



Chapter 1

America

The drive between Boston and New York was never much fun, and this rainy June night it was worse than usual. A disproportionate number of oncoming vehicles maintained their beams adamantly on high, not caring about anyone's vision but their own. Lane Dowling began to mutter with irritation, then to swear.

"Lane..." the girl murmured.

He flicked his glance across to her. Even in the gloom of the car, she was comely, her brow and nose and mouth finely chiseled in silhouette. "Sorry, Quality," he said. She was a Quaker girl, and she really did object to bad language. That was part of her allure, for him; her informed innocence. Quality Smith was far from ignorant--she was an honors student--but her background was extremely straight-laced. If anyone in this world, he thought, was pure in body and spirit, it was Quality. Therefore she was a treasure, like a hoard of gold: after remaining sequestered for years, the beauty and value was undiminished. She was smart, pretty and chaste.

Another high-beam cowboy loomed. Lane gritted his teeth. It would be so satisfying to let fly one pungent cussword!

"Perhaps I should take a turn," his friend said from the back seat. "I do have an American driving license, and since you are kind enough to convey me--"

"Forget it, Ernst," Lane said. "You don't know these roads the way I do."

"True," Ernst agreed, chuckling. "Neither do I have your experience flying, as shows in the velocity of your machine. Yet I would not have you tire yourself unduly because of me." The German accent was almost imperceptible, but he still tended to speak formally and not too rapidly in English. "It is a very great favor that you do for me."

"If I were in Germany without a car," Lane said, gratified by his friend's expressed appreciation, "and had to make it in a hurry from Berlin to--" He paused, unable to think of a suitable city. The geography of Germany was not as clear to him as that of New York State.

"From Berlin to Hamburg," Ernst filled in obligingly. "Yes, friend, I would drive you there." He smiled in the dark, highlights from passing headlights reflected in his even teeth. "But I do not think you have business in the Fatherland at this time."

"Not while the Nazi's are there, for sure!" Lane agreed. "How you can go along with the fascists--"

"Please," Quality said.

"Oh, don't worry, girl. We're not going to fight. Ernst and I are friends, though I can't say the same for our countries." He shrugged, then directed a remark at the back seat. "What the hell do you see in Hitler?"

"Please," Ernst said this time. "I am prepared to defend the government of my country, but this



stresses the lady." Quality made a murmur of agreement.

"Look, Quality," Lane said. "You always get tight about politics, but they're part of today's reality. The thing to do is not to take them seriously. Not between friends. Ernst just happens to be the single solitary Nazi fascist in the world that I can get along with, and we both damn well know--"

"Lane!" she protested, a really sharp note in her voice.

"Nazi, yes. Fascist, no," Ernst corrected him. "The distinction--"

"And if war comes we'll be on opposite sides," Lane continued. "We both know that too. It's like the Civil War, where brother fought against brother--"

"The Spanish Civil War?" Ernst asked. "That is not--"

"The American Civil War, idiot! Or as the text puts it, the War of the Rebellion. But this is peace, and we are friends--and even war isn't going to change that."

"Can't we drop the subject?" Quality pleaded.

"No," Lane said, made ornery by the strain of night driving. The drizzly, dirty rain had quickened after a tantalizing intermittence, fouling the windshield and making the road surface treacherous. That was all he needed! "We have to have this out sometime."

"Friend it should be let go," Ernst said. "I comprehend her feeling."

But now Quality, despite her best intention, was angry. "How can a Nazi comprehend the feeling of a pacifist?"

"Approximately," Ernst said with a half-twisted smile. "You abhor me as I would abhor a Jew."

"I don't abhor Jews!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"Of course not," Ernst agreed, with another unseen smile. "You are extremely tolerant of lesser races."

"There *are* no lesser--"

"You do not share our concept of the Master Race."

"I certainly don't! How anyone can believe that trash--"

"Quality," Lane murmured with a smile of his own, in the same tone she had used on him. "He's teasing you. Ernst doesn't hate Jews. That's just part of what he has to say to keep out of trouble with his government. There's a Jew on our team, and Ernst was assigned to work with him, and taught him how to--"

"Ach, swine, you betray me!" Ernst muttered, chuckling. This time he pronounced the W with the sound of a V, in the German manner. Lane had picked up a number of interesting sidelights in the course of his association with Ernst, and remained intrigued by them. Most fun was the fact that the word



folk," to which the Germans attached a special meaning, was spelled with a V and capitalized: *Volk*. So the German W was pronounced V, and the V was pronounced F. Lane hadn't figured out how the F was pronounced.

Quality was stricken. "Oh, I'm doing it! I'm making foolish assumptions, letting my temper run away with me, and using pejorative language." She inhaled deeply, exhaled, then turned to face the German. "Ernst, I apologize--"

"Accepted," Ernst said immediately. "We have mutually exclusive views, but there need be no rancor."

"Yes," she agreed faintly.

"But I believe I do understand. The mention of the war in Spain reminded me. One of my companions in the Hitler Youth, which is an organization that parallels your Boy Scouts but is more thorough, was older than I and went on to become a flyer like Lane. He was not listed as such, for political reasons, but he served in the Kondor Legion--you might spell it with a C--in Spain last year. He flew an experimental aircraft called a dive-bomber, and it crashed. When I learned of his death, I cursed the futility of war."

"Spain..." she echoed.

"I lived in Spain, in my youth; my father was stationed there for a time. I learned to speak the language there. It is a nice country, almost as pretty as Germany. Now that memory of Iberia is spoiled, for the blood of my friend seeped into that soil. Yet all would have been well, but for the idiocy of war."

"Another pacifist!" Lane said in mock wonder. But he found himself touched. He had not known about Ernst's loss of a flying friend. Ernst had always refused to be taken for a ride in a small plane, and now the reason was coming clear.

"I, too, lost a friend in Spain," Quality whispered. "I never met her, but I knew her well. A woman who lived in a Basque village."

"Ah, the territory of the Basques!" Ernst said. "That was the Republican stronghold where--"

"I *know* that was where!" she cried, her voice shrill again. "That awful Condor Legion bombed her town!"

"Ah, no! You do not suppose--?"

"They could have met?" she said acidly. "You think he said 'Here, my dear Spanish lady, is ein gift from der Führer,' as he dropped his bomb on her head?"

"*Gift* in German means poison," Ernst said. "But I take your meaning. Yet if he crashed, he might not have bombed anyone. He had no animosity to others; he did not mean to hurt. He merely liked to fly, and the experience of diving out of the sky in seeming suicide, to pull out only a few feet from the ground--"

"That I can understand," Lane murmured. "The exhilaration of falling through space, like parachuting--"



"It is not for me," Ernst said somewhat abruptly. "His name was--"

"No! No names!" Quality cried. "How terrible, if--"

"Yes, it is terrible," Ernst agreed soberly. "If I could wave a magic wand and abolish the Spanish war, then and now--for the slaughter continues there to this day--and save the lives of your friend and mine, I would certainly do so."

"The war continues." Now Quality faced straight forward, her face set. "No wish of yours or mine can change it. But I confess you have some basis to understand my feeling."

"I'm glad that's settled," Lane said. He was driving more slowly now, for the rain had continued to intensify, and the edge of the road was getting flooded. "I thought for a moment we were going to re-enact the war here in this car. Let's let the sword be a plowshare, and a gift not be poison. I want you two to get along."

"Why?" Ernst inquired after a pause. "The lady has reason to avoid me, and this I understand. Had her friend been a pilot bombing my friend's town, I would feel the same."

"No, it's not that," Quality said. "We are not our brothers' keepers in quite that sense. But as long as you support the brutal Nazi regime--"

"The American regime is far from gentle," Ernst said. "One has but to look at history, at the way your country caused Panama to revolt from Columbia, and sent her gunship to balk the Columbian troops, so that a separate deal could be made on the Canal Zone America wanted--"

"Touche!" Lane exclaimed.

"And my country's dealings with Mexico, no more savory," Quality said. "I support none of this. Yet--"

"There is evil enough to go around," Lane cut in, surprised at both Ernst's and Quality's conversance with the skeletons in America's closet. No gunship had appeared in his own history text. "We know that. And each person must support his country, his system, even if it isn't perfect. No one respects a traitor. You two should be able to tolerate each other's governments for a day."

Now it was Quality who asked "Why?"

"Because I want Ernst to be the Best Man when you and I get married."

Quality gasped. Ernst made a guttural snort of derision.

"No, I'm serious," Lane insisted. "You're the best man I know, Ernst."

After a moment the German recovered enough to protest. "Nevertheless, in the circumstances--"

The car jerked and slowed. The left front wheel had hit a pothole concealed by filling water. For a moment the vehicle veered toward the opposing traffic.

Quality made a little shriek. Ernst grunted and jumped forward. Then Lane wrestled the wheels



back to the right. The scare was over.

"What?" Quality asked, startled. For Ernst's muscular left forearm was across her front, pressing her back into the seat.

"Apology," the German muttered, drawing quickly away.

"That proves it," Lane said, pulling the car into a lighted roadside area. "You want to know what he was doing, Quality? I'll tell you what he was doing. He was throwing his arm around you to prevent you going head-first through the windshield if I cracked us up. Because he has the mass and muscle and reaction-speed you don't, and he knows how to hang on during a fall. He couldn't help me, because I was driving, and anyway I'm pretty tough myself. But you're something else."

Quality considered. "I fear I misjudged thee, Ernst," she said faintly.

"Because politics don't matter in the crunch," Lane continued. "There was no time for thought, only reaction. As in wrestling or self defense. Ernst did what was needed to be done, instantly, without even thinking. He could have saved your life, Quality, if I had messed up."

"Yes," she agreed. "I apologize to thee again, Ernst."

"A natural misunderstanding--" the German demurred, embarrassed.

"So as I said: Ernst is the best man I know," Lane said. "All the rest is dross." He turned to his friend. "When she says `thee' she really means it. It's called the plain talk; she uses it at home." He turned back to Quality. "About his being--"

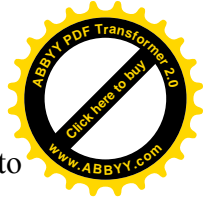
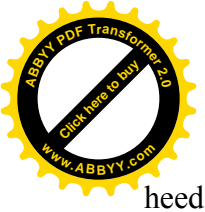
"I withdraw my objection," she said contritely. "Thee knows best. He shall be Best Man when we wed."

"Now let's go find something to eat," Lane said briskly. He did not try to kiss her, though he wanted to, because Quality did not do such things in public.

But the rain was still coming down. They waited in silence a few more minutes for it to diminish. Lane glanced at his face in the rear-view mirror; there was just light enough, here, because of the neon illumination of signs. He fished out his comb to straighten his tousled hair and restore the natural curl. He was what he called a bleach-blond, like Ernst: his hair was brown, quite dark when wet, but dryness and the sun made it shades lighter. On those occasions in the past when he had worn it longer, the ends turned quite fair. His mother always thought of him as blond; he had at one time taken that as evidence that she was color-blind. Now he knew better; she merely remembered him as a tow-head baby.

He leaned forward to peer at his left cheek. The scars hardly showed, but he remained conscious of them. Others had assured him that he was handsome, and that the scars might be regarded as a beauty mark. Certainly Quality wasn't bothered; she judged by other things than appearance. But he would be happier with clear skin. Maybe surgery, some day, though the notion of going under the knife did not appeal.

"If you are quite through--" Quality said, nudging him gently. She teased him sometimes about his vanity. She never seemed to touch up her own face, yet she always looked prim. Perhaps it came with inner goodness.



The rain had finally eased. They got out of the car, emerging into a drizzle becoming too fine to heed; only the irregular puddles impeded progress. They walked toward a garishly illuminated establishment a block distant.

"That will not do," Quality said as they drew close enough to make out the neon lettering.

"Oh--beer, ale" Lane said. "You don't drink." He said that for Ernst's benefit. Germany was famous for beer, and Lane did not want there to seem to be any obscure affront.

"Sensible people do not," Ernst said tactfully. "Perhaps there is a more suitable place beyond."

They resumed walking. At that point the door to the bar burst open and four men staggered out in an ambience of alcohol. The first almost collided with Quality. "Look at that!" he exclaimed, his beer-breath surrounding her.

Quality averted her gaze, and Lane took her by the elbow and guided her around the stranger. At this moment she reminded him of a Christian Temperance lady, and it bothered him to have her sensitivities bruised by these oafs.

"Hey!" the man cried, lurching about, reaching for Quality. The reek of his breath intensified. But Ernst's forearm intercepted him.

"Please let us pass in peace," Ernst said, gently setting the man back.

But the drunkard swung his fist instead. Ernst blocked the blow and shoved the man back again, so that he collided with his fellows. "Please let us pass," he repeated without emphasis.

The man should have taken warning, because Ernst's physical competence was readily apparent. But he had the belligerence of befuddlement. "What are you, a Communist?" he demanded.

"I am a Nazi." Ernst turned stiffly to follow Lane and Quality. If there was one thing a Nazi hated, it was Communism, Lane knew. Ernst hardly showed it, but he had been deeply insulted.

"A Nazi!" Now all four men were pressing forward aggressively, discovering the opportunity to convert their drunken ire into patriotism. It was all right to beat up a Nazi!

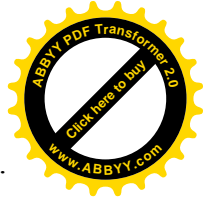
"That wasn't diplomatic, friend," Lane said, turning quickly around.

"No fighting!" Quality protested. But it was too late. The four drunks were wading in.

"Stand clear, girl," Lane said. "This is a job for us warmongers." She skipped back hastily.

Lane and Ernst made contact with the first two men almost simultaneously. Suddenly the two drunks were hoisted in the air, whirled about, and half-shoved, half-hurled into the remaining two. All four collapsed in a heap.

"Compliments of the two leading members of the collegiate wrestling team," Lane said, dusting himself off and clapping his friend on the shoulder. It was hard to conceal his satisfaction, but Quality's stern gaze assisted him.



The fight was gone from the drunks. Lane and Ernst turned around again and rejoined Quality.

"That would not have been a fair match even had they not been intoxicated," she reproved them. But her sympathy for brawling drunks was quite limited, and she knew the four men had not been hurt. It occurred to Lane that even a pacifist like her could appreciate certain advantages in associating with nonpacifists like him. What would she have done if she had encountered the drunks alone? But he knew the answer: she would never have gone near a bar alone.

They found a suitable place to eat. They relaxed and became college students again. They were all the same age and had many common enthusiasms, and the summer was just beginning.

By the time they returned to the car, the drunks were gone. The rain had dwindled to nothing, leaving a rather pretty nocturnal clarity.

Lane's thoughts drifted from the tedious drive. That scar on his face, glimpsed in the mirror--that had a history that returned at odd moments, especially when he was depressed or tired. He was tired now. The night road reminded him of the streets of his home region, not so very far from here. His father was a mason and a Mason--in the employment and social senses--in the Troy/Albany section of New York State. Mr. Dowling had been there most of his life and was well established. Lane had been granted material comforts from infancy, never going hungry or poorly clothed, always having the best of education and entertainment. Odd how far that missed the truth of his upbringing!

He glanced at his companions, as if fearful that his thoughts were being overheard. Both were nodding. Quality had let her head fall back against the cushion, so that her smooth neck was exposed; it was not an ideal pose, but she remained pretty, her delicately rounded chin projecting, her petite bosom heaving gently. Ernst, in back, had slumped against the window, one arm elevated to cushion his head; his neck too was exposed, showing the muscles and cords. He had a wrestlers neck, of course; he could not be choked by any ordinary person, because his neck was too strong. He was the very best companion to have, when encountering pugnacious drunks--and excellent also in intellectual conversation. The German believed in the so-called Aryan ideal, the perfect white Christian--though at times Lane doubted whether it was even Christianity the Nazis ultimately sought--physically and mentally pure by their definitions. Ernst was that ideal, as smart and strong and handsome as a man could be without being obvious.

Ernst and Quality: two unique people, his closest associates. It had been Lane's minor grief that they did not get along with each other, since each was so important to him. Yet he was well able to understand their fundamental separation. A Nazi and a pacifist? There was no way such people could enjoy each other's company! They did have certain areas of common ground, in that each could speak Spanish, but they never spoke it to each other. Ernst was the son of a minor or middling embassy official--the kind who did all the work and never got the credit--who had been assigned in Madrid for two or three years, so of course Ernst had picked it up. Since Ernst never let a talent go once he had it, he surely spoke Spanish fluently now. Quality had started Spanish as an elective course in high-school and continued it in college. She had taken French too, with what fluency Lane didn't know because he spoke no language other than English. He was good at airplanes, not tongues. But probably she was good at both French and Spanish, because she had a natural aptitude for that sort of thing. Perhaps it derived from her empathy with people; she could communicate with anyone, one way or another.

Lane pictured himself in a small airplane, with Quality beside him, passenger rather than co-pilot. They were flying high up above the clouds, and she was thrilled. She leaned over to kiss him on the cheek.



Someone spoke in Spanish. Lane could not understand the words, but he recognized the general nature of the language. It was Ernst, in a seat behind. Quality answered in the same language.

"Hey, speak English!" Lane protested.

But they ignored him, and continued their dialogue, to his annoyance. What were they saying, that was so important, that had to be hidden from him?

Well, he would show them! He swerved the plane to the left--

A horn blared, startling him. Lane blinked; headlights were flashing in his rearview mirror, alternately blinding him and leaving his vision darkened. Quality was stifling a scream. What was happening? Was the driver behind him crazy?

He pulled to the right, slowing, to let the impatient one by. "I'd like to ram you, you idiot!" he muttered.

"Peace, friend," Ernst said. "We were sleeping. He gave us warning."

"*You* were sleeping," Lane retorted. "I was driving." But as he spoke, he realized that he had had to pull too far to the right. His left wheel had been across the center line. He had in fact been dreaming, and his swerve to the left could have wrecked them. "Cancel that. I was drifting off." His anger was shading into retroactive consternation; this was dangerous!

"Perhaps we should stop and rest," Quality said. Her voice was strained. "Thee is naturally tired."

"Can't," Lane replied. "We have to get Ernst to New York immediately."

"We do not know that it is an emergency," Ernst protested. "Only that my father is concerned."

"If he's like you, his concern is anyone else's emergency," Lane said.

Ernst did not demur. "Yet it is not wise to drive tired. Perhaps I should after all--"

"No, I'm okay." Indeed, he was now absolutely awake. He was aware that he seemed unreasonable, and probably *was* unreasonable, but he could not help himself; to turn over the wheel now would be a sign of weakness. Of course if Quality were to make an issue, he would have to back down. But she could not drive herself; her conservative Quaker family had not yet seen the need for her to indulge in such activity. Maybe they thought that might have made her too independent. "I'll be all right."

"Certainly." Ernst nevertheless looked alert. It was evident that he intended to see that there was no more nodding while driving.

Quality cast about for a positive solution. "We were wrong to leave it all to Lane. We must maintain a dialogue."

"I do not seek to impose my words on you," Ernst said.

She turned her head to face back toward him. "I have made my peace with thee, as well as I am



ole. It is not thy fault that I abhor elements of thy situation. I do not seek to be uncivil."

"Nor I. But on what subjects may we maintain an dialogue that is neither dull nor objectionable?"

"Play the game of Truth," Lane said, chuckling. "We take turns asking each other questions, and the answers must be absolutely truthful, or there is a penalty."

"I always speak the truth," Quality said. "Those of my faith do not practice a double standard."

She meant that literally, Lane knew. Strict Quakers refused even to take an oath, because that implied that they might be untruthful at other times. So they did not swear, they affirmed. They did not swear in the colloquial sense, either, as Quality had already reminded him on this trip. There, again, was the essence of her appeal for him: her honor, her sheer consistency in life. She had been so aptly named that it was a marvel; she was quality.

Nevertheless, he could challenge her. "But there are questions you avoid. In this game you can not avoid them."

She nodded, reconsidering. It was Ernst who spoke. "The Nazi and the pacifist speaking truth! This game is dangerous."

Quality glanced back at him, then at Lane. Probably she was trying to decide between the risks of candor and those of a sleepy driver. Candor won. "I will play it."

"Then so will I," Ernst said. "Until it becomes unkind; then I will default."

"I'll lead off," Lane said. "And I'll state one other rule: we have to take turns answering. To ensure that, the one who answers a question will be the one to ask the next question. We don't have to go resolutely clockwise, in fact we don't want any order fixed, but if someone gets left out more than a couple of turns, he'll have to answer until he catches up." He paused, and no one objected. "First question: Quality, exactly what do you have against Nazism?"

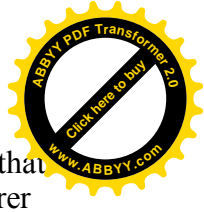
"This is not fair of thee!" she protested.

"No, answer, then ask me to respond," Ernst suggested.

She considered. "Very well. I regard Adolph Hitler as what Lane would call a posturing pipsqueak, an accident of history who has floated to the top of the German political caldron like the froth on sewer water. The man is an unscrupulous demagogue and hideous racist, and his chief lieutenants are little more than thugs. The movement he espouses is similarly ugly. I have difficulty understanding how any person of conscience can support Nazism." She took a breath. "Now I ask thee, Ernst, for thy response."

Lane made a silent whistle. She had surprised him by really socking it to the German! She might be a pacifist, but she had fighting spirit.

"There are many answers I might give," Ernst said slowly. "I might point out that other lands have their demagogues and their racists, and that nowhere is virtue necessarily rewarded in politics. I might mention Franklin Roosevelt of America, and the mistress he keeps despite being married. But we have touched on the faults of America before; they are no worse than the faults of other nations, including my



wn. I will say that while I do not support everything in which the Nazi party may be involved, and that there are those who owe their positions to factors other than merit, I strongly disagree about the Führer being either inconsequential or evil. I met him, two years ago, and I believe he is a great man, the kind of leader Germany requires in desperate times. He lifted us out of our slough of despond and made us powerful again. His programs have greatly helped the youth of our nation, and I am one who has benefited. I am here at this moment because Hitler arranged it, indirectly. He sees to the welfare of the brightest of our nation. I can not do less than applaud that." He passed his hand inside his shirt and drew out a small object on a chain about his neck. It was a silver swastika. "This is why I value this symbol of Nazism, and wear it always. It represents my devotion to the Nazi ideal."

"But the racism--" she protested, staring at the swastika with a certain morbid fascination.

"Nuh-uh," Lane cut in. "No back talk. Wait your next turn."

"She merely reminds me of an aspect I had neglected," Ernst said. "The Nazis are not racists. We merely seek to promote the greatest welfare of our kind. We believe in encouraging the fittest, and in discouraging those who are detrimental to our society. Hitler discovered that the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, mentally unfit, Communists and some others were not contributing to the welfare of the whole. Therefore he prefers to have them go to those lands where they may be welcome. We consider this to be good management."

Quality seemed unconvinced, but did not protest again.

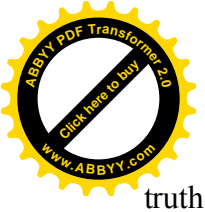
Ernst turned to Lane. "And how do you justify keeping company with a pacifist, when you are not?"

How, indeed! Lane watched the road ahead, trying to marshal his thoughts. It was not enough merely to swear (affirm) that he loved Quality, or that she was perhaps the prettiest coed on the campus. He needed an objective basis. So he broadened the base, addressing not this one aspect, pacifism, but her religious background which fostered it.

"I am turned off by ordinary people, which accounts for my acquaintances with both of you," he said carefully. "Quality is a loyal member of her religion. She is a Quaker, which is the common name for the Religious Society of Friends. They got their nickname because in the early days they were supposed to have quaked in the presence of God. They object to many of the follies of man, such as violence, intoxication, cigarettes, foul language, gambling and overt sexuality. They are gentle people, concerned with good works, but that does not mean they are foolish. Many Quakers are well-to-do, for good business is part of their religion. Good *honest* business, for a Friend never cheats. There's a joke that perhaps has some truth: a Quaker is the only person who can buy from a Jew, sell to a Scotsman, and make a profit."

There was a bark of laughter from Ernst, but Quality frowned. Perhaps she objected to the seeming derogation of Jews and Scotsmen. "At any rate, I understand that in Germany today, Quakers are the *only* people willing to do business with both Jews and Scotsmen," Lane added quickly. "As you can see, Quality is attractive both physically and intellectually, but it is her ethical core which sets her apart. She is such a good person that I could forgive many faults in her, yet do not have to, for she has none. The fault is mine, for not being more like her. How could I not love her?"

Ernst nodded. "How could you not," he murmured.



There was a silence. Quality was blushing, but could not protest, because he had indeed told the truth. He could not resist teasing her. "Do you deny it, woman?"

"No," she said. "Now thee has asked, and I have answered. These is no set length to answers. It is my turn again. Lane, why does thee seek unusual people? That is, why is thee, as thee puts it, turned off by ordinary people?"

He realized that she had turned a table on him, by taking his joke question seriously. He was stuck with another honest answer.

"That may take some time," he said. "I'm not sure you would want to listen to--"

"We are listening," Ernst said.

So he had to do it. "It dates from my childhood, right here in the state of New York. I was a wan, spindly child, lacking proper size and vitality. Naturally ordinary children picked on me. The average person seems to remember childhood as a happy time, because his memory selects for the good and the bad things fade, but I can't forget my early inability to compete. It was clear that I was both different and inferior. Everyone knew it except the adults, who didn't count.

"Then an unusual person came on the scene. He was Jed, an Australian, with his special accent setting him apart. Of course the kids started in on him, because he was new and different. Anything different was fair game, and children have no limitations of conscience. But Jed was normal in one crucial respect: he could fight. When someone got obnoxious, Jed called him out in his polite, accented way and gave him his choice: fists or wrasslin'. At first it seemed like a joke, for Jed was neither large nor muscular. But he turned out to be a well coordinated whirlwind, with a high pain threshold and considerable endurance and native cunning. Very soon it became gauche to mock Jed's accent. In fact it got so that when a boy was provoked to the point of no return about an issue, such as the shape of his nose or the pronunciation of his middle name, his voice would assume a certain Australian tinge of accent: warning of the kind of trouble that was brewing. Newcomers to the community seen learned the signal.

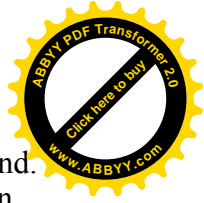
"Jed was victoriously different. He began looking out for others who were different. When I got in trouble, he tended to show up, his accent becoming more pronounced, as it did when he was ready to Call Out. So nobody picked on me when he was near--and after a while they stopped picking on me when he wasn't near, too. He never said why he picked a given fight, but the bullies caught on.

"I only knew him a year, before his family moved away. but since that time I've been attracted to those who are different. Especially those who are different and superior. Ordinary people are clannish and insensitive, but when I find those few who aren't--" He shrugged. "Now you know. Both of you remind me in a subtle way of Jed. And here we are in the outskirts of new York City. So here's my question for you, Ernst: how do I reach your place?"

"It is an apartment complex used by foreign nationals," Ernst said. "I will direct you."

So he did, and they wound through the night city until they reached it.

"We'll see you to your door," Lane told Ernst. "None of my business, I know, but if I can find out what made your folks call you home so suddenly--"



"You are entitled to know," Ernst agreed. "I hope there has been no misfortune in the Fatherland. All my relatives are there, and some are old." And, he did not add, his immediate family had not seen those relatives in two years, while Herr Best served his term as liaison for certain Germanic interests in the New York area. This residence had enabled Ernst to attend a good Northeastern college, where he had encountered Lane as a fellow wrestler.

Lane and Quality waited in the lobby while Ernst went up to meet his father. Lane took her hand unobtrusively, and this familiarity she consented to so long as they were alone. Such stolen contacts with her were more precious to him than considerably more emphatic gestures would have been from other girls, because everything Qulaity did was sincere. Only a close friend held her hand; only her fiance kissed her.

Soon Ernst was back, his face serious. "We have been recalled to Germany," he said regretfully. "We depart within the fortnight. I must help pack and terminate our affairs in this country."

"To Germany!" Land exclaimed. "So soon!"

"I regret I shall not after all be able to serve at your wedding."

"Maybe it's temporary," Lane said. "Maybe you'll be back next semester--"

Ernst shook his head. "In the present international climate, this must be final. I fear we shall not be meeting again--as friends."

"Oh, Ernst--I hate this! I only really came to know you this past year, when we started winning meets together. The team needs you--"

"You must continue the winning tradition for us both, friend. I fear my wrestling days are over. Perhaps I can continue my education at a University in the Fatherland, though normally I should be liable at this time for military service. But either way, we must part."

Lane's protests had been largely rhetorical, though sincere. He knew the way of these things. He had never seen Jed again after separation; probably he would never see Ernst again. All he could do was accept the situation bravely. They shook hands. "Whatever happens, we'll always be friends," he said passionately.

"Always friends," Ernst agreed. "Politics are nothing." He turned to Quality. "Lady, I differ with you, but respect your mode. Will you shake hands with me?"

Silently she offered her hand, granting him this token of respect. It was evident that she was on balance relieved to see him so conveniently out of the picture, but she knew him to be a worthy individual on his own terms.

Lane gave his friend a final friendly, half-savage punch on the shoulder, striking at the vagaries of fortune, then escorted Quality out of the building.

"But we'll stay in touch by mail," he called back at the door. "Send me your address, wherever you are."

"I shall," Ernst agreed, and sadly turned away.



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