dials, Sentinel," the Guide admonished.

He snarled a curse, shooting the other man a scathing look, but he dialed back again.

"You might want to work on that."

"You offering help?" Hogan asked immediately.

Klink's smile was answer enough.
It took Hogan a week to be back in shape, though he was still healing. The stitches came out, but he wasn't allowed on missions, aside from planning them. Any physical activities other than walking, sitting and laying down were forbidden.

He had a whole camp watching him, keeping an eye on their resident Sentinel, who tried not to limp or shift from the injured side to the uninjured too often.

And he had a Guide who seemed to be able to read him even better than before now. If that was at all possible. Klink wasn't exactly mother-henning, but whenever Hogan was in his office, going over lists, letters or just spending time with his Guide, Klink kept him in line.

It was a new feeling.

He really didn't mind it, actually. It was... nice. He felt the other presence, the way it guarded him, pushed him or pulled him away from overdoing it.

It was also a week Hogan spent talking to London a lot, pondering events, and exploring the now very solid connection with his Guide. It was an open but protected door, swinging in both directions. He refused to say he was bonded, though Klink kept hinting at it.

"I'm not bonded," he insisted while he was down in the tunnel, checking on radio messages.

His second in command just cocked an eyebrow. "Colonel."

"Don't! I'm not!"

"Because you didn't sleep with your Guide or because you were told you probably can't ever bond?" Kinch asked pointedly.

There was a hot flush working through his veins at the words, but Hogan refused to be baited. Everyone knew that almost all bonds were finalized by a sexual encounter of a kind, with only a few rare pairs managing a platonic connection, though alpha pairs didn't. The raw power between them couldn't be contained by a mere platonic link.

It was one thing he still couldn't wrap his mind around. Alpha. By all means and purposes, following the American system, Klink was an Alpha Guide, even if no one but Hogan could feel the immense power lurking behind the flawless shields. And Klink kept hinting and sometimes telling him that Hogan himself was one, too.

"I know you don't want to hear it, Colonel, but you did bond. In some weird, complicated way that no one probably understands," Kinchloe told him. "Unless you slept with Klink," he added bluntly.

Hogan drew a deep breath.

"Which you didn't," the sergeant concluded. "You really are not the norm, sir. And it's not a compliment each time," he added.

His commanding officer shook his head with a brief exhalation that sounded like an aborted laugh. "Nothing about this is, Kinch," he murmured.

It was weird and complicated, but it worked. As surreal as the whole thing was, it worked.

"So what happens when you do?" Kinchloe asked.
He froze. "What?"

It got him another cocked eyebrow. His second in command was way too good at what he did and how well he knew his commanding officer.

Hogan refused to answer. He just gathered up his notes and left.

*

They didn't really talk about it, what had happened, what hadn't happened, what was between them and what could be. Aside from little quips and prods sometimes.

"So, still nothing concerning the untimely demise of two German bad-ass scientists?" Hogan asked as he tried to get comfortable in the visitor chair. Sometimes the scar twinged at the most inopportune moment.

It was healing nicely, though it would remain. Brandon hadn't been all too hopeful that the mark would disappear, but he was confident there would be no lasting damage.

"No. And you know it as well as I do." The edge of annoyance had Hogan grin widely.

Klink's exasperation grew, then he gave the Sentinel a small, empathic poke along the connection.

Hogan only smiled wider. It was so natural and like it had always been there, between them, not developed rapidly in the last weeks after a slow, lumbering start in the past two years.

"Shouldn't you be hatching plans?"

"I'm good." He leaned back, one hand rubbing over the covered scar, projecting a careless air. "I can do that here, too. All comfy and warm."

"It seems that way, yes."

"We could work on this new side of our relationship, though. How about it?"

"Don't push it, Hogan."

"But that's my specialty, sir."

"I feared as much." Klink put down his pen and folded long fingers over the file he had been scribbling in. "Why do I think you need me for entertainment?"

"Because I'm bored? And I like it here." He raised his brows, just about refraining from waggling them.

Hogan felt more relaxed now, in the presence of his Guide, his senses focusing easily on his anchor, and Klink wasn't pushing him away. Even if it only lasted for a minute, it would be a minute he savored.

"You are like a child, Robert."

He grinned brightly. There was a back and forth of empathic energy and he enjoyed it immensely.
He had never noticed it before in all their little play-acted fights, but now he did. It was wonderful.

Klink reached into his stack of files and tossed a thick bundle held together with rubber bands at him.

"Work on your German. You might be interested in reading what was delivered this morning."

"My German's fine."

"Of course."

"Probably better than a lot of Germans."

Klink hid a little grin as he turned back to his work. Hogan picked up the thick file and started leafing through it.

Operations continued. Missions were run. As smoothly or with just as many bumps and complications as before.

Hogan and his crew made damn sure to protect Stalag 13 and everyone inside. Klink and the men under his command did the same. From their side.

New transfers were quickly weeded out when they found to be unfit for this joint operation. Two guards were posted in another Stalag, but found themselves back within a month, much to their relief.

* 

Christmas was a very somber affair, though Klink had allowed a tree and some decorations, all handmade from scrap. The tree itself was rather scraggly and bent a little near the top, but it was a tree and the decorations made it look… unique.

It didn't completely lift the mood, but it helped. People were dying at the Russian Front and Hogan, as well as everyone in the camp, knew that it weren't the loyal, mindless Nazi followers. Some of them, sure. Fanatics who believed to be immortal and invincible. But there were more than enough others. Those who were scared and hungry, fighting for survival and not to win a war. Those who had been transported there as punishment.

Casualties were rising and still the Madman was pushing ahead.

Hogan was in Klink's personal quarters, spending time with his Guide in a way that was both familiar and still so very new to them. The weather was frightful outside, the snow piling high and the temperatures way below freezing. All the heating in the barracks didn't help keep in the warmth.

"Sorry, no gifts," he said, half joking, watching the snow that had been coming down wet and heavy for the past hours.

Nothing moved outside. The guards were huddled in their shelters or barracks, only a few unlucky enough to be on patrol. The prisoners had all retreated to their own barracks, some down in the
tunnels, preparing for tonight.

"At least yet," Hogan added with a smirk.

"Shouldn't you leave the fireworks until New Year's?" Klink asked mildly from where he was warming up next to the heater.

"Not with such an opportunity."

There was a weapons transport coming through, consisting of apparently break-through warheads for rockets. London had asked Hogan and his team to stop the transport by any means necessary. It meant blowing up everything, which had Carter delighted. He called it his own, personal Christmas gift, and he had been working on the bombs for days.

It would be spectacular.

Klink joined him at the frosted windows, handing the Sentinel a drink. Hogan enjoyed the closeness, warmth between them as their bodies aligned and they slightly leaned into each other without actually moving.

He didn't even notice it at first when the shields opened, the presence of his Guide more pronounced. Hogan leaned into the warmth with a silent hum, stretching toward the still very much walled-off core, mental fingers sliding through the tendrils all around him. Realization hit him and he froze, pulling back, but something held him.

"Will?"

"Yes, Robert?"

The blue eyes were filled with innocence. Nothing spoke of apprehension, of any kind of fear that the Sentinel would try to dig in psychic claws. Hogan just smiled widely and relaxed into the psychic hold. He went back to watching the snow, his Guide's presence around him like a blanket.

Neither man made another move to cross the new bridge they had been carefully building.

Hogan knew it was too soon.

They were growing together at a snail's pace, but they had already been so close, it was just the fine-tuning now. Meeting in the middle, he mused to himself.

This… today… this very moment, spoke of the growing trust Klink was putting in him as a Guide toward a Sentinel. It was monumental for someone who had never let anyone close, who only knew of Sentinels who hurt and abused those born to shield and help them.

Things between them had evened out, flowed back and forth without violent surges or irregularities. They had found a good middle between them and everything else was a bonus.

When Hogan left for the night's mission, Klink just gave him a nod. He was more tense than usual and there was something coming across the bond that had Hogan want to just hug him, embrace this very special man and reassure him that they would be fine, that they would always be fine. Even if his Guide wasn't physically there with him.
But he didn't.

He opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but no words came to mind.

The mind-touch was unexpected, a caress and a little push, but Hogan just nodded back, speechless.

The mission was a success and the convoy blew up outside of Düsseldorf. The time-delayed bombs had been one of Carter's best so far. The man was grinning like a kid at Christmas.

Yeah, it was Christmas.

Carter was a big kid most of the times when it came to explosives.

They came back for morning roll-call, which was as routine and normal as always, even though the snow was high enough to go past their ankles.

Schultz's expression said enough, that he wasn't fooled, that he knew they had been up to something. Klink was his brisk, effective self.

"Colonel Hogan, my office," he ordered when the inspection was done.

He shrugged and Kinchloe chuckled, the last to get into the barracks. The others just shot him knowing smiles.

"I got a call from General Maurer this morning," Klink said as he hung up his coat and stepped in front of the heater to get warm.

Hogan joined him, hands hovering over the warmth to defrost. It was really getting abominably cold out there.

"Yeah?"

They stood side by side, clothes brushing against each other.

"He called off the planned visit of him and his convoy to Stalag 13."

"Really? How sad. For whatever reason?" Hogan asked innocently.

"Apparently they ran into trouble he didn't detail any further." Klink's brows rose a little.

He grinned and leaned closer to his Guide. "I like trouble."

Okay, so it was a little more flirtatious than before, but he was high on adrenaline and the knowledge of a mission well completed. No losses, not even a scratch, on their side.

"So I heard. Not that you or your men would have anything to do with it."

"Of course not. After all, we are prisoners of the toughest Stalag in the whole of Germany."

"And don't you forget it."

He gently bumped shoulders. "Never."
tbc...
Chapter 12

When the Third Reich fell, Colonel Robert E. Hogan was in the office of the Stalag 13's Kommandant, tying up a Major of the SS. Hochstetter was frothing at the mouth, spewing out slurs, calling Klink a traitor to his race and worse. Hogan finally silenced him with a gag.

"Now, that's better," he said, faking a cheerful smile.

General Burkhalter, who had been silent throughout the arrest, just watched them with narrowed eyes and a murderous expression, though it was tinged with confusion. He had arrived two days after the news of Hitler's suicide death, looking haunted, hunted, like his world was falling apart. He had set up camp in the guest quarters, keeping to himself, looking more frazzled as time went by, talking at length at the phone and yelling at Klink to leave him be.

"London says to arrest him should he try to leave again," Hogan had told the Kommandant when Klink had walked into the barracks one evening. It had been an 'official' visit that had worked as a cover.

That Major Hochstetter had been next to seek refuge in Germany's best-guarded Stalag, a place the Allied Forces wouldn't think of attacking, had been the icing on the cake. Everyone had been just waiting for the signal, guards and prisoners alike, and it had been almost too easy to take down both men's protection detail and fulfill the order.

"You think the Americans will let you live, Klink?" Burkhalter demanded, trying for arrogant, but the fear was plain to see. "You will be shot like a dog!"

Klink's expression was cool, guarded. He didn't answer, didn't so much at twitch at Hochstetter's gagged screeches.

"Now we wait for the cavalry," Hogan declared easily, smiling at the German officers. "Thanks for playing along, gentlemen."

"You betrayed your country for this man?" Burkhalter added, voice harder, looking at the men standing side by side. "I knew you were a coward, Klink. I didn't think you would sell out your people to Americans!"

"My people," Klink repeated as he removed the monocle, rolling the word around in his mouth like he wasn't sure what it meant. "My people died at your hands, General. My country was burned by a madman."

"What are you blabbering about, Klink?!"

"I did what I had to. If it demands my sacrifice in the end, so be it," the colonel said evenly.

Hogan's eyes snapped to him, narrowing at the words. Klink was an unreadable presence next to him, all shields firmly in place. He stood taller now, the stoop forever gone from his posture, the monocle nothing but a memory, but the pale skin and burning eyes spoke of his own fear of what had happened, what was to come, and what his fate would be.

The Sentinel nearly bared his teeth at the thought of anyone so much as trying to arrest the Guide.

"So you sold us out?" Burkhalter snarled. "Worked with Allied spies? They'll kill you, Klink! Like they'll kill us! Or do you think sleeping with the enemy will save you?"
The small smile was almost dangerous, the glint in the blue eyes triggering a surge within the Sentinel that Hogan had felt before. Like he felt the cracks in Will's tight shields, the fraction of his true empathic presence brushing over Hogan's mind and soul, calming him.

Of course Will had felt his turmoil. The man was way too good!

"Sentinel Hogan was never my enemy, General Burkhalter."

The general's eyes widened and he stared at Hogan, mouth working silently.

"Yeah, I know," the American colonel said easily. "Shock to the system and all. Not that you'd know what that feels like."

"Traitor," he just spat, staring at Klink again. "Aberration!"

Hochstetter's beady little eyes had widened, too, and he had stopped screaming into his gag. The fear was plain to see in him, only strengthened by Klink's words. He stared at Hogan as realization settled in.

"A better name than Nazi on any day," the former Kommandant replied calmly.

"I will have you in front of a firing squad for that!"

"I really doubt that," Hogan drawled. "Now, we've prepared some comfy little accommodations for you. The service is terrible, the view is hideous, but it's just for you. Really exclusive."

He nodded at the men waiting to get the two guests of honor to the holding cells. Their own men had already been stripped of anything that could be used as a weapon and locked up. It was time Burkhalter and Hochstetter joined them.

The moment they were alone, Hogan turned to Klink and clapped a steadying hand on the Guide's shoulder, squeezing gently.

"Will?"

"I'm good," was the tight reply.

"Well, the way you're feeling, you're not."

Like a door had been slammed shut, the shields went up and silenced every little empathic tremor. For a moment, Hogan felt a severe case of vertigo and he fought down a growl of annoyance.

"I didn't mean it that way," he sighed, squeezing the slender shoulder again. "As the resident Sentinel I'm probably best equipped to lend a helping hand…” He trailed off, hand sliding over the firm chest, letting it rest there, over Klink's heart. He was listening to the slightly elevated rhythm that reflected the turmoil he saw in the blue eyes.

Klink snorted softly, making no move to dislodge the hand. "Men like Hochstetter make me sick, Rob. Always have. He would have me deported and killed if he knew who I am, what I am… what we are for each other."

"He doesn't and it's not something he will ever know," he interrupted icily. "You're also not an aberration, Will. No one is!"

"He knows you're a Sentinel."
A shrug. "So what. Doesn't make you a Guide, right? Any single one of my men might be that person, but they aren't. That's you. Only you. And he will never hear it from anyone!" Hogan hadn't broken the contact at all. "This will be over soon. All of it. We won."

Dark eyes bore into lighter ones. Klink still didn't try to remove the contact, even as Hogan started to brush his thumb over the shirt. He just stood there, looking a little puzzled. Finally the intense personal connection that had formed between them, the one Hogan had been consciously aware of growing ever since Rothenburg's death, was back.

Strongly.

He smiled brightly, embracing the presence he felt, physical hand never leaving its resting place. The back and forth of empathic energy was almost heady and Hogan briefly closed his eyes with a soft sigh.

Klink unconsciously echoed it.

The brown eyes danced as he opened them again. "Good?" the Sentinel asked, amusement tinging the word.

"I'll be fine."

Hogan gently patted his chest, almost a caress. "Yeah. Me, too. When we walk out of here."

Klink felt the tension creep back. It was an unsure future for him. He hadn't dared to believe that he could survive until the Allied Forces occupied Germany and freed the wounded country from the Madman. That Hitler had committed suicide to escape capture had been rather anticlimactic.

"Hey," Hogan coaxed softly. "This will be us, together, leaving here. I'm not going without you. Anywhere."

"Colonel Hogan… Robert… I'm a German Luftwaffe officer. The Kommandant of this POW camp. I am the enemy."

"You are our ally. Our protector. The man who did everything to keep us safe. And the whole camp was our base, every single soul included. No one here is a Nazi. No one!" He leaned closer. "London gave me absolute freedom for this operation and they gave me free passes for everyone involved, inside and outside. You and every man in here can go wherever they want. No consequences. I want you with me, Wilhelm Klink. Every step of the way."

He blinked, stunned.

"My Guide," Hogan declared.

"Temporary," he argued weakly, but it sounded like the lie it was.

"No. You got me, Colonel. For good," was the playful reply. "I'm not going anywhere. Like a bad case of foot fungus," he quoted.

Will laughed, shaking his head. "Yes. Like that."

The physical connection was still there and Hogan wasn't planning on moving the hand before Klink made him.

He didn't make him.
After a while his muscles relaxed again. One hand came up and strong, slender fingers covering Hogan's. The Sentinel stood frozen, breath shallow, feeling the gentle pulses between them. There had been casual touches in the past, but this, while it looked casual, was anything but. It was more. Klink squeezed the hand, then smiled.

Hogan met the clear blue eyes, saw something in there that had his hopes rise, and he nodded once.

"There's always a plan," he said firmly.

"Even for this?"

"Even for this. I think we'll need a little get-together, your men and us."

Will closed his eyes, still holding on to the wrist like it was his lifeline. "There is a plan," he murmured. The blue eyes opened and Hogan just nodded.

Then he stepped back, the Sentinel the one to break the contact with the Guide, Klink's hand falling away.

While the physical connection was no more, the empathic one strengthened. Klink was holding on to him, needing him, and it was the first time he projected that need.

The Sentinel could only stare, mouth opening, then snapping shut again.

"We'll be fine," he promised, voice rough. "Both of us. Together. London knows we're a team and fuck whoever they send here."

They left half an hour later, both balanced and deeply settled within each other, representing a united front.

Outside, the prisoners and guards had assembled on the cold ground, some looking unsure, others frightened, the next elated. It was a wide range of emotions and Hogan unconsciously squared his shoulders, the aura of the commanding officer plain to see.

Next to him, Klink was the imposing, respect-inspiring presence he had been after Rothenburg's death.

Schultz snapped a sharp salute. "Herr Kommandant, all are accounted for," he reported.

"Thank you, Sergeant. At ease," Klink said evenly, eyes sweeping over the men.

Newkirk, LeBeau, Carter and Kinchloe joined their commanding officer, a shield and a statement in one. Hogan gave them a brisk, thankful smile.

"Sir," Newkirk said softly, smirking a little.

The Kommandant addressed his men in a calm, assertive manner, projecting his hopes and his acceptance of what had happened, offering them a choice.

Stay or leave.

The American forces would be here by tomorrow and whoever wanted to be anywhere but Stalag 13
could lay down his weapons and go.

The others would remain as civilians, among the prisoners, and not be tried.

The men would have until tomorrow morning to deliver their weapons to Schultz, who would lock the guns up, together with their IDs, their uniforms, and anything else that connected them to their old lives.

It was a busy night.

Hogan's men helped out in any and all capacity, right down to shuttling those not willing to stay until the Allied troops came in through the tunnels. The underground had been coming and going, helping with the railroad.

Hogan and Klink moved like a single unit from the moment the speech ended to the moment when the last gun was locked up. Hogan patted his Guide's shoulder, smiling tiredly.

"Part one completed."

"Yes. So many more parts of that crazy plan to go."

The American colonel leaned closer. "I love crazy plans."

Klink smiled. "I know."

Hogan was with his men not much later, Kinch giving him a quizzical look.

"Don't look at me like that," he muttered.

"Like what? Like someone who thinks a Sentinel and Guide shouldn't be apart on the eve of such a monumental change in all our lives?"

The others nodded.

Hogan glowered at them. "None of your concern."

"Actually…it is. No reason for you to be miserable."

"I'm not miserable."

There were scowls all around.

"What's with you?" he demanded.

"Just looking out for our commanding officer," Newkirk drawled. "Sir. You've been on top of your game, running full cylinder again, ever since Rothenburg. We know why. You seem to like to forget."

"Isn't that a little insubordinate?"
"We wouldn't dare. Sir," Newkirk tagged on, eyebrows raised rather insolently.

Hogan smirked. "You want me to spend the night with Klink?"

The men shrugged, not the least bit discomforted.

"Might just do both of you some good," Carter added, smiling broadly. "Has done so before."

The others shot him disbelieving looks and LeBeau just groaned.

"I mean, this is big for us, but it will be huge for every Kraut in this camp, let alone Germany."

"Go to bed. We've got a big day tomorrow," Hogan told them, shaking his head, and walked into his office.

"Colonel," Kinch said as he followed.

"Kinch, I'm good. As is Klink."

"I might not be an empath, but I've known you for three years now. It would do both of you some good. Especially the colonel." He nodded into the general direction of Klink's office. "Carter's right that you spent time with him before. We all know how close you are. You should be with your Guide now, sir."

"We're not attached by the hip!"

"Could have fooled us!" Carter called from the outside.

Of course they were listening. Hogan shot a glare at the partially closed door.

He sighed deeply. "Okay, okay, I'm going. Happy?"

"Yes," came a chorus from his men.

"What would I do without you?" he asked sarcastically as he left with a deep sigh.

"We aim to help," Newkirk called unhelpfully.

"Well, you're not."

He shut the door in their faces before anyone could add something.

Klink was in his pajamas, but he didn't look like he had already been sleeping when Hogan knocked and walked in right away. Actually, he looked tense.

"What now?" the Guide asked, sounding fatalistic, like he was expecting another catastrophe on the horizon.

"Nothing. I got kicked out of my own barracks."

Eyebrows climbed. "Kicked out?"

"The men thought it would be better for all of us if I… stayed with my Guide?" He shifted a little,
the hopeful note clear to hear.

Klink rubbed one temple. "I see. Insubordination among the ranks, Colonel Hogan?"

He gave a one-sided shrug. "They gift-wrapped it as friendly advice. You get used to it. If the Guide in question doesn't mind? I mean, you have an additional room...?"

"I don't mind, Robert," was the quiet reply, which was a huge confession.

It was settled then. He gazed at the tense man, then walked over and crouched down next to where Klink was seated.

"Trust me, Will," Hogan said softly, earnest. "We'll be fine."

He reached over and curled strong fingers around a slender wrist. His Guide looked drawn between fatalism and hope.

"It's finally over and we'll be fine," Hogan reiterated.

"Eternally hopeful?"

"Yeah, kinda. If I'd let things like that get me down, I'd be in the wrong business."

Klink chuckled and shook his head.

"We need sleep, Will. Tomorrow won't be like any other day."

"No day will be any more."

He got up and pulled the other man with him, toward the bedroom.

"One last chapter in this?" Klink asked, sounding almost resigned, surrendering like his country had.

Hogan stopped abruptly, like he had been slapped. He turned to look at the other man, mouth opening, then snapping shut again.

"No," he finally managed. "No, it's not about that! This isn't about sex, Will. It never will be. It's about wanting to be close to you," Hogan said openly. "If you want me there."

The blue eyes searched his face, then the Guide nodded slowly, cautiously.

"Scout's honor," Hogan added, hand on his heart.

"I believe you," was the quiet reply. "And yes, I'd like to have you here."

They didn't sleep together. Yes, they shared a bed, but it served just one single purpose: to calm Hogan's nerves, soothe the fiercely protective nature as he watched over Will sleeping by his side. And it evened out the surges he felt from Klink.

The moment they were in the same bed, Hogan had felt the calmness settle in. In both of them. When the Sentinel had curled in close, seeking the physical contact, there had been a second of tension, then the arm around his back had drawn him in even closer.
He had been completely honest; he didn’t want or expect more. First of all, he was way past the hormonal teenager stage. Second, while Robert Hogan was the last man to say no to sex, this was both complicated and very new in so many ways. Nothing about his relationship with this unique Guide was normal.

Ears on the steady heartbeat of the man next to him, Hogan had monitored the silence in the room, outside, throughout the camp as only the dogs moved around, sometimes one of the men, but otherwise it was so very different from before.

It was over and then again it wasn't.

Strong fingers carded into his hair, playing with the dark strands and he released a breath he hadn't been aware of holding. Klink’s empathic presence flowed around him, calm and deep, at ease. Relaxed.

He felt a wave of protectiveness rise.

Nothing would happen to his Guide. Nothing!

Will slowly fell asleep, a warm, solid, real presence next to him. Hogan felt completely at ease.

No words were needed. As they said, talking was highly overrated.

Something inside of him seemed to relax, even out, almost hum with contentment.

TBC...
Chapter 13

The American troops coming through the wide open camp gates with tanks and armored cars were greeted by an unexpected sight of prisoners milling between civilians, with no uniformed guard anywhere. The dogs were laying among them, looking peaceful, not the least dangerous or ready to tear someone's throat out.

Hogan, in his full Air Force dress uniform, freshly pressed and spotless, stood in front of the assembled men. He appeared tall, imposing, the aura of the troubleshooter plain to see and feel for anyone receptive enough. His face was almost without a single reflected emotion, eyes dark and cooler than normal.

His Guide was right next to him. Like all his men Klink had discarded the German uniform. Instead he was dressed neutrally in black pants, a white shirt and a black leather jacket that Newkirk had unearthed from their seemingly endless array of disguises and civilian clothes. Hogan had offered an Air Force uniform, full colonel, also made by Newkirk, but Klink had declined.

All the old German uniforms had been burned in a pile not long ago. No one in the compound wore anything but civilian clothing, aside from Hogan and his crew.

"Colonel Hogan," the squad leader snapped a salute. "Lieutenant Ken Michaels. We…" He stopped and shook his head a little. "I'd say we came to liberate the prisoners, but this is… unexpected."

Hogan's trademark smirk was on his lips as he answered the salute. "We're special, Lieutenant. You were briefed about Stalag 13?" he asked, business-like and very much in command of the situation.

"Yes, sir." The lieutenant nodded. "Quite thoroughly. The briefing was… surprising."

His eyes tracked around the assembled men, then came to rest on Klink. He opened his mouth to say something, then wisely snapped it shut again.

"Major Blake is on his way here. We were supposed to secure the area and the camp, but somehow I think we're a little too late?"

Hogan smiled humorlessly. "You're never too late. We could need your help handling the civilians that sought shelter here. As well as get the men ready to get on their way home, don't you think?"

Michaels nodded crisply. "Yes, sir."

"And if you brought anything like chocolate or even stale cookies, you'll make a lot of friends soon. I'd say about one hundred of them."

The lieutenant laughed a little. "I think we can find something."

Hogan felt the unabated tension from the Guide next to him, which reflected in his own body language.

"Lieutenant, a word of advice: we don't tolerate any abuse, verbal or physical, against anyone in this compound. Is that understood?"

"Of course, sir."

"All of these men are prisoners of this war. Treat them with respect. Anyone I see or hear who
doesn't will have to deal with me or one of my men."

Michaels nodded again. "We have been briefed, Colonel Hogan," he repeated. "We are all very much aware of the situation in this Stalag as compared to others."

"Good. As long as we understand each other."

He gave Michaels another salute, nodding at his core team to start handling matters. This was a vital hand-over. Hogan would have his eyes and ears peeled for anything that came even close to bullying or attacks from Allied soldiers against Germans within this camp.

His men fanned out, taking charge, and Hogan found a faint smile stealing over his lips as he discovered that each former guard had acquired at least one, if not two, former prisoners as a bodyguard.

"Relax," he said in a low voice, for Klink's ears only.

"That is easy for you to say, Hogan," was the tight-lipped reply.

Hogan briefly touched the small of the other man's back, a slight push only, but it anchored them more than just physically. Klink was empathically leaning against him in a way that was more than telling.

He was afraid.

Scared out of his mind because he was still the enemy, the German Luftwaffe officer, the former Kommandant of a POW camp. He might not be in uniform, but no one was fooled. Nor was anyone fooled by the 'civilians'. Still, matters were calm and quiet as the Allied Forces set up camp, waiting for their commanding officer to arrive.

There had been reports from other freed camps, from prisoners attacking guards and from the liberating armies being far from merciful. Hogan knew that they had a special set-up here, that Stalag 13 was an island, a unique occurrence, and he was more than relived that London had informed those sent here to aide them.

This could have gone to hell in a handbasket within a minute of the tanks' arrival, but so far it wasn't.

Hogan shot his Guide a calm, almost cocky smile. "We've got a show to run, Will. Ready?"

It got him a humorless chuckle. "Yes. Ready."

*

Major Liam Blake was a Sentinel and he was accompanied by a captain by the name of Tom Rollins who was clearly his Guide. Both men stepped out of the armored car and walked up to the Kommandantur in perfect unison, making no secret out of who and what they were. Blake snapped a salute in greeting, which Hogan replied to almost lazily, though there was a sharp expression in his eyes and a tension in his body that spoke of his displeasure of having another Sentinel in his territory. It had been mere hours since the arrival of Michaels and the camp was by now rather busy. He had been tense already, but now he was strung so tight, it barely needed a wrong gesture to make him want to tear a throat out.
Hogan gestured at the building. "After you, Major."

The warning that swung in his voice had the other Sentinel tense in turn, but the man nodded and walked past him, body stiffening as he picked up on the not so subtle threat of physical harm against him should he misbehave.

Klink rolled his eyes a little, though he was just as tense, features pale and almost gray around the edges.

Everyone was watching.

Newkirk, Carter, Kinchloe, LeBeau and Schultz. All his men in this camp who had worked tirelessly to sabotage and destroy. Everyone.

"Are those mics still on?" Newkirk asked almost conversationally.

"Sure are."

Schultz slowly shook his head. "I hear nothing, boys."

"Good man, Schultz." Newkirk gave him a friendly slap. "You take care of the civilians. We'll have a listen what the word is. From the way the colonel's looking at the guy, I'd say he's a Sentinel."

Kinch nodded slowly. "Not sure it was a wise move on London's part."

"You think they're going to go for the throat?" Carter asked, hands stuffed in his jacket and looking at the Kommandantur.

"Well…"

"Really?!"

"I think the Colonel is in control enough not to rip any arms out. He also has a Guide with him who can keep him from doing a lot of stupid things," Kinch amended. "But that Guide is also the reason for so much tension. Let's keep an ear on things."

They piled into their old barrack to do just that.

*

Hogan spent half a day with Blake, both of them going over details that sounded almost boring but were vitally important. Klink was there for the whole time, barely losing a word, but he was openly monitoring the unknown Sentinel and his Guide.

Neither man seemed to be aware of it.

Not that he had expected them to be. Klink knew he didn't register on their senses.
Klink had been introduced as the commander in charge of the Luft-Stalag, full rank, as well as an underground operative and ally.

No word had been lost about him being a Blindsport Guide or actually being Hogan's anchor. Command knew about his status and he suspected those two sent in knew as well.

"We have been briefed by London," Blake said slowly, carefully, confirming his suspicion throughout the lengthy meeting. "It is a… unique combination, to say the least. On several levels."

Hogan's expression didn't really shift, but Klink noticed how his eyes darkened a little more, how muscles coiled, and he carefully reached out and pushed calmness at his Sentinel. There was no exchange of any kind, Hogan not even glancing at him, but he received a tiny acknowledgement in return. He was amazed how clearly he received those miniscule touches, how easily he could read each shift in the other man.

Rollins shot him curious looks sometimes. Still, the American Guide kept back, nodding when Blake said something, taking notes. He didn't appear like the unlucky souls forcefully bonded to a military Sentinel that Klink had met before. He was responding to a superior officer and his Sentinel, but on more of an equal footing.

Hogan's tension didn't abate and Klink made sure to stay firmly connected to the agitated Sentinel, who presented himself as fully in control and absolutely above any kind of provocation he might feel from the presence of another Sentinel. On the outside he was his relaxed, easy self, but Klink could easily tell it was far from the truth.

He tracked Hogan's responses for the whole meeting, carefully, smoothly, and he was pleased to note that all those surges were immediately contained. The ones that were the strongest happened whenever the other Sentinel addressed Klink personally, asked him about procedures, codes, papers. The bristling was never too bad and Blake didn't seem to be aware of how close he got to having a more powerful Sentinel at his throat, but Klink was.

And he kept a lid on it.

He might have a headache tomorrow, but it wouldn't do to have Hogan knock out a fellow officer.

"I'll talk to my men, Major," Hogan said as he rose, smiling pleasantly, though the hard edge to his eyes couldn't be overlooked by now.

Klink had no doubt that their conversation had been listened in to, so the crew knew everything already.

Especially about the offer that had been tagged on like an after-thought.

"You and your men can set up wherever they want in the meantime. Mine will cooperate in any form to get the prisoners home."

"Thank you, Colonel Hogan."

The men saluted and Klink watched them go, expression still neutral. When the door had closed, Hogan expelled a breath and shook his head. His fingers were clenched around the edge of the desk, blunt nails digging into the old wooden surface. A roiling wave of anger, frustration and fiercely territorial 'protect, mine, protect' rose between them.

"You'd think I'd be better at this."
Klink cocked his head and let a smile play over his lips. "Better at having another Sentinel in your territory, Colonel Hogan? Better at not tearing his throat out for making assumptions, for questioning the Guide who happens to be an enemy soldier?"

The wave crashed forward and he caught it easily, deflecting the psychic force and turning it into nothing more than a light breeze.

A rueful chuckle was the answer. "So three years are enough to make this hellhole mine?"

"Apparently. You are quite territorial."

"It's my command," Hogan growled, a new surge of something hot and violent rising.

"Which he isn't challenging," Klink pointed out, mentally reaching out once more and embracing the darker emotions, smoothing them over.

"He better not. And you're not the enemy," Hogan added, voice harder.

Dark eyes turned almost black with fury.

Klink weathered the storm calmly.

"Robert, we went over this."

"Yes, we have. And you seem to have amnesia sometimes. My Guide," he rumbled. "If he so much as tries to have you locked up…"

This time the surge was sharp, briefly spiking past what would be determined as safe for a Sentinel of Hogan's potential, then it was caught in the safety net his Guide had established around him.

Hogan ran a hand through his dark hair, shaking his head again.

"Damn! Fuck it! This never happened before," he breathed.

Klink wove himself more firmly around the other mind, feeling the distress, the hard, protective mode his Sentinel had switched into. It was as bad as after back-to-back missions. This whole situation was far worse for all of them than three years of undercover work had ever been.

"No Sentinel is an island," he said calmly, using the Guide Voice. "Not even a troubleshooter. You can work independently, you more than any other troubleshooter I have ever heard of or met, Robert Hogan, but you can't escape instinct."

In oh-so many ways, he thought ruefully.

Hogan's expression, that mix of desperation and realization, with an added flavor of need, told him the Sentinel knew that fully well himself.

"You made up a home here, as terrible as it was, as bad as it sounds," Klink went on.


He inclined his head. "Yes," he said slowly. "You did."

"Who challenged another Sentinel for me."

"Yes."
"And they sent a Sentinel on purpose," Hogan muttered furiously. "Not the same rank, but a Sentinel. Not a troubleshooter, thankfully. With a bonded Guide. Still…"

"London took some precautions, but it grates on you," Klink translated. He had been aware of Command's intentions the moment the Major had arrived, but Sentinels, even autonomous ones like Hogan, were a bit more primal than that.

"Yeah."

Klink made a decision as the next emotional surge came on. He closed the gap between them and cupped one clean shaven cheek, the contact almost electrical. Hogan's eyes widened, pupils blown wide before contracting again, and he sucked in a sharp breath. His strong reaction was just more proof enough of how upsetting the whole meeting had been.

"Will?" he breathed.

"Relax for a moment," he advised. "Focus."

The Sentinel followed without hesitation, senses firmly logged onto the Guide.

"I am okay," Klink said, Guide Voice on. "Nothing happened to me or any of your men. He didn't challenge you."

The calm energy flowing between them was easy and felt smooth, like they had always been working this way.

"He's not an opponent, Robert. He is an ally. He is not taking anything from you."

Hogan closed his eyes, nodding, listening to the soft voice. He leaned into the touch.

Klink didn't want to think about the way he felt about that too deeply. He just let the Sentinel center himself, watching him, then finally pulled out of the intimate connection.

"Okay?"

Hogan nodded, eyes deep and filled with a lot of emotions.

"We got this. We'll be fine," Hogan declared, eyes still intense, almost black, and boring into Klink's blue ones.

"So far we are."

"And we will continue to be so. We've gone through a lot worse. A lot. This is a walk in the park."

"I am amazed by your continued optimism, Robert."

"Part of my endless charm," he said cockily, shooting his Guide a bright smile.

"When did you acquire that?"

The banter was good for one thing: distraction. Hogan fell into it easily, making a mock outraged face and poking a finger into Klink's chest.

"Verbal abuse of prisoners, Kommandant? That's against the Geneva Convention."

"You stopped being a prisoner the moment you walked in here, Hogan," was the reply.
"Ah, but we loved playing the game."

His hand briefly rested on the firm chest and he held the expressive eyes, focusing on Will alone.

The other man was silent, for three long, breathless moments. Then he nodded.

"I'm good," he murmured.

"No. We are. Together."

"Together."

Hogan became suddenly aware of the shield stretching around them, enveloping him together with his Guide, and he shot the man a stunned look. Klink just smiled.

"You keep surprising me," the American colonel whispered, awed.

"You think I showed you all my cards, Colonel Hogan?"

He laughed almost giddily at the realization that they had been absolutely invisible to the other pair outside. Nothing of his rather embarrassing loss of control on a psychic level had made it past Klink. Not a single wave.

"You're amazing," he whispered.

Klink was drawn between embarrassment and pride. The expression in those dark eyes was something he didn't want to interpret, didn't want to think about more deeply.

They fit, he thought faintly.

It was frightening how well. It was terrifying how deep it already went.

And neither man would give it up.

"I think you're just as devious as your Sentinel," Hogan quipped.

"No one can surpass you, Rob."

Hogan opened his mouth to say something, the dark eyes so much deeper now that it seemed Klink could fall into them. Then he just patted the chest underneath his fingers, his palm sliding over the curve of the ribs, then fell away. He stepped back. The empathic energies moved with him easily.

"C'mon," Hogan decided. "Let's put this show on the road."

When they left, they moved as one.

tbc...
Chapter 14

Klink had taken to roaming the busy former Stalag, talking to his men, reassuring himself that everyone was treated with respect. He wouldn't let any of the liberating forces mistreat or abuse those he was responsible for. They were soldiers of the German Luftwaffe, yes. They had been guards at a POW camp, yes. But they had never been Nazis, had been neutral in so many ways, and they had sworn their loyalty to Klink after the Rothenburg incident.

So Klink would protect them in turn.

It was strange not to be in uniform, to see the men he had worked with for so long out of uniform. His Luftwaffe colonel outfit had been burned and Klink hadn't really mourned it, but civilian clothes were something he had to get used to. With a thick jacket and a knit hat on his head he was as warm as in his uniform coat, sure. His mirror image was something he couldn't associate with himself yet, though.

Klink was pleasantly surprised that the former prisoners had taken over bodyguard duty for everyone who had been on the other side of the imaginary line. He was highly amused by the fact that the moment he walked among his men, Carter and Newkirk had started to shadow him, too.

"Just making sure," Newkirk commented lightly.

"That I won't get lost." He wrapped the scarf more tightly around his neck.

Carter smiled widely. "Yes, sir. Can't have Colonel Hogan running around the camp looking for you."

So he was followed by two of Hogan's men as he talked to his own. It was strangely relieving to have company and to see how smoothly matters worked.

It took him almost all day as he spoke with everyone who had once been one of his soldiers. In a way they all still were. Some saluted, a few aborted it right away, some nodded the greeting. All had been sent to the Stalag because they were unfit for any other kind of duty; even the Russian Front. It was common to use either very young or rather old recruits, those with no fighting experience, and Klink had made sure to get those who weren't fanatics. He had weeded them out, just like Hogan himself had made sure no sadists had come into the POW camp.

Karl Langenscheidt gave him a real smile as Klink stopped by. He was in the company of Schultz, who was enjoying a sweet treat that LeBeau had cooked him. The Frenchman was chatting happily about recipes that had Schultz moan with pleasure at just hearing them. He was also moaning about how good the pie tasted.

"Thank you," he told Newkirk as they headed back to the Kommandantur. "For keeping an eye on my men."

Newkirk shrugged. "Sure, mate. I mean, Colonel. We're all on the same side here. Have been for so long. We all know your men. The new-arrivals don't. Can't have them kicking anyone because they look German. Not the proper way to treat an ally."

He nodded, briefly closing his eyes. It was emotionally straining to a degree, but it also lifted his spirits. He knew they were lucky the Americans had gotten here first. The Russian Army wasn't exactly known for their mercy and there were rumors about how those 'liberated' by Russians had been treated. Germany had been forever changed by the war and it would still change. For better and
for worse.

It hurt.

A lot.

It was his home, the place he had been born and grown up, but it was no longer the Germany he could recognize.

Klink just wanted amnesty for those who had aided him and Hogan, had worked against the regime and risked their lives and those of their families to end the war.

"It's so much more than I ever expected," he said softly, honestly.

"You deserved it," Carter spoke up, sounding serious. "All of you. After you killed that Gestapo Sentinel, it changed everything. You helped Colonel Hogan before, but after that, it was awesome. Sir." He smiled briefly. "The two of you are amazing to watch. He really needed you."

Klink blinked, stunned. "Ah, thank you, Sergeant Carter."

"You're welcome." Carter stuffed his hands into his jacket's pockets. "We couldn't have done it all without you, y'know."

"So now you get payback," Newkirk added. "All of you. Let Blake and the others know we're not going to let them push you around."

Klink felt a little tug along the connection and looked over to the porch where Hogan had appeared. He looked around the compound, the Sentinel in full protector mode, and he almost smiled at the sight. Hogan was radiating what he was openly, warning off anyone who was a receptive.

"Newkirk, get Kinch and LeBeau," he told the Brit.

Newkirk nodded and hurried back to where Schultz and Langenscheidt were with the Frenchman. Another man took LeBeau's place as the bodyguard. Kinchloe was the last to arrive and they headed into the office.

"So, options," Hogan said slowly, looking at his crew. "We all take Major Blake up on the standing offer to go home. To our families and friends. Go to England, get a full debrief and check-ups, sleep in real beds, have real food. And then it's over."

"But it isn't," Kinchloe disagreed. "The war is, but… nothing else."

"So number two is to remain here, at Stalag 13, run the operation a little longer, with some notable differences, and help set up the survivors with a future."

"Or join Blake on his Nazi hunt," Carter added, shaking his head. "I, for my part, am all done hunting. They've got specialists for that. I can blow stuff up, sure, but I'm not an assassin or some kind of witchhunter."

Everyone nodded.

Klink was silent, watching the men attentively. Hogan had chosen to sit right next to his Guide.
They still had so much to talk about.

"We know what we're doing here," LeBeau agreed. "This is our territory." He gave Hogan a little shrug. "Your territory, Sentinel." His eyes flicked to Klink. "Guide."

The former Kommandant looked a bit startled.

"You all have families," Hogan reminded them calmly. "You have people who miss you, worry about you. You're not military by choice."

"We came here by choice," Kinchloe reminded him. "This was our assignment. It's not over yet. Some will want to leave, but I want to see this through to the end."

Nods and noises of agreement followed.

Hogan looked at them, clearly touched, then rose. "Kinch, get on the radio to London. Tell them the base is still operational. We might just want to relocate some of that stuff aboveground." He shot his Guide a look. "Think you can spare some room up here?"

"I'll see what can be done," was amused reply. "We are getting a lot of unplanned vacancies."

"Good. We'll check out the barracks, see where we set up. Then we'll start on remodeling. We can use the manpower currently here to help us. Major Blake will surely lend a hand."

It took only a day to strip the tunnels clean of equipment and remove the listening devices from Klink's office. Everything they had installed over the years, from printers to radio stations to the lab ended up in a huge pile in Barracks 6 and 7 where the men sifted through it all. Whatever was still useful was recycled. Everything else was thrown away.

The outside tunnel entrances and exits were sealed, but the tunnels themselves weren't filled yet. Hogan wanted to be prepared.

"Prepared for what, sir?" Kinch asked, frowning.

"You know. Just… be prepared. Old boy scout motto."

Klink raised his eyebrows. "Boy scouts."


"And the junior troop leader wants to keep the tunnels open."

"No, the colonel of Base 13 wants that," the colonel in question corrected.

Kinch shrugged. "Sure. We've got our hands full with the equipment already."

"Preparedness," Klink remarked when the sergeant had left.

"Good motto," his Sentinel replied.

"Yes. Yes, it is."
The weather turned for the worse throughout the night, temperatures dropping abruptly, and by early morning, just before sunrise, the ground was frost covered and the air cutting.

Everyone was bundled up as thickly as possible, breath clouding in front of their faces, layers upon layers barely keeping them warm. Work did, though.

Barracks that weren't in use were in the process of being stripped down and the beds, tables and chairs used for fire wood in those buildings that were occupied.

"Blimey, it's cold," Newkirk groaned as he hurried into Barrack 2, shivering. He migrated toward the oven and sighed in relief. "Better."

"Cold spell," Kinch told them. "Forecast warns that it will get worse tonight and stay for tomorrow, but should get better come Monday."

"Too bloody long," Newkirk growled.

But there was nothing anyone could do, aside from make sure the barracks were kept steadily warm and everyone had a mountain of clothes and blankets.

Hogan fought his way through the icy wind that tore through the gaps between the barracks and blew down the open assembly area. No one who had two functioning brain cells was outside. In the last hour it had started to rain, a fine spray that was driven by the wind and felt like walking through a wall of water.

"Damn, it's cold!" he exclaimed as he banged the door shut after himself, homing in on the heater. "And wet!"

He was dripping with wetness and his clothes felt like he had just gone for a swim.

"It's normal this time of the year."

"Spring in Germany. Come for the sights, stay for the icicles," he quipped, rubbing his hands together.

Klink looked up from where he had a mountain of files that he had started to index and cross-reference. To Hogan they looked like prime fire material, but he knew that they were way too important to burn. Everything would be neatly sorted and packed up. There was a lot of valuable information in those filing cabinets.

"Still working?"

The question got him a raised eyebrow and Hogan looked over the papers. A gust of wind rattled at the barricaded windows and he frowned.

"I think we need to tear down a barrack," Klink remarked as he rose and walked over to the window. There was nothing to see outside since it was already dark and the shutters had been closed completely, but the wind was clear to hear.
"We'll get on it tomorrow. Kinch said the weather's going to be like that until Monday."

The former Kommandant nodded. "I doubt we can move out a lot of people over the next few days if the wind doesn't let up. Conditions will be hazardous without it anyway."

"Yeah, well, if anyone wants to leave really desperately we can send him in a tank," Hogan replied cheekily.

His Guide chuckled and joined him at the heater again.

"You should get into drier clothes, Rob. Or you'll catch something."

"Haven't so far. Sentinels are rather resilient when it comes to the common flu bug."

Klink nodded. "Unlike Guides."

"We got you back on your feet," Hogan replied easily.

"Penicillin usually does the trick. Now, about getting you dry…"

"Not leaving again," Hogan muttered.

"You don't have to. Actually, you have spent the last two nights here, so why change a habit?"

He blinked, astounded by the words, the clear invitation. So far Hogan had been careful in his approach of the subject of spending the nights in the same building at least. It kept his more protective and primal side appeased. With the arrival of another Sentinel, that side was not happy. Not happy at all.

"Habit?" he echoed.

Klink didn't answer, just gave him a pointed look.

"Habit?" Hogan repeated, shaking his head.

But he didn't protest when Klink handed him dry clothes. He also didn't mind slipping into bed beside Will, the wind still howling eerily outside, sure in the knowledge that should something need his attention, one of his men would get him. There was still a functional tunnel system to protect anyone from the frightful weather.

*

Two days after the arrival of the Allied troops former General Albert Burkhalter was led to a prison transport. He was still in his uniform and looked as haughty as always. He had been treated with respect, even though he had been locked up in a cell.

"'S not like they treated ours like we treated him," Newkirk had remarked once. "He gets fed and watered."

"We are not them," Hogan had told him.

And that was that. Burkhalter hadn't had any visitors, aside from the guards, who had all been
Blake’s men. Blake himself had questioned the general, but aside from empty threats and some very personal insults, Burkhalter had refused to say anything.

Neither Klink nor Hogan had so much as thought about visiting.

Now he was on his way to another prison facility.

Klink was watching procedures and when Burkhalter saw him, his expression wavered between terrified and appalled in one. He evaded Klink's eyes, but automatically tracked back to him again.

"Someone stuck it to him that you're a Guide."

Klink glanced at Carter, who had appeared next to him. The man looked guilelessly at him, smiling.

"Someone?" the Guide in question echoed.

"Probably."

"I probably know that person."

"Yeah, could be." Another innocent smile.

"May I ask why?"

"He kept ranting about how everyone here is a traitor, should get shot or worse, that you sold out your country and he will see to it that you pay for it." Carter's expression darkened a little. For someone who rarely if ever lost it or got mad, it was a big change. "He said you're an aberration for cooperating with the enemy, that your abnormality is a disgrace. He also suggested that you and Colonel Hogan slept together."

Klink's eyebrows rose a little. "He did." It wasn't even a question.

"His words were… less nice."

The Guide chuckled. "Yes, I can imagine. So you told him I'm a Guide?"

"Someone did."

"Yes, someone. Someone told him I'm a Guide."

"He got all silent after that." Carter bounced on the balls of his feet. "Someone might have mentioned you're alpha level."

That explained the fear.

Klink watched as his former superior officer was loaded onto the prison transport and the doors shut.

Hochstetter had already been taken away, right after Blake's arrival. No one had cared for a moment. Klink was strangely drawn between pity for the man and equally not caring what would await him. Burkhalter was a high-ranking member, knew a lot of secrets, and he would be interrogated until he broke. But he had been responsible for a lot of suffering and pain, for death, for losses, and Klink had more than once been close to stepping past his façade and standing up to the bastard.

A lifelong training had stopped him from sacrificing everything, from sacrificing himself.

It had been hard, though.
"Thank you, Carter," he finally said softly, watching the truck leave.

"You're welcome, Colonel."

"I'm no longer a colonel."

Carter scowled. "Maybe not for the Luftwaffe, but your rank's your rank."

Klink gave him a little smile. "Well, if you say so."

"Good riddance to him."

He glanced over his shoulder and Hogan's dark expression was almost comical. The Sentinel was bristling a little too much, but not too badly.

"He's gone. Stand down," Klink said, pushing his mind against Hogan's a little.

His Sentinel shot him a scowl, but he did relax a little more. Carter had wisely removed himself, walking across the ground and toward the barracks where LeBeau was talking to Schultz, writing down what looked like recipes for the portly man.

"Gretchen is going to cook a lot of French meals or French-inspired German cuisine," Klink remarked, smiling more.

Hogan brushed against him, the physical contact brief but couldn't be mistaken for anything but what it was: reassurance and seeking reassurance.

"Think they'll crack him?" the American colonel asked.

"Schultz?"

It got him a little shove against the shoulder. "No. Burkhalter." Hogan was smiling.

"Burkhalter is a man of many vices and faults. He is weak. It won't take much to convince him to talk for his own good."

Hogan nodded. "He'll probably won't ever stop."

There would be a trial and Klink doubted the man would ever see the light of day again.

Yes, good riddance to him.

*

Blake had had a few days to get a sense of the troubleshooter and the man everyone from London had told him was a Guide. Someone who didn't register with him as such at all. His own Guide was getting nowhere either. He had also tried to get used to the most unusual prison camp he had ever liberated.

Like everyone else, the major had been thoroughly briefed on the operations that had been going on at the Luft-Stalag for over three years. It had left him speechless, awed, slightly terrified, and very apprehensive of coming here. Sabotage, theft, even assassination, all from behind enemy lines, all
run by a troubleshooter. That the man in charge of the POW camp was a Guide had been added almost like an after-thought to the briefing, but it had floored Blake and Rollins. Actually, their whole team had been speechless.

London had told them to expect just about anything and everything, that Colonel Robert E. Hogan was unusual, even for a troubleshooter, and that Wilhelm Klink was completely off limits, as were all the guards Hogan's team approved of.

So yes, they had been briefed. And no, they couldn't have imagined what they had found in their wildest speculations.

Blake was struggling with the dynamics, how ranks seemed to be fluid. Hogan's core unit was efficient and knowledgeable, handling matters like they had never done anything else. The so-called civilians, the German guards who had no ID, no uniforms and who every prisoner vouched for, were assisting voluntarily. The Germans were never alone, always accompanied by a former prisoner, but it wasn't for security reasons.

It was for safety.

To keep them safe from anyone who might want to take out his anger and hatred on the unarmed men.

Blake knew that guards in POW camps were no more than the dregs of the German Army, those unfit for anything else. Even the Russian Front. These here, at Stalag 13, were no better, but there was one difference: all had never been loyal followers.

The camp was in prime shape, from the barracks to the living quarters to the motorpool. Weapons had been locked up or handed over the Allied Forces.

And then there was the former Kommandant. The man was an even bigger mystery than the whole camp and from the way Hogan interacted with him, reacted to him, they should have been a working Sentinel-Guide team for all their online lives. London hadn't mentioned any kind of bond, but Blake could have sworn to it and his own Guide was just as confused.

It was eerie. Especially since Klink was invisible. It was downright terrifying when he thought about what he had been told by Command about this man killing a Gestapo Sentinel. A Guide. A German Luftwaffe officer. The man had survived a challenge fight and killed his opponent. Hogan's debrief about those events read like science fiction or fantasy.

"He's a Blindspot," Tom reminded him over a late evening drink. They had taken up the guest quarters. "You wouldn't get a blip even if you threw everything at the guy. And he's powerful. That he mimicked being a Sentinel for even a brief moment to distract a military Sentinel from another one. I really don't want to know what his empathic levels are when he drops those shields. I think he'd bowl me over completely."

And Tom wasn't a lightweight. Psychically speaking

Blake exhaled. "Yeah. Still… Look at how they work together!" The Sentinel shook his head as he kicked up his feet on the table. "Hogan's a high-level troubleshooter. Klink? He has to be."

"We knew about them coming in, Liam. We just didn't really believe it."

"We knew Klink's a Blindspot. We knew Hogan's a troubleshooter. No one mentioned that they apparently bonded!"
"Uhm, because they haven't?" Rollins guessed.

Blake snorted. "From what I see... they have. The man was ready to challenge me, Tom. He's been posturing, he's in full protector mode, and he keeps dropping his shields a little more than necessary when he sees me. What does that tell you?"

It got him a little laugh. "Yeah, I noticed. Didn't think any Sentinel could have himself under such control and still look like he's locked down in basic primal mode, but he was in control. All the time. Still I doubt they are really bonded. I mean, surface sure. They work together. But deeply? Wouldn't London have told us?"

"Would they tell London?"

"Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. But just look at them working together!" Blake argued. "You can't tell me they aren't linked."

His Guide smirked. "Yeah. Never met someone like them. Met some troubleshooters, but I think Hogan's a class of his own after what I read. He's been running without even a surface connection all his life."

They moved in sync, they had this silent form of communication that normally only happened between seasoned teams that had been living in each other's pocket, that trusted each other implicitly, that knew each other inside out; bonded teams.

Colonel Hogan was this calm, settled, guarding presence. He didn't hide what he was, was quietly assured of himself and his abilities, and he never really turned to his Guide. Still, they communicated. It was there, it happened, and to Blake it seemed both familiar and absolutely new. And there was the not so small matter of how protective the Sentinel was, how he warned off Blake.

The way Colonel Klink acted, the way people responded to him, showed how much respect he commanded, even among those who had been prisoners at this POW camp.

"We got our orders," Blake finally sighed. "We have people to get back to their homes, here or abroad, and the area to secure. Command is dealing with the rest."

"Like the fact that there are no prisoners for us to detain? No German guards? Though I can tell you there are actually a lot," his Guide mused out loud.

"We've got our orders," the Sentinel repeated. "Hogan's got his."

"Yes, sir."

Yes, it was the weirdest assignment they had ever had. Right now, following orders and protocol kept things a little more normal.

tbc,..
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

1000 hits? I love you all!

And this chapter marks another huge step for our two Colonels...

After ten days, the camp was strangely empty and still too many former POWs awaited their trip home.

New ones were coming in from near-by Stalags, getting processed, outfitted with papers, and then sent on their way. Hogan made sure they didn't interact too much with whoever was left of the German guards, though Klink didn't hide his presence.

He wouldn't want him to anyway.

The man had turned into a much bigger rock in a stormy sea for Hogan than he could have imagined. The Sentinel base-lined on him, kept refocusing on his Guide, and it helped with dealing the sheer endless trek of men coming through.

But he never forgot about his vast team of helping hands and talented own men,

Everyone here, all one hundred and three former POWs, had helped over eight hundred men to escape in their time here, had remodeled the camp in the past week, and they had protected the men who had been their guards; now it was their moment to walk out, without using a tunnel and underground resistance helpers. Whoever was still there helped in turning the former prison camp into the Allied base it had always been, though unofficially, and Hogan had by now permanently moved from Barrack 2 into regular quarters. With good insulation, a real mattress, electricity as long as he wanted it.

Blake had given him some very weird looks. He knew he was confusing the commander of the American forces that were currently occupying the area, but he couldn't give a damn. Him and Will, that was private. It was only for them to know and understand what they had, though he knew even they didn't understand it fully themselves. The connection was still thriving, powerful, giving him a direct line to the strong Guide.

Maybe their very own natures denied them what Sentinels and Guides should be able to do instinctively, especially those who really clicked, and there was no doubt that they had that. They worked in sync, aware of each other, and even if they didn't share a room every night, the continued closeness was more than he had ever thought Will was capable of.

They had fallen asleep with each other a few times, sharing a bed. Like the night after Blake's arrival. Or when Hogan had been agitated for no apparent reason, strung tight, close to snapping at the 'invaders' more than once. Klink had cushioned the emotional impact, had kept his Sentinel in line, and when the day was over, Hogan had just tiredly slipped into bed next to him with something close to a whine.

Kinch still kept giving him those looks, though by now they could be called Looks with a capital L.
Yes, they were a weird team, a strange pair of Sentinel and Guide, but it worked and it worked smoothly. Thing were on an even keel.

Until the moment Klink dropped a proverbial hammer on him.

"Go visit your family, Robert," Klink said one late afternoon as they walked along the mostly abandoned barracks, inspecting the state of the almost empty camp.

It was a reassuring and still strangely tight feeling in his chest, warring for dominance, to watch everyone leave. At Will's words he stopped in the shadow of Barrack 10.

"I'm not leaving," the Sentinel stated, bristling a little.

"You haven't been home in a long time. Now you have the chance. The war is over and you can leave."

"You haven't gone home to see your family!"

"My family isn't that far from here."

"You aren't leaving to see them either," Hogan pointed out coolly.

Klink's expression was neutral. "There is nothing for me there. You, on the other hand, have parents you haven't talked to you in a very long time, a brother, a sister, probably nephews or nieces, or both."

Hogan blew out a breath. "I still have a command here."

"And the place will still be here in a few weeks."

"Are you trying to get rid of me?" he challenged.

"The war is over, Robert. You can go home for a while."

He felt a surge of anger at the insanely reasonable words and the next thing he knew he had pushed the other man against the wall, glaring at him full force.

"When I leave, one day, in the future, it will be with the Guide I found here. Not alone. I'm not going anywhere alone. Do you understand, Will?"

The blue eyes were filled with emotions Hogan couldn't classify just yet. "I did what I had to. I did my part, Colonel Hogan. Now I'm…"

"Stop it!" he interrupted furiously. "Whatever you're thinking, stop it! You're not useless now! You're not going to be arrested in the end, tried and left to rot! You're not one of them, Will! Never were!" He leaned in even closer. "If I have to openly claim you, I will!"

"Rob…"

A violent tremor went through him and Hogan squeezed his eyes shut, head falling forward. He bumped his forehead against Klink's chest, groaning in frustration. Everything he had been taught and read was not applying here. They were seriously bonding on all but one level, and while part of
Hogan surged forward at the prospect, another knew it wouldn't give either man more than they had already.

Fingers carded through his hair, gently combing the shorter strands at the back of his neck. The gesture was so new and unexpected, he jumped back and stared.

Klink smiled a little ruefully. "My apologies."

"Uh, no, that's… okay… I… it's… new?"

The touch had been more intimate than it should be possible, had touched something no one had ever managed to get even close to. Hogan had bedded enough women, had been naked, no scrap of clothes left on his body, and it had never been like this. Here, fully clothed, he reacted to a little caress like…

He fought back a surge.

The blue eyes watching him were almost guarded, but so much more open than ever before. Bridges. Building and building bridges.

"You should take a breather from this, Robert. From Stalag 13… Base 13. You should talk to your family. Reconnect. Let them know how you are. I'll still be here."

He shook his head after just a few words, not really believing what his Guide was telling him. "No!" he said firmly. "No. Maybe I'm a territorial bastard, but this is my base until London tells me otherwise. I'm here until orders come in, and then it'll be us leaving. Us! No one alone." He closed the distance again. "Do you understand, Guide? You and I, together. They can go screw themselves into a fit, but this overrides everything!"

"It's still filed as a surface connection," Klink told him mildly.

"Screw that! I know it's no longer surface. You know it, too! It hasn't been for… forever! And if they really know you're a Blindspot, anyone with two braincells understands what happened between us!"

"Rob…"

"No!" he snapped. "Don't! Just don't! I can't… You're my Guide, Will! Mine!" He slammed his palms onto the wooden walls of the building behind Klink, feeling the new wave of psychic energy washing forward inside him. "It overrides everything!"

"Also my own free will?"

Dark eyes, looking almost black now, reflected a primal anger. "You're not a slave! Or a tool! Don't you want to understand? Is it a language barrier because I can scream at you in German just fine, too! We bonded, Wilhelm Klink! We formed a permanent, unbreakable connection between us and it's driving me insane not to… to be close!"

Will suddenly slid an arm around Hogan's waist, pulling the wound up man forward and closing the last inch between them. It was such an unexpected move, Hogan gave a surprised huff. It sounded almost like a squeak. He would deny it to his dying day, but he had squeaked.

There was no more room between them.

And nothing Hogan felt was anywhere close to what a woman had always triggered inside him. This
was… so much more. So different. So intense.

The closeness stopped his tirade rather effectively, slammed a lid on the emotional outburst, locked the primal thing back in its cave. It whined in confusion at what this simple move could do. The whine actually left Hogan's lips before he could catch himself.

He heard Will chuckle, lips moving against his ear.

"For someone not into intimacy you're still full of surprises," Hogan quipped automatically, falling for banter in stressful times, brain rallying to keep him with the quickly unfolding events. "I thought sharing bed space was a lot already. Now this… I'm kinda… amazed."

The connection between them opened from Will's side, the warm wave encompassing the Sentinel and having him almost on his knees. Hogan dropped his head into the crook of his Guide's neck with a soft moan, holding on, just feeling.

"Scratch that," he breathed. "Blown away. Holy shit, Will…"

"I never said I'm not 'into intimacy', as you put it. It was never about physical closeness in general. We have been sharing… space lately. A lot. I like it. I didn't think it was possible for me to like someone with me, so close, in the same bed."

The Sentinel tightened his own hold for a second. "I'm a persistent guy."

"Hm, yes, you are. It was a learning curve for me."

"So it was just the trust," Hogan whispered.

"Yes."

"Losing control, being vulnerable, because..." Hogan continued, almost talking to himself, "you let someone close mentally. All the way in. This is... close."

"I'm rather relieved you noticed. You have been in my personal space one way or the other ever since you came to Stalag 13."

Hogan chuckled. "You let me."

"Yes. Yes, I did."

"And you've been more open."

"Yes."

"This is a lot closer. In so many ways."

Klink's hands stroked over his back and it was so much more than a simple caress. It was different from the closeness they had shared in bed.

"You trust me," the Sentinel murmured.

"I do."

The connection was still open, making him want more, get closer, despite the danger involved. Klink could wipe the floor with him. He could turn him into a vegetable. The man had the psychic abilities to cut down a Gestapo Sentinel, and he had the physical ability to defend himself against a trained
military Sentinel, too.

"I don't know what this is," he whispered against the bare skin under his lips.

"Neither do I," Klink confessed. "It is… frightening."

"Yeah." Hogan laughed softly. "But I don't want to think about not having it. Whatever we have. I can't… not have it."

"You make less sense than usual," was the mild rebuke.

"Sue me."

He had yet to raise his head and the words were muffled, but it felt so incredibly good. Hogan had never come close to bonding, so he had no clue what it really meant, but this was as close to it as he imagined it to be. Just… they already had a very strong connection, a link between them that defied everything they were.

There was a loud caw.

Hogan ignored it. He was too busy enjoying the warmth of the skin underneath his lips, the scent, the whole feeling in his body, of Will's fingers in his hair as they stroked him like one would a cat or a dog. It was extremely sensual, like a seduction he hadn't been aware of until now.

"Rob?"

"Hm?"

"We have company."

He couldn't care less. Actually, he was pretty comfortable in the embrace, one freely given, with no reservation. If it was Blake or someone else, he didn't want to acknowledge them.

Another caw, this time louder, almost insolent in its tone, had him frown.


"Five more minutes," he whined.

"Colonel Hogan," came the warning.

He raised his head with a long-suffering groan. "Right when it was getting comfortable."

The blue eyes danced. "You might want to see this."

He turned to look around. And froze.

On the empty barrels that had served as camp fires in winter sat a raven. Or was it a crow? It was a black bird of the raven family anyway. He wasn't really a bird person.

"That's…” He frowned. "A bird."

"A crow."

"Okay."

Klink's touch was still there, a grounding connection, making it all real. Especially when something
furry, four-legged and pointy-eared came from around the barrel, like it had been hiding there.

"And a… wolf?" Will commented, sighing. "I should have figured."

"You… should have? And that's no wolf. Looks like a scrawny coyote."

The animal in question cocked its head, looked at them, then suddenly darted off. Into thin air. It simply disappeared. The crow took off and with two flaps of its impressive wings it was gone, too.

"Spirit animals. We got them. Crap. I need a drink," Hogan murmured.

But he wasn't letting go and actually dropped his face against the warm neck again, sinking into the sensation of his Guide letting him this close. Sharing a bed had never been this… intimate. It had been more affectionate, sharing warmth and reassuring themselves that the other was fine. Mostly Hogan calming his Sentinel side, which had only grown more possessive and territorial over the past weeks.

This… was so very, very different and new.

He pressed a close-mouthed kiss against the naked, warm skin.

After a long moment he tensed.

"Uh, Will? You okay? I mean, with this?"

Strong arms squeezed around him. "I am okay." The man sounded absolutely fine, too.

"Is this Christmas? Easter? My birthday? All of the above?"

It got him a chuckle. "No."

From far in the distance there was a caw.

Hogan laughed and shook his head, finally detaching himself. He looked into the narrow face, the bright blue eyes, and had to smirk.

"You enjoyed that."

"It was a hug, Hogan."

"Yeah." And a little more. Actually, a lot more. It had launched something inside Hogan that wanted out, but he had no idea how to let it out. "Followed by getting to know two very weird spirit animals. Ours, I believe. If they are Blake and Rollins'… I really don't want to know."

"They would be ours."

"So which one is you?"

Klink raised an eyebrow. "You think I would know?"

"Hey, Guides know such stuff. Don't you have a feeling?"

"American Guides, maybe."

And there he went walking into that situation with his eyes wide open. "Will… I… sorry."

A strong hand curling into his shirt and pulling him back from his planned retreat stopped him.
"We're both not very knowledgeable in this, Rob. Actually, in all matters where Guides and Sentinels connecting on such intimate levels are concerned. You might want to ask Major Blake or Captain Rollins."

"No way," he growled.

"You could also ask him about what it's like to have a Guide," came the teasing addition.

Hogan's eyes flashed. "I don't care what he has with Rollins. We're not them."

"No. Definitely not. We are… very complicated."

The Sentinel laughed softly. "Yeah. Complicated. Sums up everything from day one to today."

The crow landed on the roof, silent, like a ghost, surreal and real in one. The coyote sat at the corner of the building, tail wrapped around its slender form, covering the paws. It had predominantly reddish brown fur interspersed with black and white.

Hogan had to laugh. "There goes the bald iron eagle, hm?"

"Sadly. But a coyote fits you just fine. Even if it's a rather scrawny one."

The coyote in question tilted its head almost comically, then looked up at the bird, huffing in what could be interpreted as indignation. The bird looked back and if Hogan didn't know any better, he would say it appeared exasperated.

Both men were still very near each other and Hogan finally took a gamble. He closed that last distance and placed a soft kiss against Will's lips.

There was a moment's hesitation, then the kiss was answered. It wasn't the angels singing or sparks flying or explosions of lights behind his eyes. It was far more subtle, like a hum between them, a confession made without words. It was warm, deep, slow, speaking of emotions the Sentinel was still working through. When he pulled back, Hogan watched the other man expectantly, quizzical and slightly hesitant.

"That's… new," Klink murmured, blinking.

He didn't look like he was either about to bolt or send a mental blow at the Sentinel. Actually, he was rather open at the moment, accessible, and Hogan wanted to lean in so much closer, enjoy the psychic warmth.

"Bad?" he probed carefully.

"No." Klink tilted his head a little. "It felt nice."

"Nice is good," Hogan replied, forcing himself to relax again. He hadn't even noticed how tense he had been. "I… liked it, too."

With everything else, with the physical and mental closeness, with all that had happened, the kiss had been more of an end than a beginning. As if everything had led to this single contact. Nothing more. Wrapping up what had been scattered everywhere, paving the way for this strangely progressing relationship.

The next kiss was slow, Hogan taking the lead but leaving his Guide a way out, but Will didn't. He just responded in kind.
"I think we should get back before they send out Heidi, Gerda and Inga," the Sentinel murmured when they parted.

"Ladies' man that you are, you would have no trouble swaying a few more," Klink quipped.

Hogan chuckled, enjoying the playfulness, the openness. Right now, all was good in his little world. Not even a bunch of search dogs could put a dent in that.

Their spirit animals had vanished. There was not a feather or tail in sight.

With a last kiss, lips just pressing against lips, he stepped back, but not too far.

"We good?" he asked softly.

"Perfect."

They spent the night in their separate rooms again, but for the very first time Hogan felt his Guide's almost physical presence with him, as if he was right there. It wasn't just that one spot in his mind. It was everywhere.

He liked that.

Like he had enjoyed the embrace and the kiss. It had been different from the times he had kissed a woman, and it had nothing to do with the fact that Will was a man. For the past years he had distracted himself with the women he had wooed. Sometimes it had been just kisses. Sometimes a little more. A few rare times he had gone all the way.

With Will… it was different. So very, very different. What he wanted was… everything. It was an intensely possessive feeling that came from right down deep inside his primal core. There was arousal, there was hunger for something he couldn't describe in words, for something more than just a physical relationship. Sex, sleeping together, seeing the other naked… while he wanted something from Will, it was more than that.

And Hogan knew that though they were approaching this sideways, backwards and in weird leaps, one fact was true for them too: sex would mean a complete bond, opening up completely, letting the other mind inside.

It was a terrifying thought. Not because of who Wilhelm Klink was, but what. Hogan didn't think he would survive the mental energy coming his way. While Klink argued Hogan's mind was as steel cage that would trap him and maybe force him to submit, Hogan himself wasn't so sure.

Whatever happened, and he was sure something would one day, he didn't want to think about it too much.

Not now.

Not when they were still progressing in a positive way.

tbc...
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Okay, smaller chapter today. Almost like the 'morning after' :) And another few steps forward for them.

Touch was casual between them the next morning, but no more than before. Not in that way, anyway. Hogan felt more at ease physically touching his Guide, brushing a hand over his back or giving him a pat as they went about their duties together.

It was… normal now.

It felt easy.

Familiar.

And more intimate than a kiss could be.

Not that those hadn't felt amazing.

The mental closeness was the same as before, but it felt different, too. More intense and still casual enough.

Blake was giving them small frowns from time to time, looking like he was on the brink of saying something, then didn't. Rollins just glanced at them, then shrugged it off and didn't so much as blink twice at Hogan's scowl.

"Colonel Hogan," the Guide addressed him when they were sorting through a never-ending stack of paper. "I have to apologize for myself and Major Blake's behavior. We're simply a little… confused."

"About?" Hogan asked.

"You," was the honest answer.

Hogan crossed his arms in front of his chest, giving the captain a neutral look. "What about me?"

"You and Colonel Klink, actually. Not just you alone, sir. You and the German Colonel have a rather unconventional connection. It is… a little more difficult than expected to not try and put you in a handy category." Rollins did look apologetic and slightly embarrassed. "We know you're a Sentinel, a troubleshooter. We were told about Colonel Klink's abilities as a Blindspot. It's just… you… sometimes… start looking like a bonded alpha pair. For a fraction of a second and then it's gone again."

"Huh."

"It's confusing because you two aren't a typical pair, but you are connected. Strongly. It's a bit… off-setting. We can see it, but then again, not."

Hogan studied the other man, expression still unreadable.
Rollins kept himself at ease, loose limbs and open expression. Perfect Guide, Hogan mused, trying to be no threat.

"Sir, may I ask… is Colonel Klink your bonded Guide?"

There was a long moment of silence, then Hogan just smiled crookedly. "You go and figure it out, Captain."

And with that he left the room. Part of him was laughing hard at the man's utter confusion and still freely reigning embarrassment. Another was grumbling how others should keep out of his life and just let them be in peace.

*

Neither Blake nor Rollins brought up the topic again and by mid-afternoon, after a heavy rain fall that had had everyone hurry inside and mutter about Spring weather changes, Hogan found himself back in Klink's quarters, looking through files dating back to his arrival at Stalag 13. Some of that stuff was highly incriminating for a lot of officers and he had to give it to Klink, the man had known how to squirrel away tidbits, snippets and whole files for later use. Some of it had found their way to the saboteurs without them ever noticing how their Kommandant had orchestrated the whole thing.

Even after the whole revelation of who Colonel Wilhelm Klink really had been in this game, the surprises never stopped. Some of it always caught Hogan unprepared. And surprise always transformed into wonder and pride that this was his Guide now.

Listening to the rain beating against the roof and window panes, he leafed through a stack of notes.

"What did Anna tell you back then, when she left."

Klink looked up from his own files. "What?"

"Don't play dumb. Doesn't suit you any longer."

He put the paper down. "She asked me a question."

Hogan raised his eyebrows, waiting.

"If you are my Sentinel."

"You said no."

"Yes."

Hogan pushed away the notes, looking at the out of uniform Colonel. "What would your answer be today?" he asked carefully, trying to squelch the hope that was rising inside him.

Klink let slender fingers trail over the file folder. He contemplated the words, eyes on the letters he was tracing. Finally he looked up.

"That while I find such a proprietary word… troublesome due to my upbringing and my own experience with Sentinels in general, yes, I would consider you mine."
Hogan's smile was brilliant, open, happy. There was a burst of emotion racing through him, all gooey and warm. "One in a million, huh?"

It got him a small tilt of the head. "One for the record books. The odd pairing."

"I'll have that any day over the boring, normal stuff."

"You would."

"And I don't mind being considered yours, Will," he added, eyes dancing. "Not at all."

The expression in the narrow face was priceless. "Robert…"

"I know." He raised a hand, stopping any kind of protest. "I know what you think and I want you to understand that's not what I mean. Being your Sentinel… is amazing. Even if we never fully open the link between us, I don't want to be alone again. It's not a requirement for me… to be bonded to you to say I'm yours. I like how this… between us… feels, Will. I don't want to work without a partner again."

"It's not how you work," Klink said softly.

"It's how I've worked since coming here, right? Three years and counting. It's like a slow burn and it feels good. Amazing, actually. I like it."

Klink laughed softly, shaking his head. "You would."

"Do you mind?"


"Do you mind being my Guide?" Hogan wanted to know, suddenly so very serious. "You said it was troublesome for you."

"No," Will answered honestly, meeting the dark eyes. "I don't mind at all. Even if it does surprise me," he added with a fine smile. "You wore me down."

"I'm persistent."

"Yes, you do have some devilish traits."

"But you don't mind," he repeated. "That I call you mine?"

"That is on your mind?"

He clenched and unclenched his hands. "In a way. Yesterday… was new. I liked it. I like the way it feels, what it changed between us."

"Nothing has changed," was the mild reply.

"I kissed you, Will."

"I noticed."

"You kissed back."
"That I noticed, too."

"Rollins and Blake noticed something happened. Rollins mentioned that they can't wrap their heads around what we are." The last was said with a little smirk, then he grew serious again.

"Sentinels have a possessive streak," Klink said evenly. "It's their nature. Even troubleshooters who never needed anyone in their life. You always had it one way or the other around me, Robert. It took me a while to understand what being called yours means. I don't mind, actually."

The thrum between them was almost palpable and Hogan felt that exact same possessiveness rise that had been there so strongly and out in the open since that fateful challenge fight. He let it wash over him, along the connection, and Klink swallowed hard.

"And yes, you are trouble," the former Kommandant stated. "A lot of it. Have been since day one."

"Hm, yeah. You made it so easy."

"I had to. Your way of operating in the field is… rather creative, bordering to bizarre and outrageous, Colonel Hogan."

Hogan grinned. "I prefer brilliant and erratic."

"You would."

When the shields cracked open, the vortex of empathic power swirling forward, Hogan watched in awe. It was just for a brief moment, as always, near-overwhelming for his senses, so far beyond any scale he had ever encountered, and yet he didn't fear it.

Because somehow, in some weird, inexplicable way, they matched.

This was Will. The very core of the man who was so much more powerful than anyone could fathom, even Hogan himself.

He was close to his Guide now, sitting next to him on the sofa, pushing aside the files and Klink let him. Hogan met the blue eyes.

"Yesterday… I meant it, Will."

"That you would openly claim me?"

He laughed, breathy and in disbelief. "No. Not that. I like my privacy. No, I meant leaving together. Not leaving you alone here. Ever. We're going to see this through to the end and then I want you by my side."

"Wherever you go."

There was more to those three words and Hogan shook his head. "No. That's not what it means. Not me. I'm not the one in charge or in control. If you want to stay here, I will, too. I want this as a partnership. I know you're still thinking in terms of submission and control, but I don't, Wilhelm Klink. You're my partner in all that matters."

"There is nothing for you here," Klink told him softly, evading his eyes.

"And for you?"

The Guide closed his eyes for a second. "Only ruins."
"Family?"

"It would be so much safer for them if I didn't stay."

Hogan swallowed hard at the evenly delivered words. Even now, after Hitler's death and the fall of his Third Reich, the situation for Guides hadn't miraculously turned better. They were still feared, they were still abused, and it would take so much time and effort to make it hopefully better for future generations.

"Would you come with me, Wilhelm Klink?" he finally asked.

"What are you asking, Rob?"

"I'm asking you to be my Guide, my partner, and to be by my side. Officially. Signed on paper, filed away in my personnel file."

"Robert…"

"I know we're not bonded in any official capacity. I know it's… different for us, that the sexual side is… I don't know what the sexual side is!"

Klink chuckled and shook his head.

Hogan dropped his own head against Klink's shoulder with a groan and the other man carded long fingers into the dark hair, the caress natural, the affection real.

"Is there even such a position for a Guide?" he asked reasonably. "To be a partner? It would imply a temporary, aiding position. A surface connection. We're past that and yet not in any area your government would be familiar with."

"There will be a position now," came the muffled reply. "Because they'll make room for you."

"It might upset your classification system."

"Screw the system."

Will chuckled, tugging gently at the hair. Hogan raised his head. "You like the impossible game plan."

"Keeps me alive."

"Apparently. How do you know this… us… will truly work outside this place?"

Hogan frowned. "We work," he finally said.

Klink shook his head. "I didn't mean us personally. I know we work, Robert. Very well, indeed. What you want is an enemy soldier, a German officer of the Luftwaffe, as your permanent Guide, to be accepted by your military, without questions."

The scowl was fierce, the dark eyes turning almost black. "London has your file. You're marked as an underground operative, Will. Our ally. My ally. And a Guide. One of the million and one reasons I'll give them that you won't be questioned. No one can dispute the bond between a Sentinel and his Guide. They take you, they have to take me, too, and no one will let that happen."

Klink looked at him, meeting his eyes, and he probably felt the fierceness along the connection, how the Sentinel stretched all around him, like he was taking up a defensive position.
He finally cupped Hogan's cheek and managed a weak smile. "Okay."

And that was it. One word. So simple. It didn't even feel like a surrender at all.

Hogan couldn't describe the emotions running through him at that one word, nor could he classify the kiss that seemed to seal the vow. The connection between them was flowing back and forth and he embraced it.

His Guide.

He leaned forward, letting all of that flow into their kiss, that he would never let go, no matter what they were to the outside world, no matter what anyone thought.

Happiness spread through him when the kiss was answered openly, easily.

He surged forward, physically and mentally, pushing the other man against the backrest of the couch, one hand sliding under the open jacket and encountering warmth and firm muscles.

The way Klink was curling his fingers into the leather of Hogan's flight jacket, keeping him close, spoke volumes.

When they parted, Hogan was so very tempted to take this a little bit further, but reason and common sense stopped him. From the expression in those blue eyes, Klink knew it just as much as Hogan that it was a bad idea to push forward.

"Okay," Hogan murmured. "We're okay."

"Yes, we are," Klink replied, running an affectionate caress over his side.

"And I think I need to have a look around the base."

"Yes, you do."

He grinned as he stood, feeling that grounding sensation, that deep calmness settling inside him, a heaviness that wasn't a bother or weighing him down.

Yes, Klink was an amazing man.

"Colonel," he said, offering a sloppy salute.

"Get out," was the amused reply.

"Yes, sir."

And he did, a wide smile on his face.

tbc...
Chapter 17

There had been a trip to Düsseldorf, spending time visiting his family for Klink. It had been a strange kind of reunion, tension coupled with joy. For the first time in so many years he had been back in the house he had grown up in. There had been little to no damage in this neighborhood, either from bombs or grenades, and next to no looting. Many had fled, many more had been drafted and sent to the front to fight, leaving only women and children. His parents, who were too old to be of use, had been spared.

His mother had actually cried when she had seen him, hugging him so tightly Klink had nearly been unable to breathe. His father had tried to be stoic, but the emotions were clear to see. And for Klink they were also clear to feel.

He had come alone, though accompanied by Langenscheidt and Olsen. Klink would have preferred Hogan, but Rob had decided it would be better not to confront them with an American soldier, a special ops Sentinel whom their son was bonded to, and while Will had argued long and hard against that decision, he had accepted it.

So Langenscheidt and Olsen had been his security detail, just in case they ran into any kind of trouble from the Allied soldiers. Both had papers with a special card attached that declared them part of the troops of Field Base 13, but no one wanted to take any chances.

Seeing how his parents had questioned him about every detail of how they had met, connected, worked with one another, it had been the best decision to come alone.

Klink had told them about the past years, about the changes, about Robert Hogan. He had talked for hours, answered questions, had given them a good look into what he had been doing the past years and how much had changed for him.

His parents had been apprehensive about those changes but accepting. Klink wanted to think that his grandfather would have been happy for him, too.

"You like him," his mother said.

Klink played with the delicate cup in his hands, now empty of coffee. "Yes."

"He is a Sentinel."

He nodded. "I know, mother."

Her eyes were on him, showing fear and hope, the fear stronger though. No one in Germany who was a Guide would ever trust a Sentinel and Charlotte Klink was no different. She was the mother of a powerful empath, someone who had hidden himself all his life. Now her son had connected to a Sentinel.

An American.

"You killed for him," Otto stated.
"And impersonated a Sentinel. Briefly. I did what I had to do." He sighed. "It's so very complicated. I can't describe it. I just know it's... different. From everything I ever felt, ever knew, ever saw what Sentinels did to their Guides. I won't say Americans can't be as cruel and abusive as the Gestapo-trained beasts, but Robert isn't like any of those I met in my life."

"You already got close," his mother breathed, wide-eyed.

Yes, he had. So very close and always closer. Klink could feel himself react to Hogan in a way he had never thought possible. His mind was attuned to the other man's, his shields wavering around him in a way that told him he was already letting him closer than the other man was probably aware of. He couldn't think of leaving, of pulling out, of severing what had already formed so strongly.

The kiss... it had been a seal, it had been a door opening, had closed a chapter and started a new book. He had wanted it, still wanted it and so much more now. Wilhelm Klink had started to trust a Sentinel and it felt amazing.

Lotte exchanged a look with her husband. Otto wasn't thrilled, but he wasn't hostile either.

"You will go with him," his father just stated.

And it was as statement, nowhere near a question. He knew his son wouldn't leave the man he had connected to.

"Yes," Will confirmed.

"To America."

"Maybe."

His mother reached out and squeezed his hand, her slender fingers strong, reassuring. "Please bring him to meet us, Wilhelm. I want to get to know the man who managed the impossible." She smiled bravely. "I wish your grandfather could have met him, could have seen you."

"I know," he replied, feeling his throat constrict.

Klink was convinced his grandfather would have liked the unusual American Sentinel.

"You haven't opened up to him. Why?" Otto wanted to know.

"It's dangerous. Robert's mind is self-sufficient as a Sentinel. He doesn't need anyone to guide his senses, to give him a focus as he works, to keep him from zoning out or entering a fugue state. He won't get overwhelmed by what his senses register. He only ever needed someone to help him decompress," Klink explained. "And myself... I can't submit to another mind."

He met his father's knowing eyes. "You already gave him everything else, son."

"This is a step we're both not sure won't end in pain. He is a troubleshooter, an independent Sentinel with a mind that might just be formidable enough to overpower me," Klink said softly. "We could erase each other. I could hurt him very badly. He could do the same to me."

His mother squeezed his hand again, stopping the words. "We always heard about how other Sentinels and Guides bonded and we always thought it was a fairy tale, a myth. Because here, in this Germany, you were never safe, never would have been allowed to be yourself. You have known this man, this Sentinel, for over three years, Wilhelm. I think your instincts are what you need to trust. Even if everyone told you never to trust a man or woman like that."
He closed his eyes, feeling a lot of conflicting emotions battle to come out, to make it past his shields. He loved his parents, would always love them for what they had done for him. Like he had loved his grandfather, who had taught him the basics. His family had given up a lot to keep their gifted son safe.

Now that son was with a Sentinel, and Klink knew they were both growing closer and closer. Sharing space, then a bed, opening up his outer shields to let the other mind so much closer, and finally the kiss. It had launched something and it was heading into a direction he both wanted and feared.

"This is so new," he murmured. "And it feels… good."

"Then let it feel good," Lotte told him.

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Two weeks later, on Klink's next trip home, Hogan had come along. He had packed whatever groceries he could find in storage, dried or canned goods, vegetables and even some chocolate, and he had loaded the car with it.

Klink had stood by, slightly bemused, letting the Sentinel work. His parents could use all of it and would more than likely distribute it among their friends and neighbors.

The actual meeting had been… interesting.

Especially since the man was able to charm his parents into dropping at least part of their guard, talking amiable with them in almost flawless German, and Klink wondered more than once if Hogan was about to ask his father for his son's hand in marriage.

The Sentinel grinned unrepentant when he muttered the words. "Want me to?" he teased, voice so soft it was barely audible.

And he would.

Klink just scowled.

"Your German is very good," Otto said, watching the American like a hawk.

"One of the requirements for my assignment here, sir. Speak the language and play dumb enough that no one would find out."

His father shot Klink a brief look. Will shrugged.

"I didn't know, officially. The Kommandant of Stalag 13 was oblivious to a lot of things. Unofficially I was quite aware of Colonel Hogan's language talents. The same goes for some of his men."

Hogan's grin was equal parts pride and delight.

"You are a good man," Lotte told the American soldier when it was time to go. "I wasn't ready to trust you with my son, Colonel Hogan. But Wilhelm's instincts had always been right and now even more so. It doesn't change the fact that I do not trust a single Sentinel, but I make an exception for the
man my son is so… attached to."

Hogan cleared his throat, eyes widening. He looked almost comically like a deer caught in the headlights.

"Uhm, thank you, Mrs. Klink."

"Call me Lotte or Lotti, Colonel Hogan. We might never meet again, but you are family now."

The American Sentinel was clearly struggling with the acceptance he had found, but he managed a charming smile. "Thank you. And the name is Robert."

Will briefly reached out, empathically only, and wrapped himself around the other man's mind. The surges were not dangerous and Hogan was very well able to contain himself. He was a troubleshooter after all. He wouldn't have been able to come this far in his life. But emotionally Hogan had been suddenly upended and sent adrift. Having Will's mother approve of them had been high on his list, even if he never let it show. The same went for Otto Klink, who nodded at the Sentinel as he shook his hand.

"Take care. Of each other," he added. "The world is a dangerous place. Here more than anywhere else right now. I hope it will change one day, but we won't be here to see it."

Like Germany would change now. And all the other countries involved in this war. So much had happened, all over the world, and it was just now catching up to some.

"Will's life comes first," Hogan promised. "Always."

Will's expression flickered a little, but he said nothing. He hugged his parents.

"Take care," his mother said, voice fierce and yet so fragile in one. "Of yourself, of your Sentinel. He truly is a good man."

His father just hugged him once; silently. But the expression in his eyes spoke volumes.

Both men were silent as they drove back to the new old field base. Klink felt emotions constrict his voice, the prospect of this being the very last visit at home making it even harder. Keeping his parents safe was a priority. It was why he hadn't been in contact for so long. Two visits in such a short amount of time had been almost a luxury.

Hogan stopped the car near an abandoned farm, about just a few kilometers away from the base, and turned to look at his Guide.

"Will."

Klink shook his head. "I am okay. It was… a little unexpected."

Hogan reached out, brushing over the shields, pressing close. "They are your parents."

"And they like you. Not just because you can charm almost everyone either. I didn't think I needed their approval, Rob. I didn't think it mattered so much. But it does. They told me to trust myself, to follow instinct, and that's what I'm doing. I will be by your side, Sentinel. I will not stay here. I can't."
"We could have them relocate to America…"

Another shake of his head. "No. This is their home, as difficult as it is. We talked about it and the decision stands. Germany has to rebuild, to rise out of the ashes and become something new, better… brighter. My father won't leave his home, neither will my mother, and they still have friends here."

Hogan leaned over, ghosting their lips together, and an emotional wave broke between them. It was Klink who deepened the kiss, who pushed forward, and Hogan felt him lean into the safety net the Sentinel represented.

It helped.

Both of them.

So much.

"Seems to be a working method," he teased softly, eyes dark and filled with emotions he couldn't put into words.

"For both of us."

"We are weird."

Klink chuckled. "I believe so."

"Your parents think so, too."

"And they only just met you."

Hogan's smile was all charm. "I'm a catch. Your mother said so."

"She likes to joke."

He grinned more. "She likes me."

Will's answering smile was open and warm. "Yes, she does."

"And so do you. Then again, what's not to like?"

"Do you want a list, Colonel Hogan?"

"You wound me."

The banter was good, smoothing the emotional waves, calming the upheaval. Klink felt tense muscles unknot a little. Finally the tension leached out.

"We should go," he only said.

"Yeah."

Hogan started the car and they drove back onto the road.

* * *
Schultz had finally returned to his wife, his five children, and his toy factory. Whether he could pick up his old job was in the stars. The place had been turned into a munitions factory, had luckily never been bombed, but to return it to its former glory…?

Hogan felt bad for their sergeant and friend, but he knew life would have to go on for everyone.

The man was back a week later, in civilian clothes, carrying packages.

"For all my favorite prisoners," he declared. "Gretchen made this."

The packages were filled with homemade food, chocolates, and other sweets. Of all the over one hundred prisoners, only a handful had remained. The barracks that weren't in use had already been stripped and torn down, the material used to rebuild in town and the surrounding area. His men had refurbished Barrack 2 to be theirs. Insulation, running water, good heating. With just five of them still there, it was big enough. And with Hogan's office empty, it had been turned into a storage area.

Hogan and the crew spent a lot of time talking with Schultz, hearing about his home, and they knew he might not be back a second time. Civilian life was what he had wanted for so long, his old life, one he hadn't wanted to leave after fighting in another war before that.

"Take care, Schultz," Hogan said firmly.


"If he lets me."

The older man smiled. "He will. He already does. You're good for one another. You did all this, Colonel Hogan. All of it. Together. You didn't even know it at first and still you were a wonderful combination. You're so good for one another. I know little about what Sentinels and Guides should be, I only know that what happened in this country was wrong. So many things were wrong."

Schultz looked disgusted by everything. "Don't let Colonel Klink push you away."

"I think we took some steps."

The happy little smile had Hogan chuckle. "Oh, that is so good to hear, Colonel Hogan. But I don't want to know more. That is private. Very private."

He laughed out loud. "Oh, Schultz, it's not what you think."

"No? You have moved in together." Schultz's expression was both devious and teasing in one.

It had Hogan smirk. "If that's your way of asking if we're sleeping together…"

The other man immediately waved his hands. "No, no, no, Colonel Hogan. I want to know nothing about that! Private. So private!"

"We are not," he added with a devilish tone.

Schultz blinked. "But you are bonded."

"Weeeell," Hogan said slowly. "Yes and no. Jein, as you would say. We… made progress, but we're… different."

"Well, yes, you always were," the former sergeant agreed.
"Will and I… we're that one in a thousand combination that isn't by the book. Whoever wrote the book anyway?"

"I don't even know what that means."

"We might just be one in a million. Anyone you ask would have told you it doesn't work. A troubleshooter and a Blindspot. We troubleshooters can work with Guides superficially, but Blindspots don't crack unless they want to."

"He wanted to." Schultz nodded. "For you."

Hogan was silent for a moment. "For me," he finally agreed, voice lower now. "To protect me. He was ready to risk all of himself for a nuisance in his camp."

"Ah, yes, but he knew what kind of a nuisance you were. And still are." Schultz raised a finger, suddenly very serious. "Don't ever abuse the trust he has given you, Colonel Hogan."

"Schultz, believe me, that man could wipe the floor with me. Easily."

"You two share something," the former guard said. "Something very close. It is good for both of you."

Hogan smiled softly. "Yeah, I guess it is."

They shook hands, then Schultz was hugged by the members of his core team, some of them having real tears in their eyes. Everyone had pitched in to create a book of memories, complete with recipes from LeBeau, a group picture, old insignias of rank or just a name, removed from uniforms or caps.

Schultz was openly tearing up, mixing English and German even more. Hogan handed him a potted, red flower as their last gift.

"For Gretchen. For real this time," he said, then saluted the man.

All of them probably wouldn't see him ever again.

tbc...
Chapter 18

They operated for more than four months in total after the liberation of the camp, handling just about anything thrown their way. Major Blake and his Guide stayed for that time and Hogan was getting better and better with another Sentinel so close by.

It was a time where Hogan was busy talking to everyone who had been working for them in the underground, helping them and their families, arranging for French resistance fighters to get home or leave France to England and the US. He knew everyone he had ever been in contact with and he weeded out those who wanted to safe their own bacon by pretending to be underground.

His men did the same with those they had been in contact with, sometimes spending days in Hammelburg or the surrounding area, setting up meetings and collecting names of those who would need new papers.

Arthur Schnitzer was one of those whose family had been in the business of helping the undercover saboteurs. He wouldn't leave Hammelburg and he hadn't asked for anything, but Hogan had made sure the man had the necessary money in his new account to restart his vet business. All the dogs had found new homes, some even with former POWs or underground men and women. Two he had kept.

"What I did was for my country, Colonel Hogan," the man said when they met in the former Kommandantur to discuss monetary help. "My now free country."

"We owe you a massive amount of debt and gratitude, Doc. You and your family."

"It was my honor."

"You're not getting out of owning that money. Or getting those papers."

Schnitzer chuckled. "I accept, Colonel Hogan. Thank you." He looked around the office that no longer looked like a Luftwaffe officer resided in here. "I can't believe that we won. Sometimes my wife has to pinch me."

"Yeah. It came suddenly and not suddenly enough."

"I wish you all the luck in the world, Colonel. You and your men. And your Guide."

He nodded. "Thank you, Doc. If you change your mind about leaving, you know who to contact."

"It's my home. It wasn't my country for a very long time, but it will be again." The man rose and they shook hands. "God bless you."

Klink spent a lot of time around everyone at the former Stalag. He didn't hide in his personal quarters, nor did he hide behind the current commanding officer in charge. He was a quiet, self-assured and rather commanding presence all on his own, which had Hogan shoot him little grins. Sometimes he would just sit among the empty barracks, eyes on the demolition around him. Half the buildings had been torn down to be used as firewood or supplies for anyone in the surrounding town by now. There was a lot of emptiness stretching toward the fence that was no longer guarded by
German soldiers. The fence still existed for safety reasons, but it the men were wearing American uniforms.

It was a strange sight. Liberating somehow. Soon that fence would be no more, too.

"Deep thoughts?"

Hogan sat down beside him on the wooden bench, legs stretching out in front of him as he leaned back against the wall behind him. He tilted his face toward the sun. Summer was coming, temperatures rising, though the nights still had cold spells.

"Enjoying yourself?" Klink asked.

"I asked first."

He smiled. "No, no deep thoughts. Just... thoughts."

"Reminiscing? Good old times?"

"I am not sure you could call the past years 'good old times'."

Hogan shrugged, eyes closed, looking unhurried and almost tranquil. "We had fun sometimes."

"Are you including me in that 'we'."

"Don't tell me it didn't secretly amuse you every time we got Burkhalter or Hochstetter or any of the others."

"There is that."

"So. Fun."

Klink chuckled. "Yes. You called it fun, Robert. You gave me a lot of gray hair."

"Figuratively speaking."

The Guide shot him a mild scowl, but the other man still had his eyes closed.

"So, no deep thoughts," Hogan continued conversationally.

"A lot has changed and it still changing," Klink said. "It sometimes takes a while to sink in and then I need some time to digest it."

There was a brief moment of silence, then Hogan turned his head, dark eyes open, looking at his partner.

"About us?"

"That has sunk in. I'm not going to pull the emergency brakes," the former Kommandant said calmly.

Hogan's hand was suddenly on his knee, squeezing it. "This was home for a while," he said softly, voice serious. "I understand what it's like to leave something behind. Or someone. This might not be your real home, but it's not just about the camp anymore, right? It's about your country."

"I made my decision."

"Still hard."
Especially after saying good-bye to everyone who had been under his command already. There wasn't a single German soldier left. Schultz had been among the last to leave and it had been hard. Very, very hard. His sergeant had known so much more than he had ever let on to anyone else. He had known about Klink's nature as a Guide. And he had protected Klink in his own way.

To the outside world Schultz had been this loveable, slightly oblivious and good-natured sergeant who would rather go home than watch over Allied prisoners. A man who had had no side in the war and had still favored the enemy of the country he had been born in.

To Wilhelm Klink the Guide, Hans Schultz had been a friend. A very good and absolutely trusted friend. It had been a running joke that Klink would apply for a book keeper job should the toy factory open up again.

Now Schultz was home, with his family, and Klink was one of the last to leave the former prison camp.

Klink closed his eyes, leaning back against the wall, enjoying the closeness to his Sentinel, letting his mind settle on the powerful presence, just like he felt Hogan anchor on him in turn.

He was ready to go, to leave this place behind. Should he ever come back there would be nothing left, except an empty field. It was better this way.

And maybe he wouldn't ever be back.

*

There was not much for any of them to pack. Hogan's possessions were everything he had come into camp with over three years ago, which had been his uniform and his flight outfit. No personal effects aside from the wallet, but that held no sentimental values. The posters and pin-ups, the maps and little trinkets, it all had been thrown away.

The same went for Klink. He had a life in this camp, had had personal quarters with personal effects, but none really personal. The picture of his old squad had come off the wall, but it hadn't been packed. Nor had there been anything he had really been attached to. No medals, no commendations, no photos. His life, like Hogan's, had been packed up in a duffel bag. Unlike his Sentinel, the Guide didn't even have his original papers anymore.

Stalag 13's forgery had outdone themselves to outfit the guards and their Kommandant with perfectly forged new papers before the Allied troops had arrived, and the papers had been distributed later on.

Klink would always be German-born and he would always love his country, even if the country had been run by a nut-job who had stoked the fear of empathically powered people among so many other fears. Klink had been born with a target on his back and the need to always hide, but he couldn't turn his back completely on the country he had lived in for so long.

"Finally got your date of birth right," Hogan commented as he looked at the papers.

Blue eyes looked at him, slightly startled.

"Oh please," Hogan said, surprised. "You didn't really think I bought that you were already closing in on fifty, right? The officials did somehow, though. How?"
"Good connections."

He raised his eyebrows, silently prompting his Guide to explain more.

"My grandfather had an old friend. He… helped along in hiding me in plain sight, so to speak. Being of an old aristocratic but very poor line gives you the pity and the safety you need to fly under the radar. Add a few years here or there, it helps in disappearing in the system. With Schultz I had someone to switch facts with."

"I told you," Hogan teased. "You look younger. Even without the hair. And Schultz actually never looked like forty either, but looks aren't anything to go by."

It got him a chuckle. "Compliments will get you nowhere, Colonel Hogan."

He closed the distance between them, giving Klink enough time to say no, though Hogan had no illusions about his Guide's abilities to stop him from doing anything the man didn't want. He leaned closer, capturing Klink's lips in a gentle, probing kiss.

The even gentler hum along the bond had him smile into the kiss.

"Okay?"

The blue eyes studied him. It was like a look deep into his soul, enhanced by the empathic touch, the brush of the strong and powerful and very composed mind against his.

"You have to ask? Or were the ladies never satisfied?"

"Oh, they were. Kept coming back for seconds."

"I suspect as much."

Hogan smiled and kissed him again, relaying more than words had ever said. "I like this," the Sentinel murmured, thumb brushing over one cheek. "Ready?" he asked.

"Let's go," his Guide just said.

They didn't move for a long moment, then Will leaned in for a last close-mouthed kiss.

"Let's go," he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

*

He had once said he would leave this camp through the front gates, not through a tunnel.

And he did.

All of them did, one final time.

Hogan, in his full dress uniform, all insignias in place, accompanied by his inner circle, who were also wearing dress uniforms of their respective ranks, armies and nationalities, looked at the place
that had been their home, their base, and a bit of nostalgia hit him.

Klink was at his side, expression distant, almost unreadable. He stood tall, shoulders squared, looking very much the soldier he had been underneath all the bluster and pretense. The way their bodies aligned and touched, Hogan knew this was something truly weirdly emotional for him, too.

There had been some very close contact between them just before leaving the Kommandantur the very last time. The kiss had been to calm nerves, to anchor his Guide as much as the man anchored him. Will's response had been warm, willing, calming Hogan's more tense side of the bond they shared.

Yes, kisses worked that way. It was weird, but the small form of intimacy was like a lightning rod that bled off all that excess energy.

They had done their duty.

It was time to go home.

Major Blake saluted him, as did Captain Rollins. Both men would remain a few days longer to make sure all equipment that was left behind would be destroyed, then they were on their way to another base.

"Colonel Hogan," Blake said. "Colonel Klink. It was an honor to get to know you and work with you. Have a safe trip home."

Hogan returned the salute, as did Klink, even if he was no longer in uniform. "Same here. It was… interesting."

Blake chuckled. "Yes."

Rollins just smiled.

Then they joined their men in the troop transporter that would get them to the next stopping point on their way home.

"Will?" he asked as he watched the former Stalag grow smaller and smaller behind them.

A strong hand entwined their fingers and Hogan squeezed back.

There was a soft pressure against Hogan's mind and he opened up, let the other mind slide closer, and for the first time since they had come together as Sentinel and Guide, Wilhelm Klink didn't just crack the door open.

It was a lot more.

It was a single-minded attention that left him almost breathless with its intensity. A wave of reassurance rose, flowed toward him, the bond vibrating warm and comforting.

Hogan looked at him, stunned. Klink said nothing, just met his disbelieving expression.

"Thank you," he murmured and brushed over the warmth next to his own mind.
As the field base disappeared from sight, Klink felt his Sentinel's calm touch, the other mind so close it was right next to him, within his shields, where it belonged.

No one batted an eye when their hands stayed with each other, anchoring them.

Klink closed his eyes, head resting against the back of the car's semi-comfortable seats, and he leaned mentally against the man next to him, letting the Sentinel be his safety net.

Hogan squeezed his hand.

He understood.

Because he felt the same.

The elation of the victory, the prospect of going home, leaving this place, battled with the heavy realization that he would leave everything else behind, too. Klink had thought about this day, again and again, seeing himself either a prisoner or a fugitive, but never with the man he had protected for so long by his side.

That had only become a reality over the last months. Slowly. Doggedly, but slowly.

Now here they were: leaving.

"I'm fine," he whispered, just loud enough for a Sentinel to hear.

Maybe it was a little lie now, but it would be the truth in the near future.

*

When they passed through Hammelburg, past the many places that had been the stage of their play, the lump in his throat grew even more.

Hogan smiled, but saying good-bye to the many brave men and women who had helped them over the years, who had fought, suffered and lost friends for their case, was hard.

There was a last good-bye at the Hauserhof. Klink was stunned by how many shook his hand, nodded their thanks, and one woman even hugged him fiercely.

His shields were firmly in place.

It still hurt.

"Too much." It wasn't even a question. Hogan's statement reflected what they all felt.

The party was too much, the emotional wave drowning them. Everyone was working through feelings they either expressed in tears, laughs, hugs or just looks, no matter who or what they were. Hogan and Klink saw it through. Together. Neither man leaving the other for more than a minute, always barely any room between them.
Some of those they would now forever leave behind, the Germans who would rebuild their lives and hope for a better future, knew what had happened between the two so apparently different men.

Hogan needed fresh air after a while, the air oppressive and filled with both hope and dread, and while he had never been sensitive enough to require a time-out from such things, he needed it now. Klink was there, leaning against the wall with him, just looking at the dark town around them.

Hogan exhaled slowly. "I hate good-byes," he whispered.

"I never thought I'd have to say them," Klink murmured. "To so many. I saw myself… differently."

As a prisoner. Handcuffed, under guard, people shouting abuse and insults as he was turned over to new authorities to be tried and probably shot. It had been the topic of many talks between them. He had never expected anyone to thank him, shake his hand, tell him they were grateful.

Hogan dropped his head on one narrow shoulder, drawing a little smile. "You think about this moment, but when it comes, it hurts. These people in there, they were the backbone of the operation outside. Many were captured or worse. We couldn't save them all. And still, they say we're the heroes." He sounded exhausted, showing it more openly than when he was among people.

"Rob…"

He shook his head against the material of Klink's leather jacket. His Guide turned and gathered him into a hug, wrapping his arms around the other man. Nothing anyone could say would make this better, but at least no one was alone.

They stayed like this for a while, the noise of the people, the chatter and laughter, washing over them. Klink had all shields in place, except for the connection to his Sentinel, which Hogan appreciated immensely. It was his lifeline in such emotionally turbulent times.

It was incredibly grounding for both of them.

Dry lips brushed over his temple, his forehead as Klink ran his hands over the smartly fitting uniform jacket.

"C'mon," he murmured and pushed back, masks falling back into place as the Colonel took charge. "We got a party that's just for us."

Klink nodded, a faint smile on his lips.

Come morning, as the cars left Hammelburg, with them the men of Stalag 13, many waved, crying or smiling.

On both sides.

Hogan kept the mask on, the commander in charge for the last time. He saluted those who gave them their farewell.

tbc…
This chapter would have been out sooner if not for Work, Life and Stuff happening. Especially Work. *grumbles* So this is a smaller part than I had wanted to post. More to come. Got two days off, yay!

Hogan had his first real shower in three years at the Allied field base they had arrived at after leaving Hammelburg. It had been late in the evening when the cars had rolled onto the grounds, rain coming down in sheets. They had just been written down as the new-arrivals, given passes and been assigned quarters. Everyone had gathered for a late dinner, looking strangely out of their depths now the assignment was truly over, but they talked as if nothing was new.

Klink had been almost reserved, slightly more withdrawn than Hogan knew him to be, and he had pulled up all shields like it was the only thing keeping him safe. He was completely invisible to any Sentinel or Guide who happened to be around, and even Hogan felt only a muted connection to the man he had come to depend on in so many little ways.

It had him slightly more on edge than he would ever confess to. Not because he missed the growing connection, but because it meant Klink didn't trust anyone, was trying to keep under the radar, and he might just be manipulating people around him into ignoring him. He had done it all his life and Hogan knew that old habits died very, very hard. If at all.

Damn.

He didn't like that one bit.

When they had arrived, had had their papers checked, there had been a few curious looks, but Klink didn't stand out as German by appearance alone. With his civilian clothes, a woolen hat on his head, he looked like almost anyone.

They were rooming in together, with two separate bunks, a small table, a closet that was barely large enough to hold even their small collection of personal belongings, and one lonely chair.

"Will?" Hogan asked.

It got him a tired smile. Klink had been through the same emotional wringer as all of them and it was starting to show. The human being was cracking while the Guide kept everything tightly under wraps.

"I'll be fine," was the quiet reply.

"Sure."
Sleeping in separate beds grated on him some more, but the Sentinel wouldn't let it show. He had been independent for so long, had managed on his own, and while he still didn't need help with his senses, the companionship was something he no longer wanted to miss.

*

Hogan had slept a few hours, waking a little more cranky than the evening before. The weather was still abysmal, clouds low and threatening more rain, and the wind had picked up. He slipped out of the shared quarters and headed for the shower. Hot water as long as he pleased, sanitary conditions, products, and clean towels were an incredible luxury. He took his time, close to abusing the privilege of running hot water, and when he finally exited the facilities, he felt almost like new.

At least on the outside.

He nodded as a few soldiers walked by, no one giving him more than a cursory look. It was strange to be here, still in Germany but in a place that could be in the US for all the personnel running around. Hogan and his men had been assigned quarters, had been issued passes, and been told not to leave the compound until they had been debriefed. Again.

Hogan had a meeting with the base commander today, to hand over everything he and his men had stored, collected and filed away one way or the other over the years. All the codes, information and data had been compiled into a neat package. A thick folder served as the index file. The package itself was overflowing with rolls of film, paper, books and booklets, and pictures.

His last job on German soil, he mused as he dried himself off. There would probably be a dozen or more deb Briefings to follow, but with the handover Colonel Robert E. Hogan would be relieved of his command of the saboteur group of Stalag 13.

Today it would make everything final.

There was a lump in his throat and his stomach was clenching at the very thought.

Damn, damn, damn!

His world was somehow coming apart, though another part had finally slid into place to make it whole again. Hogan had no idea how to handle this, how to handle himself, and he was drifting in and out of happiness and mourning.

When he walked back into his quarters he found Klink at the desk, already dressed and drinking coffee.

Still a perfect Blindspot.

He really, really hated it.

"Where did you find that?" he asked, nodding at the cup.

"Actually LeBeau found it and distributed a whole pot among the others. He was just here and left two cups."

Hogan inhaled the black liquid, sighing to himself. "Real coffee. Really good, real coffee."
"Don't tell me you didn't have that stacked down in the tunnels."

He chuckled. "Yeah, as currency and to bribe."

"I know that Hilda was quite expensive that way."

Hogan sat down on the bed, wet hair tousled, needing a shave, but feeling rather good at the moment.

"Yeah, she knew her worth in coffee, perfume and nylons."

Despite the easy words, the heaviness on his mind didn't lift. Hilda was one of the many people on his mind. She had been among the first to leave. Hogan had sent Newkirk to keep her from coming into the camp two days before the final surrender of Germany had come through. There had been no good-byes and she hadn't been at the party in Hammelburg. Hilda was safe and sound somewhere else, with a new life, a new past, and his eternal gratefulness.

Hogan had tried to feel at home on the American base, but unlike Stalag 13 this base wasn't his territory and there were other Sentinels. He had run into one yesterday, low-level, probably one or two senses, and his Guide. Both had stared at him and Klink, the Guide curious, the Sentinel defensive, as the two of them had walked by.

Will's eyes held a knowing expression. "You are tense, Rob."

"It's rather… difficult not to be. I'm trying, though. It grates on me."

"The change of scenery? The good-byes? The very real fact that we are leaving everyone behind?"

He scrubbed a hand over his eyes. "All?"

And the fact that you're cutting yourself off from even me! a part of him yelled.

Klink changed seats to Hogan's bed and their knees knocked gently against each other. They drank their coffee, the silence rather comfortable, until there was a knock on the door. It had Hogan glare.

His Guide smiled tightly, almost apprehensively, and rose. He opened the door for a young corporal who was standing so much to attention Hogan feared he would break something.

"Colonel Hogan, Colonel Klink."

"Corporal."

"You are scheduled for a medical check-up at 0900 hours and General Wheeler requests you to meet him for lunch at 1300 hours."

Hogan nodded. "We'll be there, corporal. Thank you."

General Adam Wheeler was Air Force and had risen through the ranks at top speed, which made him one of the younger commanders Hogan had met in his time in the military. He wasn't a Sentinel, but he had experience working with them, which was a big plus.

The corporal snapped another salute, then walked away. Klink had to chuckle, shaking his head.

"You better get ready, Rob," he told his Sentinel. "We have an appointment with a doctor and a general."
Hogan sighed and emptied his cup.

"Another day, another general. You know, I'm starting to miss Stalag 13," he murmured as he pulled on his uniform. "We had roll-calls and surprise inspections, but the Kommandant was a nice enough guy."

Klink chuckled. "Don't tell General Wheeler."

"I should." Hogan brushed over his jacket. "Ready?"

His Guide was. More than ready and still in civilian clothes, which were so wrong, he thought darkly. Klink was a colonel, but wearing a German uniform was a surefire way to get into trouble. Being a civilian was safer.

"Ready."

Hogan met the blue eyes, wanted to tell him, order him, to drop the shields, but he didn't. Right now he would have to suffer through the strange kind of separation, let Klink fight this out himself. Maybe after the debriefing he would have a word with his Guide.

They walked down the corridor just as a group of pilots entered from the outside, chatting among themselves. All were in their late twenties, American, in full flight uniform, and radiating the cocky self-assuredness of someone who knew they were good and had won the war.

One looked at Klink, brows lowering for a moment, then his eyes narrowed. He whispered something to the others, disdain on his features as his eyes darted from Klink to Hogan and back. Hogan, who couldn't be missed as a superior officer in his uniform, tensed and his eyes suddenly grew icy black.

"Lieutenant," he said coolly and the man startled, quickly snapping a salute, though his eyes dared to flicker toward Klink.

"Colonel," he answered.

"Care to repeat that?" Hogan asked pleasantly, but with a slightly more murderous tone to his voice.

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw a shadow coalesce into the shape of the coyote. It was prowling near the group of pilots.

"Sir?"

Hogan's stance shifted minutely, muscles coiling as he prepared himself almost unconsciously. On the outside he still looked mostly at ease, like nothing had happened, but inside the storm was growing. All senses were now primed on the pilot.

"Insulting a superior officer, Lieutenant Ford?"

The man flushed, then paled in one. The name was clear to read to anyone on his jacket, but Hogan was far enough away that any normal human being wouldn't have been able to see it. Or hear what had been whispered.

"I didn't say anything, sir."
"You called Colonel Klink a, I quote, murderous piece of shit that should have been shot before being allowed on this base." Hogan's tone of voice hadn't changed. It had, if at all possible, grown even more friendly, but by now he was thrumming with tension.

Next to him, his Guide hadn't so much as twitched a muscle. Klink was a statue, devoid of emotions. His eyes were on the pilot, but Hogan felt not a single blip from him.

"You must have misheard, Sir…"

"Misheard, hm?" Hogan echoed. "Lieutenant Ford, please enlighten me: do you know who I am?"

"Uhm, you are one of the liberated POWs that arrived last night?" Ford looked like he wanted to add something, eyes briefly on Klink, he visibly fought down the words.

"My name is Colonel Robert Hogan, Lieutenant. I am a troubleshooter."

The man's face lost all color. His eyes were comically large and Hogan smiled charmingly.

"You might be familiar with the concept of Sentinels," he went on conversationally. "Like enhanced hearing or sight. Which I have. Actually, all five of my senses are perfectly enhanced."

Now the man had a distinct shade of gray around the edges.

"Another concept is the Guide, lieutenant," Hogan continued, voice in a kind of flowing lecture mode. His eyes were cold, though. Absolutely cold. "This man next to me, is Colonel Wilhelm Klink. My Guide."

By now the staccato beat of Ford's heart was close to tripping over itself. "I…I…"

Hogan's eyes were without emotion. His voice was low, cold and flat, losing that faux friendly edge. The frustration of the last days, the good-byes, the loss, the sadness, it all coalesced into one very bad mood. Ford had chosen the wrong moment to make himself a target by spouting slurs.

"You might want to think about what you say in front of whom, Lieutenant. Especially concerning the people of this country you just liberated. Not every Germany national is a Nazi. Not every German national is a killer. Open abuse of those we freed from the nut case who slaughtered his own people is punishable by military law. You accused a Guide of such crimes, Lieutenant. Do you know what Gestapo-trained Sentinels did with their Guides?"

The spirit coyote's ears were flat on its head and it was baring sharp teeth in a silent snarl. It no longer looked even remotely cute. The teeth seemed sharper, longer, and the eyes were a reflection of Hogan's: flat, black and icy.

The other pilots had already shifted a little away from their fellow flyer, some shooting very nervous looks Hogan's way, who was by now radiating imminent death to whoever made a wrong move.

"Sir, Colonel, I…"

Or said a wrong word.

"Do you know what they did to Guides, Lieutenant Ford?" Hogan repeated icily, the full power of his command in every word.

The other pilots nodded slowly and Ford did the same, just faster, and he looked ready to faint.

"Sir, I…"
The lieutenant fell silent, voice fading, as Hogan just stared at him. The coyote was watching the man like he was its next meal, still prowling around him, unseen to anyone but the Sentinel and the Guide.

Klink had yet to intervene. He was watching, almost curiously, ready to keep the Sentinel from harming the pilot, but otherwise he didn't say one word.

"Colonel Hogan."

The new voice had them all start, except for Hogan and Klink. The pilots snapped to complete attention, eyes front. Hogan's eyes slid briefly toward the newcomer, sizing him up for threat.

The coyote did the same. The crow had appeared out of thin air, sailing in on silent wings, and now it landed on the coyote's back. It cawed softly, sharp beak tugging on one pointed ear. The coyote shook its head, shooting the black bird an annoyed look.

Blue eyes met Hogan's, calm and without challenge, but also not backing down from his own challenge. There was a quiet aura of command around the man.

"General," he answered respectfully, though there was still no emotion, except the underlying threat of murder should Ford or anyone else so much as twitch.

General Adam Wheeler glanced at the assembled pilots, took in the situation, eyes briefly on the Sentinel-Guide team.


"Yes, sir," came the chorus.

Hogan watched the offender go, eyes still frosty, and a small but very intense part of him, that primeval core every Sentinel possessed, wanted to be let loose and tear Ford's throat out. Klink's presence was suddenly there, grew more pronounced and then embraced the bristling presence, the hard core of thrumming energy.

It was like a plug had been pulled and the aggression depleted, leaving room for the presence of his Guide as Klink finally allowed the barriers to fall at least a little bit. Just between them. To the outside he still didn't exist as anything else than a normal human being.

"Colonel Klink," Wheeler addressed him formally, nodding a respectful greeting. "I apologize for the lieutenant's behavior. I'll talk to his captain."

"He won't be the only one biased and full of anger toward my country's soldiers and even the civilians," Klink said reasonably, no malice or animosity in his words or expression.

"No, he probably won't. Challenging a Sentinel's bonded Guide, treating him with disrespect, open contempt, maybe even spread slander, is nothing I will tolerate when I see or hear it," Wheeler told him evenly.

Hogan rumbled, then caught himself and looked apologetic. "General."

Wheeler held up a hand. "I expect no less from you, Colonel Hogan. While I'm not a Sentinel, I know enough men and women who are Sentinels or Guides. London has briefed me on your status and suspected classification. Ford is lucky to still be in one piece of those rumors are correct."

The general raised an eyebrow and Hogan just shifted, shrugging a little.
The spirit animals had disappeared as if they had never been there.

Wheeler looked up and down the now empty corridor. "Let's continue this conversation somewhere else. You were planning to meet me anyway, am I correct?"

Hogan nodded briskly. "Yes, sir. For lunch. We have a medical appointment scheduled."

"I'll get a notice to Dr. Reeves. I think we can reschedule that."

"Yes, sir."

Wheeler made an inviting gesture down the corridor. "Now, by all means, let us finally meet. Your reputation has preceded you, though I didn't think it would have me meet you while you were about to dismember one of my pilots."

The Sentinel just shrugged. Klink shot him an unreadable look, falling in step beside the man.

"You're known for your bizarre, sometimes outrageous and usually off-beat style of getting things done. I shouldn't have expected anything else when your Guide was insulted."

"I'm usually much better at keeping myself in check, sir." Hogan said and walked into the general's office.

Klink gave him another look, which he ignored.

"As I said, I know quite my share of Sentinels and their Guides." Wheeler offered them both a drink. Hogan accepted, Klink declined. Wheeler poured himself a generous shot and Klink accepted a glass of water. "You might be an unusual combination, but your act like everyone else when it comes to threats. Now, I'd like to talk to you, both of you, about field base Stalag 13 and you operations. Your crew will be debriefed in my company as well."

"Ask away, sir."

tbc...
The rest of the day passed answering a million questions from Wheeler, going over old reports, giving him a more personal view of the events at Stalag 13.

"I have to give you and everyone involved in this operation my greatest respect," Wheeler said when they were done. "What you risked was more than anyone could expect or even imagine. Your ingenuity saved a lot of lives, Colonel." He shook both their hands. "I suspect your status as a Sentinel and his bonded Guide will make it down the grapevine of the base," the general went on. "I will make sure you are treated with respect, Colonel Klink."

"Thank you, General Wheeler. I understand the lieutenant's anger, though. The atrocities that happened…"

"None of that was you!" Hogan snapped, another surge rising between them.

"No, none of that was me, but he doesn't know that. He can't understand it." Klink kept his voice reasonable and even, eyes on his Sentinel.

"He better not cross my path again."

Wheeler looked between them, then twitched a smile. "I'll talk to Captain McCarthy. I think we can arrange that. Ford is stationed here for the time being, but you're simply passing through. You won't be seeing much of each other for that time."

"Good," was the dark answer.

Klink rolled his eyes, drawing a smile from the general.

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The medical check-up had been moved into the late afternoon. Both men were examined separately, which Hogan almost objected to, but he kept his tongue. Especially since Will had told him to grow up about it. It was just something else on the list they had to do and they would do it.

It turned out to be yet another nightmare that had Hogan seriously question the attitude of the medical personnel to Sentinels and Guides. Well, himself and Klink. Dr. Miller was a pleasant man, capable, calm, quiet, but clearly had been in the military for all his life. His bedside manner was atrocious and the questions he asked and the comments he had about a lot of stuff had Hogan want to turn in his resignation and just go.

Of course, Hogan checked out fine. Despite being a POW, he and all his men had kept fit, had snagged additional rations when they went into town on missions, and they had squirreled away enough treats and supplements to keep themselves in shape. Every single one had been important, had been needed. Running their missions had required peak physical fitness, which had been one reason for the weights room in the tunnels, as well as getting everyone to do the mandatory physical exercises ordered by their Kommandant.

"I am surprised, Colonel Hogan," Miller said slowly. "Normally prisoners of war come in
undernourished with signs of mistreatment or abuse. You and your men present as fit individuals, with a robust nature and no such signs of enforced labor or prolonged starvation, maybe torture at the hands of the Stalag's guards. Physical and mental scars are to be expected."

Hogan felt something dark rise again, but he kept his emotions in check. "Good Red Cross packages," he just said blithely.

Miller shot him a doubtful look.

"It says here you are a troubleshooter, have been undercover for a little over three years," he went on. "How are your senses, Colonel?"

"Absolutely fine," he answered coolly.

"No fugues? No overload? Hyper-sensitivity?"

"No."

"You didn't go into the camp with a Guide and never had one there?"

"Dr. Miller, with all due respect, you do know what I am?" Hogan asked evenly.

"You are a troubleshooter. A military trained Sentinel, four senses, and an autonomous mind." Miller leafed through the file. "Ah, yes, your training. You can function without a Guide, though after such a prolonged amount of time, even autonomous minds shut down." He scribbled something down.

Hogan's eyes narrowed. "This isn't an evaluation of me being a Sentinel, Dr. Miller."

Miller met the dark eyes calmly. "Yes, it is. You have apparently found a Guide in Colonel Klink. Your status should be evaluated again. As a troubleshooter, bonding with a Guide shouldn't happen. It did to you."

"We are not bonded."

"You show all the signs. Colonel Klink is apparently your anchor and focus."

"We are not bonded," he repeated, voice flat.


Hogan felt muscles tense, the instinct to fight rising. "This examination is over," he stated coldly.

"I beg to differ. The standing order for every Sentinel coming back from the field is a full examination."

"As you already said: I am a troubleshooter, Dr. Miller. I was born with the ability to handle myself in any given situation without a Guide to help me with my senses, no matter how long the assignment was. I've been through these reevaluations before. Lots of times. This isn't one of them." Hogan's voice never rose, remained flat, inflectionless, but there was an undercurrent that any sane individual would have heeded.

"Yet you have bonded."

Miller was apparently not one of those individuals.

"Let me say it again, slowly this time: Colonel Klink and I haven't bonded."
"You insisted he is listed as your Guide."

Round and round in circles we go, Hogan thought angrily. "Which he is," he said out loud. "Do you find anything physically wrong with me?"

"No."

"Then this is over now, Dr. Miller."

Miller shook his head. "Colonel Hogan," he snapped. "You are listed as a potential alpha pair."

Hogan's smile was terrible to see. "Yes."

"Unbonded."

"Exactly."

"Highly unlikely. Please sit down and answer my questions. It says here you are classified as a four senses Sentinel, with a chance of a weak fifth sense. Yet you present with five strong senses after your assignment."

Hogan's eyes spoke of bloody murder. "Talk to my superior officer, Dr. Miller. Which would currently be General Wheeler. I refuse to be evaluated in any way. Nor will my Guide be classified. Call us what you want. Alpha. Bonded. Whatever. Or just unclassified, which sounds a lot better to me! I'm ending this. Here and now!"

Miller folded his fingers on Hogan's file. "Then my conclusion would be to suspend you from active duty, Colonel. To pull you from field assignments and have you on desk duty. Unless you agree to a reexamination."

Hogan smiled cheerfully. "Fine by me. I'm up for a long vacation anyway."

With that he walked out the door, careful not to slam it, and almost right into his Guide. One look into the stony, pale face and Hogan knew things had gone less than well for the other man, too. Without a word he grabbed Will's arm and tugged him to follow.

Which Klink did.

Until they were outside the building, fresh air hitting his face, and he expelled a breath.

"Fuck that man!" he whispered sharply.

Klink laughed softly. "You have a way with words, Colonel Hogan."

"I'm not going back in there and he can take his medical exam and shove it up somewhere!"

"I take it the examination went badly?"

Hogan glared. "You think?"

Klink's presence was there, all around him, the connection warm and alive as he wrapped himself mentally around the upset Sentinel.

"You knew it might be difficult, Robert."

"He was an ass."
Klink sighed, shaking his head with a sliver of annoyance bleeding into his exasperation. "Dr. Miller was asking some very valid questions."

"Invasive, private questions that had nothing to do with my physical condition," Hogan pointed out evenly. "Which is fine, by the way." His eyes narrowed. "What did he do to you?"

"Dr. Miller? Nothing. I had the honor to talk to Lieutenant Samantha Smith. She is a Guide."

The darkness crept closer and Hogan felt a growl leave his throat. Will just wrapped a hand around one wrist and the Sentinel deflated a little. Yes, his Guide was like a lightning rod in those moments.

"She only asked about my classification and I explained the status of a Guide in this country to her in as few details as possible. Sadly, she continued to ask, so I had to expand the details into as much depth as she wanted. She looked a little sick when I left."

Hogan shot him a quizzical look.

Klink sighed, clearly not happy. "She didn't think a Blindspot could be a Guide of the caliber she was told about. She doubted we bonded, which I told her we haven't. Lieutenant Smith then proceeded to dig into my personal background."

"Will…"

"I dropped my shields."

He gaped. "You did what?"

"She asked. I told her no. She kept prodding." Klink shrugged almost carelessly. "So I dropped my shields for a second. I think she threw up."

For a moment he just stared at his Guide, then Hogan laughed, shaking his head. "You know, you do sound a little smug. Making another Guide cry, I believe. Or throw up."

"She asked. I answered. She wanted more detail. I gave them to her. I left her with a little advice on how to handle German Guides in the future."

Hogan snorted. "Right. I guess General Wheeler is going to want to talk to us again." He leaned closer to his Guide and stole a little kiss. "Proud of you," he murmured.

Klink pulled him back before he could retreat, making it a real kiss.

"I'm not proud of myself for doing this to Lieutenant Smith, but I have to confess I was… annoyed."

Klink sighed a little. "I might have furthered the impression a lot of people have of Germans and this country, though."

Hogan's glare was fierce. "You are not like those monsters, Will, and you never were!"

Klink's presence grew, warm and caring, softly enveloping the upset Sentinel. "I know that. You know that. I hope everyone at the camp knew it."

"They did." He pushed that across the bond. It was the truth anyway.

Another smile. "And that's what counts. Lieutenant Smith might feel a little nauseous for the rest of the day and is hopefully a little more cautious from now on. And you might get a visit from her Sentinel."
"Let him."

'Him' was Captain Montgomery O'Hara, a British officer who looked like he wanted to be as far away from Hogan and Klink as possible. He was standing to attention, snapping a smart salute in greeting, but he was far from challenging either Hogan or Klink over Klink's actions toward his own Guide. O'Hara was in his combat uniform.

"Colonel Hogan," he greeted him. "Captain Montgomery O'Hara. Liaison of the British Forces to this field base."

"Captain," Hogan replied evenly. "What can I do for you?"

"I came to talk to Colonel Klink," the Brit answered formally. His eyes flicked to Klink. "Colonel."

He nodded.

"Captain," he replied, slightly bemused.

"You don't have to ask me if you can talk to Colonel Klink," Hogan said, the tension in his frame clear to see.

His shoulders were squared and it was clear to Klink that he had to hold back not to fall into a protective mode again.

"I didn't imply that your Guide cannot be addressed directly, sir," O'Hara said immediately. "You are an alpha Sentinel, Colonel Hogan."

"Oh gawd," Hogan muttered and rubbed his forehead. "Captain, stop that, please. I'm not anything but a colonel. I'm alpha level, but not in charge of anyone."

O'Hara looked like he wanted to argue, then apparently decided it was better not to. He looked at Klink, hands behind his back, standing up straight.

"Colonel Klink, I must apologize for Lieutenant Smith. She was doing her job. If she offended you…"

Klink shook his head and held up a hand. "She did her job," he agreed. "She might need a little finesse when it comes to handling German Guides. But it's not just Germany, Captain O'Hara. Other countries have treated Guides as second class, without rights, just tools to assist a Sentinel. You have to adjust to that. I told her what our status here is and I think she understood."

O'Hara nodded. "We both do. It's a new situation for all of us. We weren't aware how badly Guides were treated in Germany."

"And some other European countries," Hogan added firmly. "This isn't just what the Nazis did, O'Hara. It started long before that and it's not the only country."

O'Hara nodded again. "Understood."

"I apologize for my drastic actions, captain," Klink said.

It got him a thin smile. "Lieutenant Smith is a rather forward woman. I admire her as my Guide, but as a person she sometimes has no filters in her approach." His eyes flicked between the two men.
"The incident… made it public. Along the grapevine. When you dropped your shields for that one second, every Sentinel and Guide on the base felt something."

Klink closed his eyes, a pained line steep between his brows. "Oh dear."

Hogan's expression wavered between surprise and 'fuck, yeah, that's my Guide!'. The Guide in question felt it over their connection and he almost smiled at the pride Hogan projected, coupled with something that was almost glee.

O'Hara chuckled briefly, interpreting Hogan's expression correctly. "I think you rattled some teeth."

"That wasn't my plan."

The captain met Klink's apologetic gaze calmly. "I think it's for the best, Colonel Klink. It tells everyone who you are, where you stand, and it will stop the whispers."

Hogan's brows lowered. Klink just shot him a warning look. Of course they knew about the whispers. Now those whispers would be even louder.

O'Hara saluted again. "Sirs."

Hogan and Klink returned the salute, then O'Hara left them alone.

"Wonderful," the former Luftwaffe colonel groaned. "Just wonderful. I didn't think…"

"Nope. You acted." Hogan grinned brightly, oozing smugness. "Nothing wrong with that."

"And now?"

"We go on like before. Nothing has changed."

"Everything has changed, Robert. Absolutely everything."

Hogan's eyes were absolutely black, no doubt about it. No dark brown left. They shone with an intensity that had Klink shiver a little, but in a good way.

"I don't care what they think we are, Will. I never did. Not when I found out who and what you are. Not when we grew closer. Not when you let me in." He was very close now, right in Klink's personal space. "I want what we have and I don't give a flying fuck what they think it makes us. I don't need a classification to know you're an amazing man, a brilliant Guide, and everything I need, Wilhelm Klink."

Klink swallowed hard at the emotional rollercoaster racing through him. "Rob…"

Hogan wrapped an arm around his waist and dropped his forehead against Klink's shoulder. Will held him close, dry lips pressing against the other man's head.

tbc...
Wheeler did ask them into his office for another conversation, but it didn't go as Hogan would have suspected it. The general looked actually quite amused.

"I think we should cancel any further medical examinations," he told the two men. "Dr. Miller told me that your physical condition is surprisingly good for a POW. I explained to him that your assignment differed from other camps."

"Uh-huh."

"He is under the impression that you might have suffered psychologically or psychically because of your prolonged undercover work without a decompression period."

Hogan's expression grew foreboding and dangerous.

"He advised you might need a psychological evaluation," Wheeler added.

Hogan's brows lowered. "Did he now?" he snarled.

Klink just shot him a brief look, which the Sentinel returned with a ferocious glare. Klink wasn't fazed at all.

"Dr. Miller filed his report with me, but since your assignment and subsequent missions are all classified as Top Secret and Eyes Only, the report will be… blackened." Wheeler raised his eyebrows. "Should you request another evaluation by a Sentinel or another Guide, you are entitled to."

"No," Hogan just answered icily.

"Very well." Wheeler nodded. "As for your status, there will be no classification attempt."

"Thank you," Hogan muttered, emotions under control.

"I doubt there is a handy box we can put you into," the general said with clear amusement. "You are a class of your own, gentlemen. As for Lieutenant Smith, she reported herself to me. According to Captain O'Hara, the matter was resolved in the meantime?"

Klink nodded briskly. "No further actions, General."

"Understood." The smile twitching at his lips was telltale. "I think calling you alpha level is quite fitting."

Klink briefly closed his eyes, minutely shaking his head.

"Objections, Colonel Klink?"

"No, sir."

"But you don't agree," Wheeler added.

He silently met the higher ranking officer's eyes. "It's… a matter of upbringing and recent events," Klink said neutrally.
Wheeler nodded slowly. "Understood. I think this is the second time I must apologize for the men and women under my command. It might not be the last time. I should have taken your reputation into account, Colonel Hogan," he added with a rueful tone to his voice. "I was warned from other generals that you are… a little off-beat in a lot of things you do. General Tillman was quite taken by your style of operation and he said I would have my hand full should you be transferred here."

Hogan's expression was all innocence. "He did?"

"He also had a few other choice words."

"I can't imagine why."

Wheeler gave him an almost bland look. "I think it would be best to keep your activities and reports under wraps, Colonel Hogan. None of your mission will ever make it past Top Secret anyway. As a troubleshooter you are probably used to it."

He nodded. "Yes, sir."

"And the past three years were more specialized than any of your prior missions. The rumors are enough and adding the latest event to those rumors…"

Klink pinched the bridge of his nose as if he felt a headache coming.

"May I suggest transferring us?" Hogan asked with a charming smile. "Permanently. In the States?"

The general chuckled. "Your transfer papers will happen, but not right now, Colonel Hogan. There is a lot we still need to talk to you about, as the commanding officer of Stalag 13's underground operation. After that I have no objections to finally let you go home."

"Sounds like a plan, sir." Hogan snapped a lazy salute. "Thank you, sir."


"Can't make any promises, sir."

Klink slowly shook his head.

Wheeler chuckled. "Get out, Hogan."

Hogan saluted again, then they were gone.

They joined the other four men late in the still drizzly afternoon and all voiced their outrage at what they had already heard running through the base. Of course Ford's confrontation with Hogan had made fast rounds. That Klink had dropped his shields, had turned from a Blindspot into a bright beacon of empathic power, had made even quicker news. There had been apprehensive looks all the way to the mess hall. One Sentinel-Guide pairing, two women, had turned tail and left in a hurry, looking pale. Actually, close to green in the Guide's case.

Klink wanted to feel bad about it, but somehow he didn't. He found he didn't give a damn. All his life he had hidden what and who he was, had suffered a different kind of abuse to what him being a known Guide could have been. He had willingly played the too eager, slightly too incompetent and
sometimes clueless officer. After today, people knew what he was. Not just by rumor or because something had been written on paper. The Sentinels and Guides of this field base knew.

Hogan broadcast an air of command and control that had the other man internally shake his head. He didn't call his Sentinel on the posturing; at least yet. The man wouldn't back down from any confrontation, verbal or non-verbal.

No one had challenged him in any way.

If at all, everyone was making damn sure not to get in his way at all.

The situation with Miller was filed away under confidentiality between doctor and patient. Hogan told his crew anyway and there was another round of angry muttering.

"Who does he think he is?" LeBeau said, voice low but clearly laced with anger. "Asking about such a personal matter!"

"It is a matter of interest to the US Army," Klink said evenly, turning a mug of coffee in his hands.

"Bah!" the Frenchman snorted. "They're nosy because you're a powerful Guide and invisible. And the Colonel's a troubleshooter."

"I'm also German."

Carter shrugged. "So what?"

Klink's expression was priceless.

"They all knew that for more than a while now," the tech sergeant added. "They never made much out of it. Just now."

"Carter's right," Newkirk agreed. "London's been in the know since we set up shop in your backyard. They probably shit their pants when you went all bloody murderous. They never asked for anything before."

Klink looked into his coffee, shrugging lightly. "I was useful for the operation. To keep their troubleshooter from burning out."

Hogan's expression grew dark and foreboding. "You're not a tool, Will. Never were, never will be. You were our ally, protector, and friend. You were my protector. You became my Guide." The voice had dropped down low, had become intense. "This isn't about useful or not. They're not going to classify you. They're not going to lock you up."

"We're gonna bust you out if they should," Carter piped up, smiling brightly.

Klink chuckled. "Thank you, sergeant."

"And if they don't stop digging around, I'm going to hand them my resignation," Hogan added.

Klink's eyes widened. "What?" he blurted. "No! No, you won't!"

The Sentinel's expression was firm, unwavering. "I would and will. I'm not going to let anyone push us around, degrade you, force you to do anything you don't want to."

"You're a military Sentinel, Robert!"
"I know."
"We're talking about your job!"
"I can find something else."
"What are you talking about?!"

"Private security. Police work. Maybe someone needs a sheriff somewhere."

"Are you completely out of your mind, Hogan?!"

His men were watching the two colonels like it was a tennis match. Carter was chewing fries that had been lathered in ketchup, while Newkirk was tossing an apple from one hand to another.

Klink sighed, exasperated.

"You knew what you were signing onto," Kinch teased gently, stirring his coffee.

"I think I need to re-examine my decision," the former Kommandant replied dryly. "I must have been under the influence at the time."

Hogan just smile brightly. Klink scowled, but he didn't say anything else.

The way people kept shooting them cautious and curious looks, Hogan wanted to just find a private room and lock the door behind him. He heard whispers, as clear as if someone had spoken up right next to him, about a powerful troubleshooter in their midst, about the Ford confrontation, about him finding an alpha level Guide.

Klink just sighed.

"Is this going to be normal from now on?" he asked.

"No idea. Never knew I was considered an alpha."

Kinch rolled his eyes and Klink's expression was clear to read. Even Carter shook his head.

"You were always an alpha, sir," he commented. "Really hard to miss. Doubt you could."

Hogan shot him a scowl, but everyone was nodding. He glanced at Klink, whose brows rose pointedly.

"Troubleshooters don't classify," he muttered.

"According to what I read so far, they do," Newkirk said with a grin, busy shuffling cards. "Always high level. Comes with the job description." He started to deal them out without even asking who wanted to play. Everyone was given his share. "You're just the odd duck, Colonel-Sir."

"Thank you, Newkirk."
"You're welcome." Newkirk winked.

They fell into a few rounds of cards, bantering back and forth, ignoring whoever walked by and shot them curious looks. Hogan once or twice narrowed his eyes at a soldier, but they quickly scurried off before things got dicey.
Klink never said a word, didn't even slap him over the bond, but the expression in his eyes spoke length. Hogan just looked back, guileless.

He wasn't fooling anyone, though.

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"I didn't know you could be even more territorial, Rob," Klink remarked when they finally retreated to their quarters for the night.

The Sentinel was in his space, as he usually was, eyes dark and promising, the possessiveness and protective streak flaring sharply.

"I can get away with it," Hogan said smartly, lips twitching.

"You are a child, Robert E. Hogan."

The man gave him an innocent look. Then he leaned forward and caught the Guide's lips in a teasing kiss.

"You make it so easy and so hard in one, Will."

"I could say the same," Klink answered softly. "And you're not giving up your job with the US Air Force."

"I won't?"

"No."

"Because you say so?"

"Because it would be a childish reaction to the last few days. Dr. Miller wasn't the first to ask questions and he won't be the last. You might get people with even worse bedside manners."

"Hard to believe."

"Just… don't," Klink murmured.

"Yes, sir."

Klink shot him another annoyed look. "Come on. Let's get some sleep. The day was strenuous enough."

Hogan looked at the narrow beds and scowled, but he didn't argue.

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Klink read a chapter in a book he had found, keeping a mental eye on his Sentinel, who was also reading. Somehow he would have preferred physical closeness, too, but it wouldn't happen here. He simply lowered his shields a little, embracing their private connection, and Hogan involuntarily
sighed in what sounded like almost relief.

"I have to apologize," Klink said softly. "For the shields lately. Well, for disappearing on you. It was... an automatic reaction."

Hogan lowered his own book, looking at him over the distance between them. "I understand. I don't like it, but I understand," he answered. "I hated it, though."

"I know. My deepest regrets and apologies."

The Sentinel suddenly sat up with a grumbled curse and pushed his bed closer to Klink's, who watched it with a bemused expression.

"There!" Hogan declared and slid under the covers again, now just a few inches away from his Guide. "Better!"

"You do know it's against regulation," Klink teased, but he had put down the book for good and was looking at the other man.

"Screw that. After today, I'm not sleeping alone."

"I am in the same room with you."

"Just shut up, Will," was the soft order.

He chuckled and did just that, laying down again. While the frame of the bed was in the way, they were closer together and it was strangely calming. Mental closeness was one thing, but physical nearness helped. There was a brief touch of Hogan's fingers against his arm, then the Sentinel curled as close as he could and closed his eyes.

When they turned off the lights, both slept like dead to the world.

* * *

It hit him harder than he would have expected to say good-bye to his men. Not even the news that Hochstetter had committed suicide to escape prison and a later trial did much to him. A lot of high-ranking Nazis had chosen to kill themselves. Some had made it out of Germany, many going for South America, some had gone dark.

The Allied Forces were already hunting for them, specialized teams sniffing out those who had committed such atrocious deeds and had killed or helped kill or torture thousands.

A strong empathic shield surrounded him, kept him balanced, as the Sentinel had to let his team go one after another.

LeBeau had the shortest way home, going to Paris first, then he would head home. He left in the morning by train.

Carter, Newkirk and Kinchloe were sharing a flight to London from where the two Americans would board another plane to the States.

There were hugs and back slaps all around, eyes bright with unshed tears. They had had one last
roaring party last night, but now it was over.

"One last advice from the guy who was your crutch for a while," Kinchloe said as he prepared to board his flight to London.

"Kinch…"

"Everyone with eyes in their heads knows you took some huge steps lately. We all know how protective you've become and I can say the same for Klink." He grinned when Hogan glared. "And I'm sure all those steps are nothing like we all know it should be."

"Mind your own business, sergeant." There was no heat to the words.

"That is as close to a yes as it can be. Don't mind me, Colonel, I won't tell anyone."

"Tell anyone what?"

Kinch looked absolutely innocent. "Nothing. I know nothing at all," he mimicked Schultz.

"There is nothing to know."

"If you say so, Colonel." His former second in command shrugged. "I guess there's a handful of Sentinels in this world who could connect completely to an alpha Guide's mind and survive. You're one of them, sir."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

Kinchloe shook his hand, nodding. "I know it's not misplaced. Take a leap of faith. Good-bye, Colonel Hogan."

"Good-bye, Sergeant Kinchloe. And thanks for the pep talk." He gave the man a salute. "It as an honor working with you."

Kinchloe returned it, smiling. "It was an honor to work with you, troubleshooter."

*

"So," he said when he had seen off the last of his men. "That's how it is in the end."

Will stood next to him. "I'm not going anywhere, Robert," was the promise. "Not any more," he added with a tiny bit of humor.

Hogan fought off another emotional wave, words stuck in his throat.

Next to him, almost leaning against his lower leg, was the coyote that had been quite visible and clingy in the past two days. The crow was hopping around on the roof of the car that would get them to base. It looked a bit unsure, sometimes cawing at nothing.

A sure, firm hand touched his back, giving him a gentle pat. The contact was reassuring and grounding in one.

Anchoring.
In oh so many ways.

"I need a drink," Hogan muttered.

tbc...
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Well, I've got good news and bad news...

Good news first: new chapter! And you might just have been waiting for this one to happen :)

Bad news: I'll be on a business trip as of tomorrow and won't get to update until the end of next week. Sorry!

Hope you enjoy this one. Took me the longest to write and be satisfied with.

The upset Sentinel really wanted to drown his miseries in alcohol, but he decided against it. Not that he had any kind of problem with alcohol. While Sentinels usually moderated their intake, trying not to overload their senses, Hogan had never had that problem.

Still, he had a soda and nothing else.

Somehow, getting dead drunk wasn't high on the agenda.

But it was tempting. Very, very tempting. Forget everything for a while, suffer the consequences the next morning.

They were now staying in crew quarters at the base. The move had been two days ago, after it had become clear that both Hogan and Klink wouldn't join their former team on the flight home. General Wheeler hadn't signed any transfers and it looked like they might be here for another month or two.

Crew quarters meant a larger place, but no longer cohabitation, which had had Hogan scowl and mutter about military close-mindedness and not accommodating Sentinels and Guides. Klink had simply taken it with a shrug.

Now the man left the door to his quarters open and Hogan walked inside without thinking about it too much, locking it behind them.

He didn't question the invitation.

He didn't question the way they shared a bed that night; a bed that was large enough for them to fit in. He buried against the other man, fighting through the emotions. Fingers carded through his hair and he settled his senses on his Guide, letting the calm waves he felt from deep within that stronghold of Will's mind quiet him.

A light kiss was pressed to his forehead.

He had left men behind before. It was the nature of a troubleshooter never to be in a place long enough to get too attached. Stalag 13 had meant three years of his life and the men had become his family. Some close, some extended, but all of them had meant something. They had been a tight-knit, sworn group from different countries, working together to fight a war from behind enemy lines.
Blunt nails dragged over his skull and he exhaled a shuddering breath.

The Guide's presence grew, wrapping around him like a shield. He wasn't utterly alone. There was a second presence, but it was guarding and gentle, non-invasive and very much keeping an eye on everything to keep his peace, to keep him safe.

Safe.

Hogan smiled dimly to himself.

He finally surrendered to an uneasy sleep.

*

Hogan woke throughout the night with an arm over Klink's hip, face pressed against his back, listening to his Guide sleep. It wasn't really a new way to wake up. Sharing a bed usually resulted in them being close one way or the other the next morning. He had also automatically logged on to his partner's breathing pattern, his calm heartbeat, and it had lulled him into safety, relaxing him. Everything was dark, quiet, with the occasional rumble from far away. He tracked the noise of cars and airplanes in the distance, making it a guessing game as to what kind of machine he was hearing.

It passed a few minutes and he knew he was probably ninety percent right when it came to the machines he had flown himself or had been around in the past. When he stretched his hearing he could make out the voices of the pilots. It wasn't even much of a hardship. He wasn't struggling at all.

Hogan felt Will's mind all around him, wide open, trusting, everywhere. It kept him safe, grounded in his own mind, his senses working without the danger of slipping. He had never slipped before, but now he was sure he never would either. It was… amazing. There were soft waves and gentle currents, and Hogan slid even closer, drawn to the power within that deceptive softness. He knew it was a losing battle to stay away from this man, especially now that Wilhelm Klink was the only person left in his life that connected his past with his future.

His Guide.

He would hold onto that, firmly, with whatever was necessary. He couldn't lose this, too. Ever. It would tear him to pieces.

His old instructor would probably laugh his ass off if he ever heard about Robert Hogan, independent, hard-headed and stubborn trouble shooter, connecting to a Guide and forming a bond in the most bizarre way ever. Yes, he had drilled it into Hogan's mind that no Sentinel could work on his own forever, even a mind like Hogan's, but Robert had never believed it.

Now he had something he hadn't ever thought he wanted or needed, and Hogan wouldn't let it go again. The possessive need had tripled in intensity, the prospect of losing this man, too… it was close to burning a hole in his mind.

Hogan's hands twitched over where they rested on Will's hip, wanting to dig in and hold on. He felt an almost overwhelming need to claim, to mark, to make this Guide his and his alone. Logically he knew that Wilhelm Klink had been his for a long time now. Basic instinct clamored that he had to take a final step.
He sensed the change in Will's breathing pattern, felt him tense for a fraction of a second, then wake completely.

"Didn't want to wake you," Hogan murmured apologetically when Will turned, looking at him.

He sounded rough, the words harsher than normal, and it felt hard to talk.

The blue eyes filled with knowing, almost a fatalistic acceptance. Part of Hogan was terrified, another extremely elated, and a rather big part shocked at how he reacted to the hunger coursing through him, without consideration to his partner.

"You didn't," his Guide said calmly. "You're upset. More than I ever felt it with you before."

Klink drew a gentle caress over his skin, feather-light and still felt deeply. The intensity of the flow between them was growing and Hogan felt it, was suddenly aware of absolutely everything. He felt vulnerable and strong in one. The pain of losing so many of his men, not to death but to peace, gnawed at him, had him want to erase everything from his head. On the other side he felt happy and relieved that he had managed to bring them all home safe and sound. He hadn't lost a single operative.

"You won't lose me, Robert."

"I know," he replied softly. "It's just…"

Lips pressed against his own, so gentle and yet so demanding, maddeningly distracting his mind. It sent a cascading warmth through him that had Hogan want to do a lot of things, not all of them safe. Safe for him or safe for Klink.

But he craved it.

"You've wanted this for a while," Klink told him when they separated, putting his thoughts into words. "You've wanted me."

"I have you," Hogan replied, eyes tracking over the narrow face, taking in the open, serious expression. "In so many more ways than I ever hoped for."

"Your civilized side knows it. The logical one. Your primal, inner core, what makes you a Sentinel and so in tune with your senses, craves to complete the bond."

"If we go this way… Are you sure?" he whispered into the darkness of the room as he translated the emotions coming from his Guide.

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life," was the quiet, firm answer.

"You don't have to do it, Will. Ever. What we have already is more than I ever thought possible."

Hogan pushed himself up, looking at the supine man underneath him. His Sight gave him an advantage, showed him every little detail despite the lack of illumination in the room.

And what he saw had him push back another strong wave of hunger. His Sentinel side was close to overpowering him, take it all and damn the consequences, but that wasn't Hogan. He wouldn't do this to anyone and he had never thought he would be in such a situation where a Guide could do this to him. There had been passionate encounters in the past, between him and a willing person, but was Klink willing? Or was he accepting a fate he thought he couldn't escape?
Hogan screwed his eyes shut and clenched his teeth, molars grinding.

Klink reached up, cupping his cheek.

"Robert."

He shook his head.

"Look at me."

It was so hard, but he did, following the calm suggestion that was actually a command. By now it was hard to ignore the signs of blatant arousal.

"To say you wore me down would be a crude description. You taught me to trust, to be vulnerable, Rob. That I can open my mind to a Sentinels, to an alpha of your caliber, and not drown. I was terrified for a long time. That you were too good to be true, that bonding to you would turn me into the slave I've known Guides to be."

Hogan shivered at the words. "I'd never force you into anything. You have to believe me. If you say no, I'll stop. I can stop. I'm not an animal. I'm not a mindless beast." The very thought of doing to Will what creeps like Rothenburg had done to their Guides sickened him.

"I know."

"And this… is okay. I like it the way it is." He was trembling now, his whole body aching from the strain of keeping himself under control.

A thumb brushed over his stubbled cheek. Klink smiled. "You want more. Maybe not in the beginning, but it changed. I can feel your… desire."

The words were almost hesitant. Not that it was hard to miss how Hogan was pressing against him.

Hogan's smile was almost hungry. "Sorry," he murmured as he leaned down, the kiss a little sloppy this time. "And not sorry. I know I said sex doesn't factor into this partnership. I might have fudged that a little."

Klink chuckled softly. "I was aware of where this might finally head, Robert. Always. I just didn't think you would want it."

"Why?" he murmured against the warm skin, tempted to nip and lick. He did it, just for a little kick, and it got him a small gasp.

"I'm a man."

"Hm, I noticed." Another lick-nip.

Klink shivered. "I'm glad we're on the same page then."

Hogan looked at him. He felt something dark and hungry rise. Something that very much wanted to taste the power he saw and felt, take that last step, let those raw forces come together, but there was a strong curl of fear deep inside him. That primeval part was very well aware of the power Klink wielded with his mind and it respected that, despite the gnawing hunger to claim this Guide.

He might not survive this. He wanted this with all his soul, but there was the very real possibility of ending up brain-dead.
"I won't harm you, Robert," Will promised in a low voice, as if he had read his mind. "We match."

The steady heartbeat in his ears, eyes on the other man, his Guide, Hogan finally nodded.

They matched.

Had always matched and always would. It had been the one reason they hadn't imploded.

The last step was about trust. His trust that Wilhelm Klink wouldn't erase his mind, wouldn't slice into his very soul like he had taken out that Gestapo Sentinel. And Will's trust in him that Hogan wouldn't force him into submission.

Hogan trusted like he had never trusted anyone before. And probably never would again.

"I trust you," he said softly. "I think I always trusted you with this."

The kiss was slow, deep, filled with desire and a promise he had never given anyone before.

There was a deep, almost violent thrum along the anchor line between them. He looked at the other man, saw the surprise, almost shock. He had startled the Guide with his words.

The Sentinel felt the incredible psychic force that lurked underneath the unsuspecting exterior. It sparked between them, drawn to his own mind, and he couldn't really fight it any more.

He wanted this man, this Guide, right now.

In the worst possible way.

It was tearing at him, like a vicious beast, overwhelmed his mind, made him think primal, very dirty thoughts.

"Robert," his Guide coaxed, hands sliding over his body, stoking that arousal instead of reining it in.

It was so easy to open up, to fall back on what he knew, on what they had both become really, really good at, and to feel the familiar wave of content and calm.

Mixed with the trickles of hunger. And lust. He couldn’t deny that anymore.

The next kiss was as hungry and primal as Hogan felt. Will responded, reflecting the need, the want and something so much deeper.

And he wanted more. He wanted something that frightened him because of the intensity he felt with.

"Let go."

He did.

Hogan plunged into the bond with no shields left, no protection at all, absolutely open and vulnerable, and he didn't burn up.

There was no hesitation.

No doubt.

There was only the need to feel. He was inevitably pulled to the other mind.

It was almost anticlimactic to feel them come together, to wrap himself around his Guide's very soul,
just like Klink was suddenly everywhere with him.

The need rose between them like a tidal wave.


Klink’s voice sounded as broken as Hogan himself felt and his body shook as he came. Hogan felt his release tear through him, sparked by his Guide's openness, the slick feeling between them.

The Sentinel closed his eyes, falling forward, into an embrace that held him as he buried against the warm neck of the other man, felt lips kiss his temple. The release had been like a tiny storm breaking loose, sweeping over his mind and soul. Emotions he had no words for enveloped him, thoughts that he couldn’t translate into appropriate words flowed by, and the presence that was everything surrounded his own mind.

This was more than physical. It was so much more, so much deeper, and still so strange, but only between them.

It was complicated and yet so clear-cut and simple.

Inside him, everything was in turmoil.

Another wave of desire raced through him and he smacked it right in the face. He wasn't eighteen anymore. He wasn't about to turn into a complete caveman and just fuck his Guide into the mattress.

Strong hands stroked over his back and sides, calming and not so calming in one.

"You're not helping," he groaned.

"Who says I want to?"

He laughed, sounding breathless, like he was on the edge and about to topple over. Considering he had just come, it was a little disconcerting how much he wanted so much more.

"Will…"

Klink's lips brushed over the shell of his ear. "You want more, Sentinel."

Of course he did.

Theoretically, in all the books he had ever read, in all the stories told about a connection that went as deeply as one's soul, the Sentinel was the dominant person. The Guide would slide into the missing hole in the Sentinel's very soul, complete him, empower him. The Sentinel would take over, would finalize what their instinct had already brought together. He would claim the Guide.

Now, Robert Hogan was anything but dominant. He felt adrift in the vast power that was Wilhelm Klink, the maelstrom of psychic energy that could snuff him out with a single thought, and still it was nothing but warmth. No danger. He didn't feel like he was about to lose everything.

They meshed together on a level he hadn't been aware of inside him, between them, everywhere.

Hogan pushed up and took his partner's mouth in a kiss, body sliding over the warm form.

Klink's was pliant and so familiar, and his whole body seemed to welcome him.

Fuck!
He felt the sharp twist of renewed hunger, his own reaction to the tension that was building in anticipation of the next step.

Will didn't push, didn't overpower him, didn't tear apart what had been built throughout his life. He seemed to fit everywhere, even if there had been no emptiness, no puzzle pieces missing. He was everywhere, as if it had always been like that. As if Will had always been with Rob.

He laughed as he realized how very fitting it was for them, had always been, and how very wrong the word 'partnership' still was. They were so much more than that and nothing like it at all.

The Sentinel briefly wondered if anyone was aware of the monumental step they had taken, of an alpha pair acknowledging a bond that had already been in existence. It should have been the first step in their relationship, not the last, but hey, there was no rule book.

Hogan couldn't care less what they might be viewed as tomorrow or any other day in the future. Right now he only felt and it felt amazingly good. There were no words to express what this was for him, what it meant.

Their last step, the last part of a journey that had begun so long ago.

tbc...
Chapter 23

He woke in bed, feeling warmth along his back. Will stretched out on the other side of the mattress. The warmth wasn’t just physical but also in his mind. He had never felt this calm, centered and absolutely mellow. Nothing was pressing on his mind, nothing was pushing his neurons into firing top speed to solve a problem, to get anyone out of a tight spot, or to bend the truth to his favor, to protect himself and anyone else. No one expected anything of him right now. There was just the warmth and the knowledge that here, in this very moment and this very room, he was absolutely safe and secure.

With his brains intact, all of him functional, and the deep, endless well of Will's mind everywhere. Memories lapped at his consciousness.

Robert Hogan had really no idea how to really feel at the moment. Aside from warm and relaxed and at ease. Maybe scared? He had just opened himself to the most powerful empath he had ever had the honor of meeting. A man who could take him down and also take him out with so much of a thought. Maybe triumphant? Because this man was his Guide now, in every aspect of Sentinel-Guide bonding. They had been a team, a unit, a partnership before, but now it was absolutely final. Or maybe just happy?

Yes, happy sounded about right.

His mind was currently ensconced in the powerful one of his Guide, warm and protected, like a precious thing. They were entwined, inseparable from one another. Hogan didn't want to let go, didn’t want to leave the bed or the room. It felt nice. Natural. Normal.

The mellow feel spreading all through him had the Sentinel want to stay here forever.

See if this morning led to another rather enthusiastic encounter.

Hogan felt the heat rise in his face and fought down a very physical reaction to the memories of last night. It had been everything he had wanted and so much more. Just the completion of their psychic connection had been absolutely astounding and felt like nothing he had ever felt before. The physical connection had been just as hot and surprising, especially when Will had been more than up for a second round.

A very enthusiastic, satisfying second round that had nearly broken the Sentinel in a very good way.

Yeah, he wasn't eighteen anymore, but damn!

Hogan scrubbed a hand over his face, shaking his head at the arousing memories. His experience with men was limited to a few occasions and it had never gone very far.

Last night they had gone a lot further than Hogan had ever thought possible, and he had never thought it would be like this. The intensity had blown him away, had blanked his mind, had left him a puddle.

The bond was easy to feel in the back of his mind, a permanent fixture, a safety and security he had never had before, and he easily sensed his Guide's calming presence, laid-back and peaceful, but a bottomless well of sharp-edged power. He had never needed anyone to control his senses, but he had come to depend on Will for so much more than that. He still didn't need that kind of assistance, but for the first time in his life, Robert Hogan felt truly grounded, absolutely at home, wherever he would
be in the future as long as his Guide was there. And it was an amazing sensation to have this strength attached to him,

It was morning already and the sun was out. The day should be bleak and gray, the first day without his team, without the men he had come to see as family, but it was actually very sunny, looking like it would be perfect.

Will was still asleep, looking peaceful, almost serene. And he was absolutely naked, like Hogan, who felt no embarrassment or shame at their state of undress. He let his eyes roam over the other body, so tempted to reach out and touch the warm skin. There were no marks, even if he had heard the murmurs about Sentinels marking their Guides throughout the bonding.

There was a clearly non-human yawn and he turned his head. The spirit coyote had curled up on the armchair in the room, nose buried in its bushy tail. The crow was nesting within the fur, a black dot inside the reddish brown mass. Both animals opened their eyes and looked at him, the coyote flicking an ear. Then it yawned again. The crow just buried back inside the fur.

Huh, Hogan thought as he slipped out of bed, escaping from temptation. He looked at the animals, took in their cozy snuggling, and he almost laughed. The coyote cracked an eye open again and huffed silently at him.

"Yeah, right," he murmured.

Last night had been so... intense.

Amazing.

Frightening.

Beautiful.

Different. Something he had never experienced before. Nothing he had ever thought he would have. Even if he had thought about it… well, it wouldn't have been like this.

And he felt amazingly refreshed, and never more grounded than ever before.

He wanted this. He wanted everything. He wouldn't give anything back and would fight to keep what he had already.

Reality crept back, sneaking in as he realized that his riled-up, very emotional state of mind had been the reason. He had sought an anchor deeper than anything he had had before, needing to connect to Will on a basis they had never approached in the past. The memories of saying good-bye to his men had him screw his eyes shut and he ran a hand through his messy hair. He drew a deep breath, briefly checking on Klink, but the man was still sleeping.

The shower washed away some of the returning misery on his mind, at being suddenly back in a world without the men he had worked with, trusted, lived with, for a little over three years. Hogan knew that the emotional attachments he had formed were against everything he had ever been taught and trained for, but he couldn't help it.

Three years.

A long, long time.

He felt the warmth in his mind, the way he leaned toward it, looking for comfort and balance, as he
worked through emotions that he hadn't thought would come up this strongly.

They had always hoped for a quick end to the war, to get home to their families, but the Sentinel hadn't bet on it hitting him like this.

Klink was awake when he walked out of the shower, meeting Hogan's solemn gaze. The warm, empathic contact had him smile despite the emotions running through him.

He could almost hear Kinch telling him he could have had this sooner if he hadn't been so stubborn. He recalled Newkirk's scowls at the continued dance both men had done around each other.

Nothing was different and still so much had monumentally, and forever, changed. Power thrummed through him, all five senses in peak condition, his control of them so easy and fluid.

Sentinels either burned hot, fast and very bright, or they grew to be tenacious old bastards. Hogan had never planned on the latter because it didn't seem like anything happening to him. Troubleshooters went into hot zones, looking for the trouble that was part of their name. They were military; special ops and versatile.

Now he wanted the latter. With his Guide.

A person he had never thought he would need in all his life and now he couldn't imagine living his life without this man by his side.

He could just imagine them in forty years. It had him smile a little to himself.

His Guide watched him, blue eyes reflecting an openness that had never been there like this before. Just like the connection between them had never been this… intense.

The sensation of completeness hadn’t changed. He was still surrounded by the absolute presence of his partner, still absolutely safe. The surface connection had perished. This was a bond. It had been for a long time, completely unconventional, just like them.

Hogan had no description for what he felt, for the kind of stability this gave him, how relaxed he was despite everything that had happened, how sure and confident.

"Good morning," he said and settled down next to the other man on the bed, dressed in his bathrobe.

Will was still naked underneath the blanket that had pooled in his lap. Hogan fought the urge to push him back onto the mattress.

"Good morning," Klink returned the greeting calmly. "I hope you slept well."

"Never better than last night," was the honest answer. The Sentinel reached for one hand and entwined their fingers, squeezing them. "Thank you, Will."

He felt the contentment, the absolute pleasure, between them. There was a tremor of arousal, but he didn't pursue it. Not now.

"For…?"

"Your trust. Trusting yourself… with me."
It got him a private little smile. "I didn't think it was possible," he confessed. "I didn't think it would work."

"Now you tell me?" he said in mock-outrage.

"You were never in danger, Rob. Never. I could not ever harm you."

"I know," was the calm answer.

The connection was suddenly wide open and Hogan felt it, saw it, experienced it in a way that was absolutely new and yet so familiar. It was the unfiltered version of what had developed in the past year between them.

Not like the imprint, the sudden bond Sentinels and Guides normally formed. This had been slowly burning between them, building glacially, like they had pulled the brakes and still the car was moving forward a fraction of an inch each time they were together. Sure, the car had taken a few detours, had backed up and gone in a few circles, and once or twice it had needed road side assistance. But they had moved toward each other.

"I hope they don't dismiss you because of your changed status," Klink said softly with a small trace of humor. "You're no longer special ops material. You're no longer a troubleshooter. You have a Guide now."

"Hey, I'll always be special ops material." He squeezed the hand again. "And I don't give a flying fuck if they don't think I'm fit for that kind of work any longer, Will. None at all. Everything is changing, now that the war is over, and I know whatever happens, it's going to involve you every step of the way. You're not just my Guide, okay? You're my partner, the man by my side."

"I'll have to get used to that. It's… rather new."

"It's no different than what we had before. We worked like this for three years!"

"In a POW camp."

"It doesn't matter where we are. We're together, Will. You and me. Nothing and no one between us."

The blue eyes were to drown in and Hogan felt something tremble along the bond.

"I'm not going to chase after anyone else," he said, opening up completely. "Not after it took me so long to find you."

The stunned surprise had him laugh and shake his head.

"You still don't understand it?"

"I… understand it," Klink said slowly, like he didn't believe the sensations flowing back and forth between them. "I just can't… comprehend…"

"Isn't that the same?" he teased.

"No. No, because you're… you. And you…"

Hogan leaned closer, holding the intense gaze. "And that 'me' wants only you, Wilhelm Klink. I've had people tell me that in various ways before, that it was obvious, that we were being stupid. I didn't really think about what this meant for us, for me, but it's… I want this now. We've been playing this game for a while. I'm not going to choose anyone beside you, Will. Ever."
Statistically speaking, bonded Sentinels didn’t seek out other partners. A select few had a Guide and someone outside that partnership, but that rarely worked in the long run. Another few had brief relationships, one-night stands, so to speak.

Hogan hadn’t planned on any of that.

"You're being stupid," was the gentle rebuke as Klink shook his head.

"Nope."

"You're not that type, Rob."

"How would you know?" came the challenge. "How can you tell what type I am?"

"Like you said already: three years of knowing you."

Hogan shook his head, expression serious. "No. You don't know me after three years of a cover operation. Don't confuse flirting to acquire information or find the target with true emotions. Helga knew it. Hilda knew it. All the ladies knew it. It was a game we played. A game I liked."

"Ladies."

Hogan wanted to shake the man. Wilhelm Klink wasn't the drop-dead gorgeous kind of man ladies swooned over and who might even get a guy to fantasize in the shower. He wasn't exceptionally stunning. He was balding, sure.

But it didn't matter. It hadn't mattered in any of Hogan's decisions and the attraction he felt wasn't influenced by superficial attributes. Beauty was in the eye of the beholder.

He was that beholder.

And he had never wanted anyone with such a single-mindedness than ever before. He had grown to know this man, had gotten to know the real person behind the perfectly crafted façade. That was what he was attracted to, what had made him yearn for so much more than just a connection.

"Yes, ladies, Will," he said calmly. "And before you think I'm stupid: I know you're not a woman and never will be. Doesn't factor into it. I want this. I want it with you. Don't you think last night proved that? That was me last night. All of me, Will."

The blue eyes evaded him. "Last night was… amazing."

"And I don't want it to be a one-time occurrence. I want it again. Really want it."

Klink tilted his head. "We played games, too," he said thoughtfully. "All the time."

"On a completely different level," was the calm reply. "And the stakes rose. This isn't a game for me. It hasn't been since you went all badass and killed a Sentinel to protect me. You got all of me."

He looked into those keen blue eyes and spread his mental arms, wide and open, letting his Guide see everything. He had been inside his head, his very soul, already, but the disbelief was firmly rooted inside the other man.

"I understand if you decide that one night will be the last night, but I'm not going to find my way into another bed," Hogan said firmly. "Aside from mission purposes."

"You're being stupid," Klink repeated.
"No. I've never been more sure in my life. You're my calm center, Will. My protection and my safety net. I want you. I want this between us."

"You never needed a safety net."

"Not as a Sentinel for my senses. This is different. I've never been this… balanced, Will. Never. I've never felt so alive, so thrumming with energy, so ready to face this world. You do this to me. It's not just the sex," he added with a small smile. "But that I enjoyed a lot, too. Really a lot."

There was a long moment of silence, looking at each other, Klink being almost unreadable. The sudden calmness in the blue eyes made him shiver. Like a switch had been flipped, Hogan knew. He just knew.

When Klink finally pulled him closer, their lips brushing against each other, it felt like the first time all over again and something achingly familiar between them in one.

"I believe you," Will murmured. "Even if it sounds fantastic and ludicrous to my ears. But that's just you."

Hogan's cocky smile was back. "And you got me for the rest of our lives."

They had finally closed that chapter; firmly. It was time to work on their future.

He pushed his Guide – mine, mine, mine, ran happily through his head – back into the bed and straddled him, robe falling open.

"Plans?" he asked lightly, a teasing smile in his eyes.

The energy between them was like an explosion building to be released. It was an incredible feeling, encompassing him and Will, every single cell in their bodies. He seemed to vibrate and thrum with it, the pulse of life echoing between them.

Alpha level, something small and fierce whispered. Nothing surpassed this. They were equals in everything, but Will's psychic energy was hard to comprehend, even by his now bonded Sentinel.


The kiss was downright dirty and Hogan groaned into it.

"You're so absolutely amazing."

"So are you, Robert. In everything you do."

Hands slid under the robe, over his naked skin and pulled him closer. He felt something skitter over the anchor. Will's hands pulled him even closer, naked skin against naked skin.

Yes, that sounded like a plan.

He briefly wondered if they had any appointments today, then erased that thought. He didn't care.

At all.
They were very late leaving their quarters. Hogan's sudden need to kiss the living daylights out of Will delayed them even more.

Not that his Guide objected.

He did have to retie his tie again, though.

tbc...
Okay, next step and chapter. For anyone who wants a guesstimate on how many more chapters (nope, not going there! I had it wrong once. I said 3 and it were more like 20...) or when to expect me to be done: before Christmas. 2016, of course ;)

No one looked at them any differently than before.

"Did you want every perceptive person on the base to faint?" Klink asked when they sat down for a very late breakfast. He sounded reasonable, almost like he was talking about new report forms.

The fork with scrambled eggs stopped halfway to Hogan's mouth. "What?"

Klink just smiled and ate his own eggs.

Hogan lowered the fork. "You… didn't..." he said slowly.

The Guide was silent, chewing. His brows rose pointedly, though.

"Fuck… Will..."

"Do you want them to know?"

His mind stalled at what his brain translated from the words. Klink had… he had… Holy shit! He kept forgetting just how powerful this man was and it hit him out of the blue sometimes. Like now.

"Know what? Nothing has changed," Hogan finally answered blithely.

"Something has. We bonded, Robert. Completely. What we had before was… almost everything. That means we both got more than a little push in the psychic department. I'm not sure what would happen should I… let go."

Hogan shoved the eggs into his mouth. "Like last night?" he asked cheekily.

Klink rolled his eyes. "Like a child," he only commented. But there was a kind of warm fondness in his eyes.

Hogan refrained from shifting on his chair, feeling the reminders of what had happened, and they were the good kind of reminders, too. He planned on making this more than just a one-time experience.

"You're still a Blindspot, Will. Nothing has changed there. But no one gave me a second look either."

Klink tilted his head a little. "Like I said, we're connected. My shields reflect back onto you. The bond is… protected. You're still perceptible as a Sentinel, but everything that is related to me, the psychic power, is muted."

"Huh," Hogan muttered around a mouthful of bacon. "Have I ever mentioned you are an amazing
man, Wilhelm Klink?"

It got him a tiny smile.

There was a faint frission between them and Hogan swallowed hard, fighting back the need to touch the other. More than just touch. The affection he felt for this man had turned into something so much more intense. They had just spent half the night and this morning getting rid of pent-up sexual energy and whatnot. He hadn't thought it possible to be this aroused, this hungry for any kind of physical closeness, at his age. He was past the hormonal teenager stage, just like Klink, but the past hours had shown him nothing was impossible.

Now he wanted to go back to their quarters and…

Damn!

Hogan glared at his bacon, then speared it angrily. He was losing control of himself in a way that had never happened before. Then again, he had never been in a relationship before. A serious relationship. One with a Guide he was bonded to.

It showed in how he glared at Lieutenant Smith, who wasn't even in their general vicinity. He had just made her out all the way across the room.

"Robert."

The quiet voice called him to immediate attention. He felt something like a nudge in his brain and looked into the blue eyes of his Guide. Klink's expression was calm, but the eyes burned with emotions. Some were a reflection of what Hogan felt, others were different.

"I am not very familiar with the American bonding process between a Sentinel and their Guide. My experiences only go as far as forced bonds and equally forced subservience. But," he raised a hand to stop Hogan from interrupting, "I have come to understand that Sentinels who just bonded experience emotional surges coming from their more… primal side."

"What?"

"You might want to handle your inner caveman better."

"I… what?" he repeated.

Klink raised his eyebrows and pointedly looked at where Lieutenant Smith had been. Hogan felt the heat of embarrassment rise and stuffed the whole toast into his mouth, chewing angrily.

He felt Klink reach out, wrapping his presence around his surging mind, soothing the boiling emotions.

Hogan wanted to protest, wanted to push him away, wanted to kiss the man right here and for everyone to see that this was his Guide, and…

Wide brown eyes met even blue ones. Hogan hissed a soft curse and his fingers curled around the knife in his hand, knuckles standing out white. There was another push, this time with more force, startling him out of the rising flare.

They finished their meal, Hogan fighting to stay civilized throughout it.

It was a hard fight, one where he switched between embarrassment at the emotional waves and that
cold, calculating feeling of how to eliminate potential threats to his Guide.

He had to pull himself together a few more times throughout the day. On the outside there was hardly a change in his behavior, though he did scare a private and a corporal as he passed them. On the inside he felt like a nuclear reaction about to go critical.

It was Captain O'Hara who told him to better get a room and not come out until he had his more possessive, primal, claiming side worked out and under control.

"I'm not primal!" Hogan growled, eyes flashing.

"Yes, sir," the captain replied calmly. "If you say so, sir."

He balled his hands into fists, needing all his willpower not to react as primal as O'Hara claimed he was. He tightened his emotional control, using his own talent as a troubleshooter, someone who had always managed himself without help.

"Colonel Hogan, a word," Klink said and pulled him along with a brief nod at O'Hara.

They ended up in an empty office where Hogan leaned against the wall and scrubbed a hand over his face.

"I'm so screwed," he whispered.

"No. We are both rather inexperienced in this matter."

Hogan's eyes danced with sudden humor. "I wouldn't say that, Will… not after last night…"

"Robert."

"Sorry."

"You are not, but anyway. This isn't something we considered could happen, but it did. While you don't need me for your senses, you connected to me on every level, Rob. You never sought out a Guide, never had the same urges as other Sentinels, so it stands to reason your body and mind react differently, too."

"Well, there's the whole thing about Sentinels bonding to Guides who need a room for a while." Hogan shrugged.

"Yes, there is that."

"To imprint."

Klink nodded.

"We don't need that."

"No, we don't."

"And still I'm part caveman."
Klink chuckled. "Yes."

He bumped his head against the wall. "I hate this. If this is what other Sentinels deal with after finding their Guide, I'm glad I'm not them."

"This is hardly even close to it."

"How would you know?"

Klink just shrugged. "I had several chances to talk to other Guides since we came here."

"And you talked with them about bonding and sex?" Hogan laughed.

"No. They were curious about me. I asked them about what Guides from other countries experienced in the past, concerning acceptance, Sentinels and the like."

"Oh."

"Sexual encounters came up once or twice," Klink added with a fine smile.

Hogan smirked a little. "So we're different. Nothing new there. It's still something I could do without. I mean, I know you're my Guide, that you wouldn't go off with anyone else, but that doesn't stop the possessiveness, the instinct to snap at everyone."

"Which is pretty normal."

"Hate it," Hogan growled. "That's not me!"

The Guide eradicated all distance between them and wrapped his arms around the tense man. Hogan dropped his head against the warm neck and sighed.

"Really hate this," he mumbled against the soft skin.

"You know what is happening, Robert. You can deal with it now."

"Like: not want to tear out anyone's throat?"

"Preferably."

He laughed against Will's throat. "Okay. We could get that room, though."

"We already are in a room."

"Not ours."

" Territory," Klink murmured, sounding both exasperated and understanding. "Okay. Don't we have an appointment?"

"Two more hours until that happens." Hogan raised his head, eyes dark and filled with want. "I can think of a few things to do in two hours."

So could Klink.

* * *
They left Germany for good in November, just as temperatures dropped to freezing. The ground was icing over and every morning it was a sliding competition outside until they thawed the paths.

It was a dry, cold and very sunny day when General Wheeler saw them off personally, accompanied by two Sentinels and two Guides, both teams known to Hogan and Klink. Captain O'Hara had become a friend over time, pointing out the differences between his bond to Lieutenant Smith compared to what the two men shared. It was eye-opening in some regards and Hogan valued the input, as well as the stories of past conflicts. He knew he wasn't as possessive and territorial of Will now, that their connection had leveled out and become this steady, unbreakable bond. He was actually rather at ease and laid-back around other Sentinels once again, sure in his knowledge that nothing could destroy this.

"Sam and I met at what the military calls a mixer," O'Hara told him. "We liked each other and we figured out a way to make it work."

"Married?" Hogan asked.

"No."

"You didn't ask?"

O'Hara chuckled. "I did. She shot me down. She says she likes me and we're great together, but that doesn't mean she's looking for a ring. We're bonded, which is as good as any vow or ring."

Hogan couldn't agree more. He hadn't heard of a single Sentinel or Guide who was married to someone else.

"And it's not like I'm looking outside anyway," the captain added. "If you know what I mean."

"Oh, I do," he said quietly.

"If I may speak openly, sir?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"The two of you are beyond anything Sam and I ever encountered. You're a high level Sentinel, Colonel Hogan. We all know what your position was before you met your Guide and that it should be impossible for a Sentinel to do what you have done for three years, even a self-contained one. Other high level Sentinels have gone into day-long zones, some never coming out of them, some coming out… different… Without a Guide, they are useless. I'd be useless. It's like an Achilles Heel, to show us humbleness. To teach us that with such powers comes also a weakness."

Hogan nodded. Even a Sentinel could be defeated if you hit one of his senses at the right moment and drove him into a zone.

"You never had that weakness."

"Now I do?"

O'Hara shook his head. "No. You found your strength."
Hogan was silent for a long time, pondering the words. "Yeah, in a way I did."

"So did I when I met Sam. It's a different kind of strength, but it's like getting a backbone where you weren't aware of missing one. I can't understand how any Sentinel could mistreat their Guide. Ever."

Hogan nodded slowly. "I've seen it, Captain. Guides are so much stronger than us and they could bring us to our knees, but there are places in this world where they live in fear, without protection, at the mercy of a system that sees them without rights, as anything but human. Tools. Slaves. Objects."

O'Hara's lips were thin lines and the man had to be thinking of his own Guide the way he looked. Hogan had often thought of how lucky he had been, how lucky Will had been, that they had met the way they did. That Klink had survived until that very day.

"There are also other places on this very planet where the Guide is an important, vital addition, revered and seen as the Sentinel's protection. And that's what they are," Hogan continued.

O'Hara nodded. "I know I wouldn't be able to do what you always do on your own, sir. I couldn't avoid a zone or, if I fall into one, get out of it alone. You did the impossible in many ways."

"Part and parcel of my job description," he replied.

The captain chuckled, shaking his head. "I doubt that figured into all of your plans."

"No, it didn't, but I was lucky to find Will, that he trusted me enough to run along with my crazy plans, that he was my wingman in so many ways."

"That I believe. Good luck on your journeys, sir."

They shook hands.

Lieutenant Smith had kept a respectful relationship with Klink himself. She hadn't asked questions any more, but she had answered those Will had had.

"I never met a Guide like you before, Colonel," she told him over a late night tea, watching the biting wind blow leaves and paper around outside the mess hall. A warm and cozy mess hall.

Not too many people were here, most of them just coming off their shift and grabbing a bite or warm drink, and they all left the two Guides alone.

"I very much believe that," he replied.

"It's disconcerting to know what you are and not feel it. That's what puts us on edge." There was a smile tugging at her lips. "But I think we'd be more on edge or even over it if you had let us in on some recent events."

Klink refused to blush. He just looked at her, trying to keep a neutral expression.

The lieutenant raised one delicate eyebrow. "You and Colonel Hogan bonded."

He couldn't argue against that statement.

It had her nod, like it was the confirmation she had needed. "Usually bonds start out the way you
finished it, but you are an unconventional and very powerful combination, sir."

"I wouldn't say that."

"Troubleshooters don't fall all over themselves to bond with a Guide, let alone one of your potential. And Blindspots don't hit it off with any Sentinel."

"Colonel Hogan and I had some time to get accustomed to each other."

Smith chuckled. "I don't know if you ever noticed, but that man has it very bad for you, Colonel Klink."

He raised his eyebrows and the lieutenant smiled. Yes, she was a very forward woman and Klink understood what O'Hara had meant that she was a handful before. He had never met a female Guide in Germany who wasn't a cowed little slave, barely there, only to be used and cast away again. Samantha Smith was anything but cowed and she was a force to be reckoned with.

"If I may say so, sir, Colonel Hogan is absolutely into you."

He laughed, shaking his head. "Lieutenant…"

"He is, sir. I know what Captain O'Hara was like when we bonded, and that was the regular way." She didn't even blush talking about such a private topic. "This isn't the possessiveness the Sentinel shows when in a new bond. This is so much deeper and it shows a lot, even if he doesn't touch you to ground himself, to seek balance, or just to mark you as his Guide in front of another Sentinel."

Yes, forward. Very, very forward.

"Colonel Hogan and I are not in that kind of a Sentinel-Guide relationship."

"Definitely not," she agreed with a nod, hiding a smile behind her tea mug. "But you are extremely close and he's extremely… smitten."

Klink nearly choked on his own tea. Smitten?

"Captain O'Hara mentioned Colonel Hogan was always suspected to be alpha," she went on as if she hadn't just dropped a bomb of personal words, "should he ever develop his full potential. He has now. With you."

He didn't fall for her probing, still trying to get over the amusement of her description of Robert Hogan, Sentinel troubleshooter.

It didn't faze her the least. She just nodded to herself, as if that confirmed the lieutenant's suspicion. Smith sipped at her tea, both of them sharing an almost companionable silence.

The second pair that didn't so much see them off than accompany Hogan and Klink to England were Major Liam Blake and Captain Tom Rollins.

"I'm surprised to see you here, Major," Hogan greeted them, shaking their hands.

"New assignment, sir," Blake told him, his whole posture reflecting calmness and a laid-back ease to not challenge the alpha. 
Hogan gave him a good-natured glare. "Drop that knuckling under stuff, Blake, or I'll kick your ass so hard, you won't need a plane to cross the Channel."

Blake chuckled. "Yes, sir."

"Colonel Hogan, Colonel Klink," Wheeler addressed them. "Have a safe flight. It was an honor to meet you both, despite the circumstances."

Both men saluted. Hogan was in his dress uniform while Klink had chosen dark pants, a white shirt and the black leather jacket he had taken from Stalag 13’s very own seamstress, Peter Newkirk. It was the only piece of personal clothing he had not given up. There wasn't a single sign or insignia as to who he was, what his rank had been or would be, or what position he held.

"Sir," Hogan said, nodding. "Good luck to you here."

"Thank you. One piece of advice, though."

"Sir?"

"Please don't request an overseas assignment to this place, Hogan," Wheeler added with an amused note to his voice.

"Far from my mind. When I come back here, it'll be as a visitor, not a soldier."

Klink's expression was distant, almost neutral, but Hogan felt the other man's conflicting emotions over the finality of their stay here. Will was leaving his home country. A place where he had been born, had grown up, where he had his family and a few friends and allies. It was a place full of memories, good and bad. Hogan understood that only too well. And he had silently vowed not to make it a final flight. They would be back, see what had changed, one day.

Wheeler's last salute was snappy, accompanied by a smirk, then the men boarded the plane.

They sat together as their flight took off for London. It was one of the many supply planes going back and forth from the occupied Germany to England and back. Right now it was mostly empty, with just a few boxes stored in the back, and four passengers, of course. Flight time was expected to be mostly calm, with no bad weather system ahead, but they weren't betting on anything.

Blake had just closed his eyes and dropped off to sleep, catching up on what he had probably been missing. Rollins had been awake for a while, reading a book, then done the same.

Klink was completely shielded, almost shutting down like the day they had arrived at the field base.

Hogan wasn't taking it silently this time.

He pushed psychically at his Guide. Hard.

Klink blinked, twitching a little, and met the dark eyes.

"Don't," Hogan just said. "This isn't the end."

"I know."
"You don't look like it."

"Are you insulting my looks now, Colonel Hogan?"

He grinned at the teasing in his Guide's voice. "I'd never." He interlaced their fingers and squeezed the too cold hand. "We're not leaving your country forever, Will. I promise. My oath as a Sentinel and your partner."

"As my Sentinel," Klink corrected him gently. "And this isn't as bad as I thought. It... hurts to see the destruction, to know what this war led to. My country is divided, but many have survived who would have died otherwise. Many more will be born who might not have come to life at all. Part of me wants to stay and watch it all. Another, much bigger part knows there is nothing I can do here."

"We'll be back," Hogan repeated.

Klink was silent, eyes seeking the view outside. By now there were clouds obscuring the landscape below and he finally leaned his head back against the headrest.

Hogan didn't let go of his hand. It grounded the upset Guide in a way that only Hogan could understand. And it anchored the Sentinel himself.

tbc...
Chapter 25

England wasn't as foggy and wet as he had thought. It was also a lot less cold and windy. At least on this day. Two days ago, when they had arrived, it had been raining dogs and cats, coming down in buckets and the temperatures had been frosty. Now there was a momentary respite, but forecasts spoke of a wintry December, with the possibility of snow.

Wilhelm Klink was dressed in an American Air Force uniform, the rank of a colonel, and it spelled 'W. Klink' on his chest.

He still had to get used to that.

It was one of the first things he had been handed over by the Allied Command officer who had greeted them in the offices in London, along with official papers and a passport. As a Sentinel's Guide he had been automatically incorporated into the military, even if the Sentinel was a troubleshooter and shouldn't be in need of one. His file reflected his past in Germany, with a lot of black applied to most pages since his work was highly classified, as was his Guide status.

Next to him, the Sentinel was at ease, almost totally laid-back, wearing full uniform, and looking right at home. He had gone through the Q&A game with his usual charm and wit, coming out on top. It had been just another round of repeating what had already been said, right down to the assessment of him as a special ops agent and troubleshooter. Klink had had his own interviews, but those had been less in the line of what he had done in the past, who he had been in the giant Nazi machine, than what his status was now.

Giving him an official rank within the US military had been that last step in his acceptance.

"Enjoying yourself?" Klink now asked.

Hogan smiled brightly. "Very much. You?"

The anchor bond lay solid and real in the back of his mind. Hogan had been in his element lately, was his assured and cocky, as well as confident and commanding self. He handled himself with an air of authority and purpose, assured of his abilities and his place in this world. Not just the military, no. The world.

Typical alpha, Klink mused. Whether he wanted to hear it or not, Robert E. Hogan was an Alpha Sentinel of the highest order and those few Sentinels and Guides they had run into had known. He might not radiate it to the world because of Klink's abilities, but word had spread like wildfire.

"Not so much," he answered the question.

"Liar."

Yes, liar. London was different from what he had expected it to be. He hadn't been here as a German officer, a spy, or a prisoner. Klink was here as a colonel, as Hogan's partner.

No one had given him a second look.

No one had threatened to drag him off to be questioned by Intelligence or any other kind of military security force again, or to have him thrown into a holding cell. Somehow Klink still expected tables to turn, for MPs to cuff him, for a general to decide he was too much of a risk to leave running free.
Hogan had always been there, right down to the moment where he had even warned off a higher-ranking Sentinel who happened to be a general. The man had just given them a narrow-eyed look, especially Klink, who kept himself shielded. He had yet to use his abilities to manipulate perceptions, to push his will at a mind.

And then there was the wily little coyote that had been quite visible to the Guide recently, bristling just as much as the Sentinel, snarling silently or bouncing angrily around whoever upset them. Their spirit animals usually kept an extremely low profile. Neither man had seen them after that night where they had taken the last step in forging the connection between them into a bond.

Now the coyote was there, looking highly offended and ready to bite at ankles or sink its teeth into any fleshy part it chose. Klink had no idea if spirit animals could be corporeal enough to inflict harm and he didn't really want to find out. Logic told him that they were nothing but a representation of their respective souls, the energy within them. But who knew anything about them or what they truly meant?

For all he had talked to other Guides while at field bases or even here, he had never broached that subject.

So far no one had seen the animals, aside from the bonded pair. The crow was usually a lot better behaved, though it tended to stare at people like it wanted to drill a hole into their minds. Klink had tried to mentally shoo it away, but it had simply given him an amused look and continued to size up an opponent.

"You keep pissing off people, Hogan," he now remarked.

"I like a challenge."

"General Henry McNeill? Another Sentinel? A higher-ranking Sentinel?"

A careless shrug. "He implied things."

Who didn't? Klink thought sarcastically. They were an unusual, actually very unique combination and he never dropped his shields to be perceived as anything but normal and human by other gifted people.

By now there were the odd murmurs about them being alpha primes, whatever that entailed. Hogan was his smug, insufferable self, breezing through meetings in such a confident manner that had Klink want to stomp on his foot or kick him in the shins repeatedly. Or smack him upside down the head.

A man without a single doubt, strong and unbreakable.

Probably his work, Klink mused. Because the bond was now a permanent fixture, their very cores connected and the flow of psychic energy a steady, thrumming hum. It was incredible to feel his Sentinel like that, a soul full of energy and life, and he knew Hogan felt him the same way. It gave them a life, a strength and a power he hadn't been able to imagine before.

In his case it was all hidden away from prying eyes, but Hogan wasn't beyond flaunting it.

McNeill might have been a little more on edge for such a seasoned soldier or military breeding because of it.

"So you threatened him?" Klink now asked with a long-suffering look.

"Threatened?" Hogan echoed innocently.
"You postured, Rob. A lot."

It got Klink a careless shrug.

"You don't have to defend me."

"I wasn't defending you."

"Right." He pointedly raised his eyebrows.

The connection between them was close to alive, an almost physical sensation. He let their minds touch, a soft brush over his senses, like a kiss, a gentle caress over his face, and Hogan almost leaned into the non-existent touch.

"We're a new pair, Will. Newly bonded, off their radar, unlike anything they've ever had on their hands. I was working special ops for long enough to be a little peculiar, now that I have been pulled out with my new Guide. Alpha," he intoned, lowering his voice. "Lets me get away with being territorial."

Klink rolled his eyes. "Robert…"

Another bright smile. "I didn't feel you holding me back."

"I'm not a baby-sitter."


McNeill just happened to be a highly decorated Sentinel with three senses, with a Guide who happened to be both male and a Colonel, and who hadn't made a secret of his close inspection of Klink. Klink himself had simply decided to be what he had always been: a Blindspot. Not a blip had been detectable, though one didn't need to be empathically talented to feel Hogan's smugness as the general had struggled to understand their connection.

Klink had yet to meet a Sentinel who hadn't been caught completely off guard by them. McNeill had gone as far as challenging the bond, on a subtle level, stating that it was most likely a ruse, that the rumors of them being prime alphas had been instigated by Hogan himself.

"I could order you to drop your shields, Colonel Klink."

"You could, sir. It might just have… unexpected results," had been the polite reply.

Hogan had nearly flown off the handle, though on the outside he had been calm and cool, very collected. Klink had simply given him a hard mental smack. He didn't want to handle an angry colonel attacking a general on top of everything else.

Of course, McNeill had been way out of line and more than just courting danger. A newly bonded pair was usually treated with quiet respect and a lot of leniency when it came to protectiveness of each other. An Alpha Pair? McNeill could count himself lucky Hogan hadn't just torn his throat out.

"I have no intention to wipe the floor with anyone, Robert." The former Kommandant looked out over the Thames. It was really nice here. He wouldn't mind doing some sight-seeing. "You were lucky General Barton intervened."
"He owed me one."

Klink chuckled. "I'm not sure generals owe colonels anything."

"If that colonel got the general out of the toughest POW camp and the Nazis' clutches, yes, he does." Hogan gently bumped their shoulders together, wide open to him. "He said he read my file when he got back home after the extraction. Quite a page-turner, too, it seems. Took him a while to get through all the reports. He was impressed."

They were still standing shoulder to shoulder, overlooking the river. Will didn't mind. Physical contact in public had become normal, expected, wanted. Some of it was unconscious on Hogan's side, some was a clear push forward, testing the Guide's limits when it came to public displays of what they were. Aligning their bodies, breathing almost in synch, Klink found himself letting go of the last of his tension.

He briefly closed his eyes, centering himself on the anchor, feeling the calming effect of his Sentinel, feeling nothing but protection and safety. Time and again Klink marveled at what bonding to a Sentinel felt like. To this Sentinel. The only one possible.

He had been incredibly drawn to it and still was. For all his wild plans and outrageous mission executions, Robert Hogan was a well of peace… peace of mind. Not the first description of the man anyone would think of when meeting the colonel.

"I've got an open pass, Will. We can go wherever we want for the next four weeks. No duties, no ranks, no military. Start here, work our way up the country or go overseas."

"I have never been to America," he mused softly.

"About time I showed you a good time then. And I remember you telling me to get some family time. How about it? Tour my own country for a while, quick drop by the family home, then it's just us."


Strong fingers curled around his wrist, sure in their touch. A thumb brushed over his pulse point. Just once. Then he released the wrist again. Hogan was his obnoxious self, but he knew the limits when in public and he never crossed the lines Klink drew up.

"They know I found a Guide, Will. That I found you. Actually, my uncle's been congratulating me ever since."

"They know," he stated.

"Have so since I managed to get a personal call in. They know all about you."

"Oh."

Hogan grinned unrepentantly. Teasing, a touch of roguish.

He shouldn't feel so… so warm. So amazed.

But he did.

No one they had met or talked to had any idea what their relationship was really like or what had already happened, aside from Hogan and himself. They implied a sexual component, the primal
Sentinel claiming the Guide, while it had been so very different. No one understood that the kisses meant more than a semi-erotic, intimate contact. Yes, sex happened. He liked it. He liked it a lot. Robert was a passionate man and Will could let go, absolutely let go, and not regret it.

Most had no clue what it meant to have such powerful minds meet, connect, intermingle and mesh together. Klink had once described Hogan's as a steel trap and he couldn't have been more correct. It was just that. Their psychic energy was immense on their own, but now it was easily flowing back and forth, intermingling, thrumming through their bodies, and Hogan had never felt better.

Alive. Real.

Alpha Prime, he mused. He wondered what it really meant, since classifications were still something few nations did. Then again, what was in a name? It didn't change what was between them, what he felt, how alive he was with the connection to the sharp mind and the deep well of power inside Robert Hogan.

"And they'll love you," his Sentinel said easily, drawing him out of his thoughts.

"I doubt it."

Another shoulder bump. "What's not to love?" Hogan asked playfully.


"Trust me, Will. It'll be fine."

tbc...
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Okay, wrap-up number one! Careful guesstimate: 4-5 chapters left until I'm done. Very careful guesstimate...

Being a full colonel of the US Air Force and a high-level Guide had its privileges, Klink had found out. He only had his Luftwaffe experience to draw from and as a Luft-Stalag Kommandant there had been quickly reached limits for his command power. A Gestapo Major could overrule him. With connections, even a lieutenant or captain could have him out of his cozy little office and inside a prison cell with one call.

This was different. So very, very different.

He wasn't shut down as he made some careful inquiries concerning one specific person he had gotten to know and who had been the trigger that had changed his life.

For the better, he now thought. He owed that person a lot.

That person was Anna.

It took him only a day to find out where she had been taken to after her arrival in England, what had happened to her in the year that had passed, and another three days to be allowed to see her.

It wasn't so much all the red tape but the fact that she was still fragile, had never recovered her most basic shields, and Wilhelm Klink was a powerful Guide.

Not to mention the man who had killed her Sentinel.

"I was against this meeting," Carla Kinnear said, her voice filled with the misgivings she had, her whole posture stiff and rather unfriendly. "Anna is an unstable mind in a fragile body."

She was still called Anna. Her last name was 'Smith' for lack of a better one. No one knew if she was even German or if Rothenburg had grabbed her from Poland, Austria, Russia or wherever. She still didn't speak, though she responded to emotional waves. Treating Guides injured on such a deeply emotional, mental and psychic level was difficult and rarely anyone recovered. Theories went from keeping them isolated from the world to finding them a Sentinel that would heal those terribly traumatic wounds. The Cambridge Conservatory was one of the few such places in England and rather renowned.

Klink looked at the woman in charge of the place, trying not to reflect his own misgivings in his voice or posture. Next to him, Hogan wasn't so respectful. His frown was clear to see.

"Especially since a Sentinel is a terrifying person for her," Kinnear added, blue eyes hard and unforgiving as she met Hogan's. "I was very much against a military Sentinel coming here."

"With all due respect, Ms. Kinnear," Klink said calmly. "Colonel Hogan is a known factor for her. She was in his care for a while. She trusted him and his men."
"He is still a military Sentinel," she said sharply.

"I was a military Sentinel back then, too," Hogan told her, voice level. "I'm a troubleshooter, Ms. Kinnear. My mind is different from a normal Sentinel's."

Her expression grew even less pleased. "I know what a troubleshooter is, Colonel Hogan. I also know that your kind doesn't bond." Her eyes flicked over to Klink.

Neither man reacted to that statement, nor to the look of doubt and distrusts.

"But I was ordered to let you see her. I'm not responsible for the mental fall-out of her seeing what she is terrified of."

"You are a Guide," Klink stated calmly.

"Yes, I am."

"A universal Guide."

She straightened. "I am."

Hogan was silent, tilting his head a little.

"She responds to Guides, those with a calm disposition," Klink went on. He had read Anna's file. "Universal Guides are the best choice for that. They don't bond to anyone and can assist in medical cases." At Hogan's look he added, "I'm catching up on some matters."

Clara's eyes narrowed a little. "You are neither English nor American."

"German," he told her calmly. "I was born and raised in Germany."

"As a Guide. You survived as a Guide. In Germany."

She sounded doubtful and Hogan briefly looked like he wanted to say something, but he pressed his lips shut.

"Yes. I doubt you didn't know that before allowing us here," he said pointedly. "She was at the Stalag I was in command of."

Kinnear now inclined her head, acknowledging the words. "Very well. Anna's way of communication is fickle and she rarely if ever does so on her own."

"She knows me, Ms. Kinnear. She talked to me before she left."

She frowned.

"I won't overwhelm her. Neither will Colonel Hogan. I can shield his presence as a Guide and I won't let her feel myself either."

"I was told what you are, Colonel Klink." She crossed her arms in front of her chest, looking neither impressed nor reassured. "I'm still not happy about this, but I have my orders."
Anna was in a bright room with a view of the river, the trees running along it, and the expanse of grass that followed a soft incline toward the water. It was airy, light, decorated with calm images of landscapes and flowers. A few personal belongings dotted the shelves, next to the occasional book.

Anna sat on the bed at the window, looking outside, her expression distant, like she was anywhere but here.

Will looked at the delicate looking woman. She was still pale, her straight hair falling past her shoulder blades, unconventionally dressed in pants and a wide blouse. He knew she refused skirts, anything that showed more skin than she had to, and it spoke of her past.

She suddenly turned her head, those distant eyes starting to focus on her visitors. For a moment there was nothing, then her lips twitched. Will felt her mind, unprotected, a raw egg in a sea of sharp blades, its shell too soft to withstand any kind of force.

"Hello, Anna," he said soft.

Her eyes flicked from Klink to Hogan, then she frowned. Will felt her cast out inelegantly, like she was looking for something.

"I'm still me and Colonel Hogan is still himself, yes," he interpreted her psychic moves. "It's just a shield to to keep you from harm."

Her frown was deeper now, almost angry, and her eyes filled with emotions.

"Anna…"

She looked at him.

And Klink opened the shield, showing himself to her as he had done down in the tunnels over a year ago. It wasn't everything, just a fraction of the mass of psychic energy he harbored. Anna's eyes filled with tears, her lips formed a huge smile, then she launched herself off the bed and wrapped her arms around the startled Guide in a fierce hug.

Will felt her, all of her, the unshielded mind flailing everywhere and trying to wrap around him like she was hugging him physically.

"It's okay," he said softly.

She was pushing everything at him and he easily smoothed the jagged waves and calmly channeled her mind into a more even flow.

Hogan met his eyes, smiling, then cocked an eyebrow at Carla. Ms. Kinnear looked flabbergasted, then she huffed and left the room.

Anna looked at the Sentinel as Hogan moved to leave.

"Rob," his Guide said softly. "You can stay."

He cocked an eyebrow.

"She wants you to stay. You are familiar and she trusts you."

"Uh, okay," he replied, a little surprised.

Will just smiled
"She understands we have bonded," Will told his Sentinel when they were alone again, outside the clinic, down by the river and overlooking the peaceful landscape.

"She told you?"

"In her own way. I think she approves of the bond."

"She can feel it?"

"She can feel everything, Robert. She is wide open and has no protection at all. She catches a lot of things, but she can't really handle the input. I'm currently helping her along a little. She was rather taken by how the bond felt in me, in us, as compared to her own experiences."

Hogan grimaced. They had never talked about it, but both men knew what had happened to the girl, now a young woman, at the hands of the Gestapo military Sentinels she had served.

"And she doesn't fear you, Rob."

Hogan smiled, feeling slightly tickled. "I'm a good guy."

"More than that. You are my Sentinel. She trusts me and she knows I'm not your slave. She understands that what happened to her and all the other Guides she met in her time with Rothenburg isn't the norm in other countries now."

Hogan leaned a little closer, their shoulders brushing against each other.

"I doubt she can ever be anywhere but here," Klink went on, sounding regretful. "Her shields are absolutely destroyed. She doesn't even have basics left. A Sentinel might be able to protect her, but she probably won't ever trust anyone like that ever again. Introducing her to someone like your, a Sentinel of any level, would be risky. It might help, it might make everything even worse."

"But she's safe here." Hogan put a little question mark at the end of that.

Klink nodded. "Yes. Despite Ms. Kinnear's behavior toward us, she is safe here. Ms. Kinnear was just protecting her charge."

"Good for her."

Another nod.

Carla had been rather brisk and business-like when she had seen them out, not the least bit mellowed by the positive experience Anna had had. Or even apologetic. Hogan understood it. She was in charge of injured Guides, mentally and psychically injured, and she took her duties seriously. Just his mere presence, a powerful Sentinel, even though he was shielded by his alpha Guide, was a disturbance and could set back a delicate mind.

"You didn't harm anyone in there," Klink said out of the blue.

"Uh, what?"

"You were thinking about it. If your presence harmed anyone. It didn't. I was careful not to let you scream what you are all over the place. You're usually rather guarded anyway, but even that might
have disturbed some of those patients."

"So Anna didn't really feel what I am?"

"Oh, she did. And she recognized you from the tunnels. She knows exactly what you are and she accepts it."

Will's eyes were on the gurgling water, slightly distant, lost in thought. Hogan had felt little of what the young woman had apparently projected at his Guide, but he knew it had been like in the tunnels. Anna trusted Will. She had opened up. It was something she hadn't done in a year and might not do again, even though Will had encouraged her to work with the clinic staff.

"You'd make a good counsellor," he remarked.

His Guide shook his head with a fine smile. "Hardly. Anna responds to me because she knows me, trusts me, knows what and who I am. Otherwise she would be as distant and unresponsive as she is with others. And I don't plan on counseling anyone. I have my hands full with you, Hogan."

The other man grinned. "Yeah. Private appointments and personalized service."

Klink had to laugh.

"You want to visit her regularly?" Robert wanted to know.

"No. I want to know how she is faring, but I think coming here again and again would be counter-productive. Anna has to come out of her shell to communicate with others, not wait for me to be there for her."

"Okay."

"And I think I affronted Ms. Kinnear enough."

It got him a bright smile. "Learned from the best, Will. So proud of you."

"You are rubbing off on me then, Colonel Hogan."

"In all the best ways."

Hogan leaned in, kissing his Guide, feeling them sway together, both men using the intimate contact as a base line and anchor. He framed the narrow face, thumbs brushing over warm skin, dark brown eyes meeting bright blue ones.

"Maybe she gets lucky one day," Hogan said softly. "Maybe she finds it in her to talk to someone else, connect to someone else."

Klink smiled sadly. "The hopes for that are… miniscule at best."

"So was my chance to meet a Guide that can match me. So was your chance to run into a Sentinel who is your equal. We've been each other's blind spots."

Arms wrapped around his waist, pulling him even closer, and Will rested his head against Hogan's shoulder and neck.

"I was so incredibly lucky," he whispered, barely audible.

"So was I," Klink replied. And he knew it, would never forget it.
"You feel incredible," Hogan murmured.

Klink smiled a little. "Shouldn't a Guide feel good?"

"Hm, maybe. No experience there. I can only say for sure that you are amazing, Wilhelm Klink. You feel more than good. You're perfect."

The Guide framed his face, meeting the dark eyes. So much darker than normal, so much power in there, so much passion and fire.

"No one is perfect. And I think it's time to head back. I'm more than ready for a beer."

Hogan grinned and stole a last kiss. "So am I."

tbc...
They had once said they would all meet after the war in London. And they did.

Surprising their former commanding officer.

Hogan had had no clue as to what was going on when he walked into The Fox and Crow pub, Klink just behind him, and he was greeted by loud cheers and raised glasses.

Stunned, he stared at the assembly of men, his men, his crew, and there was a surge of emotions he would never confess to, even at gun point.

Newkirk, Kinchloe, Carter and LeBeau were all sharing a table and calling their greetings, waving at him. Klink gave him a little push and Hogan stumbled, shooting his Guide a glare, but he walked over to the four men.

His team.

Former team, a voice muttered, but he ignored it.

"Welcome to London, mates," Newkirk said cheerfully. "Had a good flight?"

"Took a while and the on-board service was lacking," Hogan replied, sitting himself next to the Brit. Klink took his own seat, next to an enthusiastically smiling Carter. Everyone was in civilian clothes, looking whole and healthy, happy.

"What are you guys doing here?" Hogan asked after his first sip of beer.

"Honoring the promise we made," Newkirk replied with an easy grin. "Meeting again in London. After the war." He ticked the facts off on his fingers.

"We checked," Carter threw in helpfully. "We got it all right."

Hogan chuckled. Newkirk just gave the other man a scowl.

"Yes, Andrew, it all checks out. Even the bloody war's over." He turned back to Hogan. "We just had a ruddy time finding you. They keep you guys under wraps somehow."


"It might be because you are civilians now," Will said.

"Yeah, well, I'm not," Carter objected. "And they wouldn't even let me ask the question."

"You're a tech sergeant. Not high up on the ladder," Newkirk told him.

"But you still found me," Hogan stated.

"We ran into a very helpful general," LeBeau piped up, grinning.

"Barton," he groaned.
The very man who had said The Fox and Crow served the best bar food and had amazing beer, and why not go there tonight. Since Hogan and Klink had had nothing else to do, they had.

And here they were.

"Barton's really impressed," Kinch said with a fine smile. "Ever since Newkirk told him about the operation he has been going through our reports and he almost interrogated us before giving out your location tonight."

"Three hours," LeBeau muttered. "The man knows no end to his questions."

"So how long are you staying?" Hogan wanted to know.

"A few days. Thought you might want to see some of my capital's sights," Newkirk answered.

"Sounds like a plan." Hogan shot Klink a look and the other man just raised his beer, smiling.

"It does."

"Good. Now that that's settled, how about that famous bar food?" the Sentinel asked.

"I'll go have a look what they can get us hungry gents," the Brit in their midst offered and got up.

It was a long evening, until closing hours, where they swapped stories of how they had been after going home, what their plans were, their possible futures. Other tales interrupted, as they talked about the past years, about their adventures, the daring, the danger, the victories they had celebrated.

Klink was included in everything, part of their team, part of this tight-knit group that had undermined so many German war efforts.

"You and Klink bonded," Kinch told Hogan as they stood outside in the cold, slightly damp evening. Both had opted for a breath of fresh air. "Completely."

"That obvious?"

"To us? Yeah. Congrats. Took you long enough."

"Kinch…" Hogan's narrow-eyed look had his former sergeant grin.

"Sir," he only replied.

Hogan stuffed his hands into the pockets of his leather jacket and inhaled the cold air. "Yeah," he said after a long moment, voice thoughtful, almost a little lost. "Took us long enough. It was a trust issue in so many ways."

"Klink did trust you in the end."

He smiled a little ruefully. "He gave up a lot, risked a lot."

"I think the risk was on both sides."

"Proof right here, sir."

Another scowl. Kinchloe chuckled.

"I told you you'd fit. Probably the only match to a Guide of his caliber. Think of the chance of that happening."

Yes, that had been one in a million or even worse odds. So much had been absolute chance and sheer, dumb luck. Klink had gone way outside his comfort zone, had trusted a Sentinel, a person he had always feared, with his mind. With everything. He had risked his very soul.

"I'd be lying if I said I'm not proud of what we managed. And possessive of it."

Kinch grinned. "You were always possessive, sir. Right from the start. Even if Klink told you he wouldn't be able to trust you with a bond. And the world's still turning."

Hogan chuckled, shaking his head. "It does. Sometimes we even make it move faster."

"Whoa, too much information there, Colonel," Kinchloe exclaimed, humor dancing in his eyes. "But good for you."

Yes, good for them. Both of them.

Hogan sometimes wondered if Will had ever realized what a monumental step he had taken, how he had walked right past his taught fears, his apprehensions, his perception of Sentinels in general, and had opened up to one such person, who hadn't turned the Guide into a tool or a slave.

He still vividly remembered the conversation from almost two years ago, that fateful moment in the Kommandant's office, when Klink had just walked away from Rothenburg's body, covered in blood. How Klink had revealed what and who he was, that he had been an undercover operative in so many ways, and a Blindspot.

So much had changed. So very, very much. Emotionally, physically, psychically.

And those emotions were surging rather strongly right now.

"You got it bad, Colonel," Kinch said, looking at him with a broad smile.

Hogan grimaced and gave him a narrow-eyed glare.

"You ever tell him?"

He grunted something uncomplimentary, not willing to venture into that territory. Deep inside there was a tiny, fierce fire that glowed and warmed him at the words. And his own thoughts.

In the pub, LeBeau suddenly cursed in French and dug around his pockets, finally pulling out a rather crumpled letter.

"Mon Colonel," he turned to Klink. "I was asked to give this to you."

Klink raised his eyebrows. Not just at the formal address, but also because the letter was from Germany, sent to France, addressed to LeBeau.
"I am only the delivery boy," the Frenchman added with a grin as he interpreted the puzzled look. "This is for you."

Klink took it and opened the envelope, which had already been torn open once already. Inside was another envelope, this time addressed to him by name, though without a rank and address.

It was from Schultz.

Klink's eyes shot to LeBeau and the other man smiled.

Then he started to read.

It was how Hogan found his Guide, reading a five pages long letter, looking both deeply touched and sad in one. A brief surge of alarm was quickly squelched. He felt nothing over their bond. So he shot LeBeau a look.

"Letter from Schultzie. He sent it to me, asked me to give it to Klink."

"Oh."

LeBeau got up and Hogan took his place, peeking at the letter.

"News?" he asked softly.

"In a way. The Schatzi Toy Company has reopened and they are making good figures. No big profit on the horizon, but it's looking up a lot. They found a book keeper, but Schultz offered to fire him should I want the job." Will's lips twitched in a faint smile.

"Well, if you feel like crunching numbers…"

Now the smile grew bigger. "No. I've got my hands full here. With you."

Hogan beamed.

"That wasn't a compliment."

"It was to me."

The connection between them was strong and unwavering, the Sentinel feeling his Guide's upset and doing his best to return the favor he had been so often given before. Then again, it wasn't really a favor. It was what they did, what it meant to be this close, interconnected, inseparable. He wanted to touch physically, too, but it wasn't advisable.

"So what else is going on in our favorite sergeant's life?"

"He's talking a lot about the rebuilding, about his wife and children, about visiting Hammelburg just recently and how everyone he knew greeted him like an old friend, not a former Stalag guard. I think you should read it yourself." Klink folded the papers, smoothing the paper with almost gentle caresses. "Letters from home," he murmured.

"Will…"
"I'm not going to change my mind," the Guide said calmly, voice even and strong.

"Good."

A bowl of freshly fried chips was plonked in front of them and Carter smiled widely, already chewing on his share.

"Compliments of the chef. For war heroes."

Klink put away the letter and Hogan gave Carter a pointed look, which the tech sergeant as usual ignored. Or wasn't even aware of. Klink picked up some hot chips and tried them, amazed at the taste.

"Good seasoning," he remarked.

The others joined them, each delighted about the free food, and when the pub owner also brought over a round of pints, Klink felt his slightly melancholy mood lift. Hogan was right next to him, pressed as close as was still decent in public, and while Kinch shot them smirks, the others just swapped more stories.

They stayed until closing, shaking hands with Ben, the pub owner, who thanked them for their services and invited them over for all the nights they would be in London.

Everyone happily accepted, then went back to their respective hotel rooms.

The moment the door closed behind them, Klink pulled his Sentinel toward him, kissing the unresisting man. Hogan hummed with pleasure, smiling as they parted.

"Helped?" he asked, the smile stretching.

"Yes. Thank you."

"Hey, no need to thank me for a kiss. I'm always happy to do so. Repeatedly if necessary."

"Hm, I'll keep that in mind."

"You do that."

The next kiss was a little more than just a grounding method.

"You are bad for me, Colonel Hogan," Klink said under his breath, loud enough for a Sentinel to hear, though.

"In a good way."

He chuckled. "You could say that. I never wanted this so badly before I met you, Robert."

"Wanting something isn't bad."

"Not in this case."

Klink had had little to no physical closeness in his past, in all the years of his life, let alone had he
enjoyed the deeper connection of a relationship. He wasn't a virgin, nor was he inexperienced, as Hogan had found out rather quickly. It was simply a reluctance to open himself to such pleasures, to lose control and hand over the lead to someone he couldn't trust completely.

That was gone now.

In its stead was a man who enjoyed being close, who would stroke, pet and caress, who hummed into a kiss, who leaned into a touch.

Hogan knew he was just as bad.

Now he slid his hands under the already loose shirt and his eyes crinkled at the corners as he watched Klink's expression shift to amused and playful.

They ended up on the bed, naked, trailing fingers over warm skin, sliding palms over each other's body, exploring, kissing and enjoying the nearness. It was like an addiction. A good kind of addiction.

There was no urgency, no drive to reach any point any time soon.

Hogan closed his eyes, senses stretching to surround his Guide, to listen to his breathing, his heartbeat, every single sound Will made. He let hyper-sensitive fingers run over faded scars.

Klink didn't have to ask if he felt good.

He knew it.

The emotions lazily moving back and forth between them were a mirror of their general relaxed state.

Hogan shuddered, a soft sigh leaving his lips, and Will wrapped his arms around him, holding his Sentinel as Hogan came down from his high.

Languid caresses over his back grounded his senses, made him mellow and strangely vulnerable. To Will. Only to Will.

Hogan felt his lips curve into a soft smile. Emotions he had rarely ever pondered surged and he knew he was in so deep, it should drown him.

But he wasn't. Didn't. Couldn't.

Fingers trailed over his temple, ran through his messy hair.

They were good. Absolutely perfect together.

Kinch's words came back, a faint reminder, but he pushed them away.

It was how he fell asleep not much later, firmly anchored within the other, mind quiet and calm, reflected in Will's own.
Everyone met again the next morning, around ten, and Newkirk took them on a private sight-seeing tour. It started out as rather foggy, but the weather cleared up within the next hours and everyone liked their little stops throughout, mainly because it meant pub time.

For the next two days Hogan enjoyed being around his men again, listening to their banter, their stories, their laughter.

Klink was there with them, all the time, enjoying himself just as much and eagerly taking in the, to him, foreign city and its sights.

Saying goodbye again wasn't as bad as the last time, but it still hurt.

Hugs, backslaps and handshakes were exchanged, promises made to meet again. LeBeau offered his services as a guide in Paris for a possible next get-together.

Newkirk was the only one still staying.

"Hard, sir," he murmured. "Seeing them leave again."

Hogan nodded. He felt Klink's touch in his mind, his Guide a soft presence everywhere, keeping him balanced and calm. He leaned into that mind-touch.

"Heard your own flight home's coming up," the Brit went on, glancing at Klink.

"We are scheduled for next week. Tuesday," Will answered.

"Care for a last round at The Fox and Crow?"

"Sounds like a plan." Hogan smiled at his Guide. "Coming?"

"Like I would let you get drunk on your own."

"I'm not going to get drunk."

Klink chuckled. "Good. Then I can drink more. I sure need it."

Newkirk grinned. "Taxi'll be ready, sirs."

Neither man had more than a little buzz and both walked a considerable distance back to their place, the fresh air doing them good. Newkirk had taken a taxi to his own place since he was a little more drunk than his former commanding officer.

Both arrived back home a little after midnight.

And if Hogan was more possessive and a little more intense that night, Will didn't mention it. Nor did he turn down the blatant offer for a deeper form of comfort.
The Sentinel knew his attachment was counter-productive, but he didn't give a damn. Feeling the push of Will's mind against his, their bodies sliding against each other in turn, he opened up and just let go, the emotional overload nothing his Guide couldn't handle.

Looking into the blue eyes, alive with such energy and emotions, Hogan felt like he was on top of the world, high on emotions, on endorphins. Each time together felt like he was renewing his claim on this special man, just like it renewed the claim Will had on him. Part of him was always briefly abhorred by those primitives emotions, reminding him of what Sentinels did to Guides in the country Klink came from.

But he wasn't such a man. Never would be.

And the way Will looked at him, ran a broad, heavy hand over his side, calmed those surges immediately.

"Will…"

The words died in his throat, on his lips, right before they could really be formed, actually.

The blue eyes seemed endless. Then Will pulled him into a lazy kiss, exploring his mouth thoroughly, Hogan's mind blanking for a moment. His Guide nudged him to lay on the mattress, looking down at him.

"Will."

"I know."

He swallowed, then forgot what he had wanted to say as the other man expertly distracted him.

tbc...
The weeks that followed their flight from England to the US passed by quickly. Some days went by without consciously being aware of them and Klink found himself adapting to his new life as part of the US Army special ops unit, even if neither he nor Hogan were listed as currently active.

After three years in a POW camp in Germany, Colonel Hogan had apparently been given free time at his disposal, which the man used shamelessly.

It did them both a world of good, though. Fresh, healthy food, fresh air, no confining spaces, no guns, explosives and threats. No military protocol.

And listening to the connection between them, the way it resonated in his mind, enveloped Hogan almost possessively sometimes, and the way the Sentinel shot him those tiny smiles. Not smirks, just private little smiles that had Klink understand how important this was for him, too.

Whenever they did meet with someone official, mostly either civilians or high-ranking officers, the speculative looks were always the same. If those people happened to be Sentinel-Guide pairs, the looks were accompanied by not-so-hidden questions.

Klink usually deflected them easily, shields pulled tightly around himself, the perfect Blindspot. No one caught an empathic whiff of him. He liked his privacy. And that meant it was no one's business whether they had a traditional connection or not.

Hogan loved playing with people, manipulating their views of what they were, and he thrived in such situations. His mind seemed to fire on all cylinders, the devious glint easy for Klink to see, and he joined the game immediately. It was so easy, so normal, and it worked like a charm.

Finding a place to live was both easy and not so much. They had military base accommodations for the first week, but Hogan wasn't happy in such tight quarters with people all around him. He could work here, but the 24/7 option wasn't one at all.

There were rentals everywhere for base personnel, just like houses for sale, but there was no guarantee they would stay here indefinitely. Or even longer for a month or two.

So they got a rental house half an hour drive away from the base that could easily be vacated again. With no personal possessions to move, moving in was done within hours. The place came fully furnished.

Yes, it felt like a hotel room, but at least it had some privacy.

They had to go shopping for clothes other than uniforms and it was actually quite entertaining. The military was paying for those expenses, as well as their first load of groceries and basic essentials. The car, a jeep, was a loaner from the base, though Hogan planned to keep it until they either forgot he had it or exchanged it for a motorcycle.
Klink just shook his head. "Next thing we have a dog and a cat," he remarked.

"We've got a coyote and a crow."

"Spirit animals aren't pets."

Hogan shot the coyote a pointed look. It was prowling around the new place, looking everywhere, like a dog inspecting its new home. The crow saw on a cupboard, cawing softly.

Klink simply shrugged. He had long since given up on understanding what those two really were.

The crow took off and disappeared with two wing flaps. The coyote continued to explore for a few more minutes, then yipped and bounced out of the door, into nothingness.

"At least we don't have to feed them," Rob only said.

*

Meeting Hogan's parents was… draining. Interesting, but draining. He was under scrutiny by everyone present, even if they all tried to behave like normal.

It was anything but normal.

Will finally fled to the outside when dinner was over, taking a deep breath of crispy night air.

"Too much?" Hogan asked as he joined him.

It felt natural how he wrapped an arm around him from behind, resting his chin on Klink's shoulder. Some of the tension in his frame bled out and Klink sighed.

"In a way."

"They're curious. Dad told me he doesn't trust anyone from Germany and he knows you're former Luftwaffe. He's trying, though."

Klink was silent, drawing up his shields like an automatic reflex. Hogan dropped his forehead against the narrow shoulder from behind.

"Don't," he murmured.

"Sorry."

John Hogan was a former Air Force sergeant himself, training new recruits and being both feared and admired. He had all the bearing and attitude of one, too. He had retired early, due an accident, but he wasn't a bitter old grouch. Just wary, which Klink understood.

The Hogans probably hadn't counted on their special ops trained Sentinel son to catch a Guide. And even if they had thought it was possible, they hadn't counted on it being a balding enemy officer, a man.

"Will," came the murmur. "Stop it with the doubts and self-flagellation."
Klink interlaced their fingers, letting them rest over his stomach. He listened to the gentle waves between them, unconsciously mimicking Hogan's calm breaths, feeling his heart beat even out.

"I don't care what anyone thinks. A Sentinel and Guide don't find each other by nationality, gender, preferences or through matchmakers," Hogan whispered. "We find each other because we connect on all the right levels. That's how it works."

Not like in his home country. Not like the forced bonds that turn the Guide into a tool to be used until they burned out.

Hogan slipped in front of him and cupped his face. The kiss was barely there, but it was deep nonetheless, purely on a psychic level. He smiled at the slightly stunned expression.

"I think it's time to head back to the hotel," he told Klink. "We have breakfast tomorrow, then we're leaving."

"Rob…"

"We are leaving," the American said calmly, each word more pronounced than before. "I want time with you. Only you."

"Your family hasn't seen you in years. They deserve to have you around for more than just a few hours."

"And they understand that my Guide takes priority."

"Yeah, we understand," a voice spoke up and Hogan shot a glare over Klink's shoulder, directed at his brother. "Even if I think it's a case of complete bollocks and you just want to skip family time dinners with great-aunt Edith. But who can tell?"

Mark Hogan grinned brightly, toasting them with a beer. He was younger by only a year, not in the military, and had inherited the lighter brown hair of his mother. What he hadn't inherited was the Sentinel gene. He was absolutely normal, without an enhanced sense. He wasn't a Guide either.

"What do you want?" Hogan asked.

"Mom sent me out to look for you. She thought you might have left without her care package and a hug."

"I wouldn't dare."

"She also told off dad, reminded him that this isn't about where Will comes from, only that he matches you. She then proceeded to quote Sentinel lore at him. I think Dad's all glassy-eyed by now. So," he nodded at them, "don't run off. I can't eat all she always cooks."

"I promise."

"I know our dad came on strong, Will, but he's just a bit… wary, okay?" Mark went on.

"Understandable."

"Maybe. Maybe not. I think Robby here knows best. Instincts and all that crap."

Hogan shot his younger brother a warning look. Mark smirked and it looked a lot like Robert's smirk. Klink almost had to smile. His lips were twitching dangerously.
"All I'm saying is welcome to the family, Will. Now, Robby, don't forget to give mom the hug and don't roll your eyes at the heap of food she's stacked for you. See ya."

"You have a weird family," Klink muttered when the other man had disappeared inside again.

"You only know half of it."

The 'heap of food' was truly humongous. Hogan's mother hugged both her son and his Guide, which had Will blink in surprise.

"Don't be a stranger," she told her son, smiling.

"I won't. You'll get a postcard."

She lightly slapped one arm, then pushed the food package at him.

They wouldn't go hungry for days.

"Will, it was so wonderful to meet you."

"Likewise, Mrs. Hogan."

"Sue. I told you, call me Sue. You're family. You're Robert's Guide and I'm very happy for both of you."

Hogan grinned brightly. "Aw, Mom…"

"You shut your mouth, Robert Hogan."

"Yes, Ma'am." But he was still grinning.

They took their food and went toward the car to head to the hotel. Hogan looked absolutely pleased and like he was on top of the world. Klink just smiled as he watched his Sentinel. The family time had done him a lot of good. He was relaxed, at ease, the psychic waves even and steady.

The hotel was actually more of a bed and breakfast style accommodation. They had what had been a garage once that had been remodeled as a large ensuite. Hogan made sure his Guide was very relaxed before they fell asleep. His father had been cordial and polite when they had left his family home, but tomorrow would be interesting again.

He pressed a kiss against a naked shoulder blade. Hogan settled next to him, senses on the other man.

Breakfast happened without a major incident, most likely because his uncle joined them. In full
Army uniform. At fifty-five Stewart Hogan was far from ready to be a retired Sentinel.

"Where's Lisa?" Hogan asked.

Lisa Donovan was a civilian consultant on paper and Stewart Hogan's Guide in every situation the soldier went into. Like O'Hara, his uncle hadn't married his Guide and he had never been too clear about their relationship, aside from Sentinel and Guide. They had been a team for almost as long as Hogan could remember. His uncle was younger than John Hogan by ten years and looked barely out of his forties.

"Sentinel genes and good living," was usually his uncle's comment.

Lisa was a headstrong woman, came from a medical background, spoke four different languages, aside from English, and was no beautiful arm decoration on a good day.

Hogan had always liked her.

His uncle respected her immensely.

"She's in town. She said she needed a break from all the testosterone."

Robert chuckled. "Sounds like her."

"Though she was curious about meeting Colonel Klink. She might drop by later, but don't count on it."

The whole breakfast conversation was about Hogan's assignment – what he could talk about anyway – and how he and Will had found each other.

Klink was more relaxed in the presence of the other Sentinel than he had been the night before. It was strange for him to be this evened out all of a sudden, though he was still heavily shielded and undetectable for anyone.

Hogan reflected that ease, aware that he was under scrutiny by his uncle, who asked a few pointed but still not too invasive questions.

"This is driving me crazy," Stewart said and refilled his coffee. He looked at Klink. "Rob says you're a Guide. He behaves like you're a Guide. His Guide. You act like you're bonded. But I can't catch a damn whiff of you!"

Hogan smirked around his bagel. "Told you."

"Yes, you told me. You told everyone. I know he's a Blindspot, but that doesn't mean I understand it."

"Your instincts are trying to get a grasp of me, knowing what I am, and you are failing," Klink said levelly.

"Happen often?" Stewart wanted to know.

"Actually, no. No one ever knew of me before. I never revealed what I was to an outsider."


"There is nothing to apologize for."
The older Hogan snorted. "Right. I know how my dear brother responded to you." He cast a look at where John Hogan was pointedly reading the newspaper. "You're right about the instincts, though. Knowing you're a Guide I want to get a read on you, but you're just not there."

"I prefer it that way."

"And you don't want to throw up breakfast if he does," Robert threw in, grinning devilishly.

"Now there's a story behind that comment, right?"

Klink shook his head and just about stopped an eye roll. Hogan shot him a questioning look, but when his Guide didn't argue, he launched into the story of Lieutenant Smith.

"So, alpha, hm?" Stewart commented when they were outside. "Knew you had a hell of a lot potential, Rob. Always did. Didn't think it was possible for you to find an alpha Guide, though. He's powerful."

Hogan nodded, the sliver of pride crawling through him again. "Yes. Very. I didn't think I'd come out on the other side with all my brain where it should be."

Stewart grunted, eyes on where Klink was talking to Hogan's mother. "You know alpha connections are fickle stuff. Especially equal ones. Usually the Sentinel is the more dominant physically while the Guide holds the psychic force. The two of you? Not saying he's a slacker in the physical department, Rob. I doubt that very much, after you told me he killed a Gestapo-trained killer with a pair of broken broom sticks. And your mind is the psychic equivalent of a death trap. That I know because I'm a troubleshooter, too. Lots of power there, between you."

"Yeah. I noticed," Hogan murmured.

Stewart grinned. "Gotcha, kid. Alpha pairings are usually highly explosive in all the good ways and all the bad, too. You got your hands full and so does he. I know what Germany does with Guides, so it's a miracle he is what he is, Rob."

"I know."

"And that he allowed the connection, let alone the bond. Full bond?"

"Yes."

Stewart's grin widened. "Congrats. Lemme guess, headquarters is still trying to wrap their collective heads around what you might turn out in the future?"

Hogan shrugged. "Not sure they know what to make of us right now."


"Like I said before, you really don't want to."

"Yeah, puking my guts out isn't fun. I guess it's different for a Sentinel, though. Guides are rather receptive. We're the designated frontliners, the warriors of old. Might leave me with a headache."

Stewart clapped him on the shoulder, grinning. "So, the brass is too scared to make you general.
Scared to call on you as a trouble shooter. Absolutely terrified of what you two can do. That about sum it up?" he asked lightly.

"Yeah, sounds about right."

"You did everything right, Rob. You listened to instinct. That's better than any book."

"There are books?" Hogan asked, amused.

"None that I could ever find. Instinct's better," his uncle advised. "And alphas of your level are rarely documented anywhere. Can't say I'm not extremely curious about what you two have, but your Guide's a Blindspot. Can't tell how strong you've become either."

"Yeah, we noticed that before." Hogan tried not to sound too proud and cocky about this.

Stewart cocked his head for a moment. "Huh," he grunted. "You're really something."

Hogan chuckled. "Thanks, I think."

Klink joined them, a quizzical expression on his features. His Sentinel just grinned at him.

"That bad, hm?" Klink commented.

Hogan chuckled. "Hardly. Uncle Stu and I just talked."

"Right."

Stewart stuck out a hand. "Was nice meeting you, Colonel Klink."

"Will," Klink corrected him.

"Okay, Will. Take care of Rob here. He's handful."

"I know."

"Hey," Hogan muttered.

"And call sometimes. Where are you headed from here?"

Hogan shrugged. "I thought we'd take some time to see a few sights."

"Don't be too vague, kid," his uncle laughed. "But I understand. Road trips are fun."

They left after saying their good-byes to Hogan's parents. John was his reserved self, though Stewart kept glowering at him.

"Just swallow that frog, Johnny. Your son is a powerful Sentinel who bonded to an equally powerful Guide. It doesn't matter who Will was before that."

John's brows lowered and he shot his brother a dark look, but he shook Klink's hand.

"Well, that was more than I expected from dear old dad," Hogan commented when they drove off.
Klink's brows rose. "I doubt he will ever be happy with your choices in life."

"He was quite happy to have a son who turned out to be a military Sentinel, special ops to boot. He was also happy about me making Colonel so quickly. He wasn't happy about the overseas assignment and he doesn't know all about it either."

"He isn't happy about a male Guide to his son, who also happens to be the enemy."

Hogan gave him a sharp prod along the bond. Klink just shrugged.

"I am telling it as it is. You know it, I know it."

"And I don't care. It's my life. And right now I'm planning to spend a considerable amount of time with you. No bases, no saluting, no one demanding a report or trying to assess us again and again."

"That sounds... rather appealing."

Hogan smiled widely. "It does, doesn't it? We'll pack our stuff and off we go."


tbc...
Okay, so here we are: last chapter. I want to thank all of you for reading and for your enjoyable, encouraging and all in all wonderful comments. I didn't think this fic would get all too many hits, but it did and you took time out of your day to comment. Thank you so much!

I can't promise a sequel. I might, I might not, get an idea. I have a scene running around my head, but I'm not sure there's a fic coming out of it. But hey, this epic came out of an instrumental piece that kept running on my car radio and my brain cell doing the rest.

So have a wonderful holiday and a happy New Year's.

They were on the road for two months before Hogan was recalled.

It was where they celebrated Christmas.

Not with family and friends, but together, just them. Neither Hogan nor Klink had bought presents. It was a new concept for them to have time to themselves, to be open, away from prying eyes, and sitting in front of a fire place in a simple cabin Hogan had rented for the week was strangely more homely than a huge family dinner.

There was a small, fake Christmas tree in one corner, courtesy of the landlord, who was an energetic sixtyish lady who also insisted on giving the two men leftovers. Klink had doubts about those dishes being leftovers. They looked like freshly cooked meals.

"She likes you," Hogan teased.

"No, she's fawning over you, Rob."

The Sentinel shook his head. "Nope. It's you."

Klink snorted and ate the last of the casserole, which was astounding. "I doubt she has the hots for balding, middle-aged Germans."

Hogan's grin grew wider. "How would you know? You never pursued anyone seriously before and all advances were expertly shot down. You don't know how many were seriously into you, Will."

He shook his head and piled the dishes in the sink. Hogan joined him, gently bumping shoulders.

"She likes you, Will. Just accept it. I might just be jealous." He kissed his cheek.

"You are a very childish man sometimes, Robert Hogan."

"You remind me of the man who saved my husband," Eleonore Thompson told Klink when he
returned the cleaned casserole pan.

"I…do?"

"We only met once. When I went to the hospital after the accident that cost my dear Frank almost his life. He was there. He was a doctor. He had been on the road when Frank was run over and he was with him until they could get him to a hospital. His name was Theodor Heberger."

Klink was silent.

"He was German, like you. A good man, like you. He had left his country before everything turned so bad."

"Not like me," Klink whispered.

"Robert told me you are both with the military, that you fought in that war. I'm a good judge of people. Theodor was a kind soul, helping where he could, even if he couldn't get a job as a doctor. I never saw him again after that day, but I owe him those five more years I had with Frank before God took him. You are the same kind soul."

"You know nothing about me, Mrs. Thompson."

Her smile was open and warm. "I think I know enough."

With that she took the cleaned dish and walked into her house.

Klink took the scenic route along the river to clear his head, breathe in the fresh air, until he decided to head back to the cabin. He met Hogan halfway there.

"Ellie get to you?" the man asked.

"In a way. What did you tell her?"

"Nothing much. Only that we're taking some time out from active duty. She asked if we fought in the war and I said yes. She lost a son over there."

Klink felt part of himself freeze. His eyes were on the house in the distance and he sucked in a breath of air.

"She didn't tell me," he whispered.

"She told me. Asked me a few things. I told her you're my Guide." Hogan tilted his head. "Will?"

"Where did he die?" Klink asked sharply.

"No one told her. He is MIA. Presumed dead."

"D-day?"

A nod.

Klink was silent, a statue, eyes on the house, and he felt something inside of him thrum. He knew that wherever he went, the people he would meet would have a connection to this war somehow.

Hogan closed the distance and placed a firm hand against his chest, anchoring him and himself with that simple gesture. His mind was wide open and Klink fell into the freely offered support, feeling
"You can't carry the weight of the world on your shoulders, Will. You are one man. You weren't responsible for anything that happened that day or anywhere else. You were one of ours, an Allied agent, not a Nazi animal. Ellie knows that. She carries no anger, no hatred of Germans."

Klink met the deep brown eyes, feeling the Sentinel everywhere. He placed a hand over Hogan's still resting against his chest, and squeezed it.

"Let's get back. Ellie promised cake."

"Not hungry."

"You will be."

"Rob…"

Hogan kissed him, silencing the protest. It was a little awkward with their joint hands between them, but it worked.

"Okay," Klink murmured. "You win."

Hogan chuckled and prodded him along the path. "Cake it is then."

*

"I wouldn't have minded visiting your parents again," Will said softly over a glass of wine one evening. "These are the holidays."

"I would have. I talked to my mom. And actually to my dad, too. After mom chewed him out. She understands. Dad's… dad. I know Christmas is a family affair, that it should be a gathering of everyone, but I can't, Will. Not right now. Not after last time."

"They are your family. It would be your first Christmas with them after such a long mission."

Hogan grunted.

"Robert?"

Hogan leaned against him with a soft sigh, his presence mellow and warm in body and mind.

Ellie was with her daughter and grandchildren for Christmas and would be back the day the two men had planned on leaving. Their fridge was stocked with food and she had given them keys to the house in case of whatever.

"I'm not a little kid, Will. I'm a grown man. I'm a Sentinel. You are my Guide. This is my life and you are a large part of that life. You don't have to suffer through some stilted Christmas dinner for me. My dad will either get with the whole fact that his son is now bonded, to a man who just happens to be you, or he won't."

"A man who happens to be me?"
The Sentinel shrugged.

"Okay," Klink murmured.

Hogan sat up, facing his Guide. "I mean it, Will."

"I know," he replied.

He understood. He really did. Will felt a little melancholy wash over him, thinking of the people he had left behind, the people who were all over the globe now; people who had become friends and a family by necessity first and choice later on.

Hogan pulled him close, the kiss warm, deep, tasting of the wine he had drunk.

"I want this time with you," he said when he pulled back. "Only you."

*

New Year's they were in New York.

Hogan had only ever been there once, just before being transferred overseas. They found a tiny room, large enough for two beds and two grown men, but neither minded.

They enjoyed the wild festivities everywhere in town, moving from club to club, and Klink let himself get pulled into the spirit of things. People were laughing, dancing, shooting fireworks, celebrating a new year and the end of a long, terrible war in one.

Hogan was truly enjoying himself, though he turned down several flirtatious invitations to dance and maybe something a lot more. The ladies usually looked disappointed, one or two trying to convince him otherwise, but they found someone else to entertain them quite quickly.

"Go on and dance with one of the poor souls," Klink told him, smiling into his glass of champagne. It was now an hour after midnight and people were just starting to let loose. "They are going to die of heartbreak."

"Not interested," was the simple reply. "How about you?"

"It's not me they're after."

It briefly got him lowered eyebrows. "That's not what I meant and it's their loss. I meant dancing."

"I don't dance."

"That's my loss then."

"Your feet will thank you."

Hogan grinned. "I'd suffer through the pain."

"I'm not going to dance with you."

The other man shrugged and emptied his glass. "Want to get out of here?"
Klink saw a woman eyeing them. She was clearly already intoxicated. "Another interested party two o'clock."

"Not asking anymore. We are getting out of here."

He had to chuckle and followed his Sentinel out of the club, much to the woman's disappointment.

Walking through the celebrating crowds, dodging drunks or hyper teenagers, the two made their way through the streets. The air was crispy cold and the forecasts had promised snow within the next week.

Hogan found out that Klink could dance in their hotel room, in privacy, to a slow tune. There was hardly room to move between the wardrobe and the beds.

"How are the feet?" Will asked, lips moving against his ear.

"Pain free."

"Good."

Hogan had to smile as their lips met, then the kiss grew deeper.

*

It was two days later that Hogan got the call. It was actually a messenger in Air Force uniform, looking young, smart and just a little star-struck.

General Barton personally had signed the order to report to Washington, D.C.

"So that's the end of this road trip," Hogan remarked with a wide grin, eyes alight as he read over the words. He looked at his Guide. "Unless you object."

Klink chuckled. The light in Hogan's eyes was downright devilish, expectant, a fire that had always been there throughout the years he had been at the Stalag.

"I'm not letting you resign, Robert. This is your life."

"You are, Will."

He looked into the serious, dark eyes, felt the intensity across the bond. "You weren't born to be a tourist, Colonel Hogan. Sentinels are warriors. You want the challenge. You need the thrill of a hunt, of a chase, of a complicated mission."

"I also need you."

"You're still as autonomous as before."

Hogan slowly shook his head. "We're a team, Will. Always have been, always will be."
"What day do we have to be there?" the Guide asked calmly.

"The eighth."

Klink nodded. "The eighth it is then."

The glee in the dark eyes was confirmation enough.

* * *

"This was fun," Hogan remarked as they crossed the wide open space between the office building they had just left and the parking lot where the military issue vehicle Hogan had borrowed was parked.

"You love having them in fits and running in circles," Klink only remarked, easily matching the confident stride.

The wide smile was answer enough. "They poke their noses into our business, they have to live with the results. And you like to play, too, Guide." He winked.

There was a playful light dancing through those knowing eyes.

Klink chuckled. Yes, he liked to play. He never gave them an opening, never an in on his abilities, and the one time they had been asked for an evaluation, Hogan had gone Sentinel on them. Klink had simply removed himself completely, becoming… nothing. He had been physically there, but every other sense of the Guide sent in to talk to them had been absolutely confused. The poor little evaluator had run from the room.

The Sentinel who had then entered had taken one look at the troubleshooter and his Blindspot Guide, then had told them they were done. One salute later they were on their way again.

"Another dance, another win," Hogan remarked. "They'll never learn, do they?"

Probably not. There was a new assessment or evaluation around the next corner every other week. It was like no one wanted to believe them or anyone else who had run into the pair.

"Well, now we have it in writing. Or almost as good as. We're unlisted," Hogan added, sounding pleased. "Not classified. Sounds about right."

Hogan, five senses strong troubleshooter with a mind like a steel trap, and Klink, alpha level but a Blindspot. Unlisted. He nearly laughed. They were listed, probably the first on top of a new sheet of paper. Alpha Primes. Klink had caught some of those looks sometimes, curiosity mixed with fear.

He had also spent a lot of time going through archives, sifting files, burying himself in dusty paper and ancient books. No one had so much as tried to deny him access. Apparently Hogan and he had all-around access wherever they went when it came to records. At least those that didn't contain military operations and special operations.

Those hadn't been of interest to Klink anyway.

Alphas were rare, the few files he found told him. They were powerful, mostly four or five senses strong, with an uncanny, sharp and rather self-contained mind. Most still needed a Guide to get them
out of a zone, but there was the mention of an alpha troubleshooter from decades ago, though he had died on a mission.

Alphas rarely found compatible Guides of their power level. If they did, the Alpha Pair was formed. The last known one had been documented in a journal of a travelling scientist who had explored the South American jungles.

Klink read the copy of the journal, but there was nothing he could transfer to their own status. The two men had been of a hardly known tribe, revered by their kin and neighboring tribes, peacemakers and respected warriors. Apparently they had been around for a long, long time, too.

So in the end, he and Hogan were probably better off unlisted anywhere, though he suspected someone was always watching them one way or the other.

"I expected them to make you general now. The youngest ever," Klink now said casually.

Because as an alpha, bonded to a Guide with just as much power, maybe even more, the military was falling all over themselves to have Hogan somewhere prominent and in charge. So far, his Sentinel had deflected all advances. He was playing a new game, Klink had realized soon after the first time Hogan had been approached. And he was absolutely enjoying it.

"Nah. Not my kind of thing," the Sentinel said. "You want to have a go at it, be my guest."

Klink chuckled. "I doubt it."

"Isn't that what you always wanted?" Hogan teased, enjoying the last rays of spring sunshine as he leaned against the car. Washington was a nice sight this time of the year, especially with the cherry trees in full bloom. "Would become you. Not a red stripe on the pants, but you look really good as an Air Force general, too."

His Guide looked out over the vast land, so very different from where he had grown up, so much larger, so much distance everywhere.

"No," he said calmly. "Not my thing either."

Hogan nodded knowingly.

"I also have no idea about how your Army works, Robert."

"Same bucket of bolts and slow-turning wheels as every Army," he drawled. "You'd get the hang of it in a heartbeat."

"Decline, thank you."

"Yeah, might be better."

He turned his head, scowling at his Sentinel. "What are you planning?" he demanded.

"Who? Me? Nothing!" came the bright reply.

"Hogan…" he warned.

There had been a lot going on lately, with meetings and plannings, with reports and more meetings. Klink had bowed out of some spending his time in the archives, but he knew Hogan had been excited about whatever it was he had been told. So far Will had refused to be baited into questioning his partner about those meetings- If Hogan wanted to spill, he would.
"Really! Nothing! Maybe a little get-together with some old friends."

"Four old friends I know? Ones we've seen about four or five months ago in England?"

It got him a one-sided shrug. "Maybe."

"A small, international crew?"

"Probably."

"A cooperation between Allies?"

Hogan's smile was downright devilish.

"And?" Klink prodded, lips twitching into a smile.

"Just talking. I mean, we had a fun time. You're invited, of course."

"Of course."

He waited, baiting Hogan into continuing, but the bastard knew the game too well and just watched the sun set, grinning to himself. Klink shook his head and got into the car.

Hogan did the same, but he didn't start the engine.

Two could play the game; expertly.

"Got a call. From General Walters. You might know him as Corporal Tillman." He smirked.

"I also know him as General Tillman Walters," was the mild rebuke.

"Of course you do."

"So, you received a call from a general you railroaded out of Stalag 13 after implicating him of being a firebug," Klink prodded.

"Yeah. There might be talk about an international team. Just one now. Maybe more in the future."

Klink was silent, waiting.

"Kinda like troubleshooters, but different. Aside from me, there are no Sentinels in it. Not yet." Hogan shrugged. "They probably want to see how we work, if they can actually run it with another Sentinel under my command. I've seen some prospective candidates for that. Interesting service records and all."

He still kept his silence, prompting his Sentinel with raised eyebrows.

"Walters is looking into creating a new department within the military, maybe even take it outside of military control. Like an international response team. He showed me some of the tech stuff they've been working on. Fascinating stuff, really. Carter would love to get his hands on some of it. And Kinch would salivate over the com tech. It's so far from what we know, it's like a science fiction novel. I mean, we were one hell of a successful team. Why waste talent?"

Klink regarded him calmly. "Those men have civilian lives. I thought they'd be happy to return to them. Not all were soldiers to begin with."
Another shrug. "We'll just be talking. It's also a paying job and one they, and we, would do well at. Not everyone returned to a happy family," Hogan slowly shook his head. "For example, Carter's girlfriend Mary-Jane dumped him. He stayed in the military instead of continuing his pharmacy exam. And you heard Newkirk. The Brits offered him a career, too. He's actually thinking about it. We might just fall back on some when needed. A job's something they might need anyway."

"Running impossible missions, Robert?"

The smile was wide and happy. "What we do best. Sabotage and intelligence. General Walters mentioned the connections we established in Europe, which might come in handy. And the two of us are an asset, he said. No one can tell what you are and you can keep me off the radar, too. I hardly register as an alpha when you mask the bond."

Klink tilted his head, regarding him thoughtfully. "You're a lunatic," he finally said.

Hogan beamed. "The best."

"Yes," Klink agreed slowly. "The best. And you want this."

"Kinda. Thinking about it."

"No, you're not. You're already drawing up the team."

Hogan shot him a look. Klink returned it with a knowing smile.

"I know that busy brain of yours, Robert. And your ego. You want back into the field, work with your crew again. You need this. It's what you are, Sentinel."

"I haven't even sent the first draft of my idea for a team to Command yet."

"I doubt they'll say no. They'd rather have you on their side doing this than freelance."

He laughed. "You think I'd freelance, Will?"

"You need the thrill, Sentinel. You need this kind of work."

Hogan leaned forward. "I also need you. Doesn't the Iron Eagle want to soar in the wild blue yonder?"

Klink rolled his eyes, but his lips were twitching. "If you put it that way…"

"You can say no, Will. I'm not going to drag you into this."

"You're not made for civilian life."

"But you are."

"I'm highly adaptable."

Hogan nodded slowly. "I know."

"And I think I can adapt to your impossible missions again."

"You should see the toys they have," Hogan said with a dreamy note. "So much more than I ever laid eyes on before. R&D acquired a hell of a lot throughout the war, from all sides, using resources I wasn't even aware of. That stuff is amazing."
Klink chuckled. "You're already very much sold on this."

There was a hum between them, intense and warm, encompassing Klink's mind and asking to be closer. He opened a tiny crack in his shields and let it happen.

"I'll be there," Will promised.

"I know." The crack widened and Hogan smiled. "You've always been there. Even when I didn't know. Maybe even before we met."

"That is a rather… mystical approach."

It got him a shrug. "Who knows how Sentinels find their Guides? Who knows why we clicked?"

The powerful mind embraced him and Hogan closed his eyes, letting himself rest against the other man, smiling a little when he felt warm lips brushed against his temple.

"Go for it," Klink murmured.

"Hm?"

"The team."

"Oh. Just the team?"

"Cocky American bastard."

"You know you love me anyway."

There was a breathless moment. One heartbeat. Two. Then his Guide hummed.

"Yes. Yes, I do."

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