



## Chapter 8

### Felix

Ernst saw Quality wave as he drove away. It was a perfectly ordinary thing, probably mere habit on her part, but it touched him. She seemed like such a fragile thing, standing there in her feminine jacket and skirt, yet she had been in Spain for the end of its civil war and had seen her share of blood. She was a soft-spoken pacifist, yet tough enough to get her job done. He respected that. Lane Dowling had a better treasure in her than perhaps he knew.

Now it was time for him to move on down to the southern tip of Spain. He had used up his slack time, driving with Quality. He would not be able to report to Heydrich until he returned to Germany, because the privacy of the local phones was not to be trusted. He would of course exonerate the Quaker mission; even had he not known Quality from America, he would have seen that these people were merely doing what they claimed to be doing, feeding hungry children who would not otherwise get fed. They were simply trying to do their bit of good in the world, in contrast to the great majority who had other imperatives.

There it was, he realized: Quality was good. She stood out from others not in appearance, though she was an extremely comely woman, but in the quality of her nature. Her name was the symbol of her being: Quality. He had felt it throughout, without being quite conscious of it until now.

When she had called him "thee," in English, he had felt something odd. He knew that she used the Quaker plain talk only when among friends. There was another symbol: they called themselves Friends. Indeed they were friends to the world, with their opposition to strife and their efforts to help those in need. Yet Quality was not his friend. She was his friend's fiancée. He had treated her as such. Still--

"Thank thee, Ernst," he said, repeating her words, and felt a warm shiver. He wished he could truly be her friend. He had told her that he regarded her as a fine woman. Now he realized how nice it would be to regard her as more than that.

Fortunately there was no chance of that. Their meeting had been coincidental, and it was unlikely that he would see her again. He need have no concern about presumption in his wandering fancy.

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In due course he reached Algeciras and rented a room, as if he were a tourist pausing to see the sights. He did not report directly to the Abwehr post; he was an unofficial agent. But he would be there to help when Admiral Canaris arrived to supervise the implementation of Felix.

"Felix" was the unofficial code name for this project. It was, in essence, to mount an assault on the rock of Gibraltar and take it from the British. With that fortress and seaport in German hands, the British would be severely constrained, and it might be possible to close off access to the Mediterranean Sea and isolate the British fleet. It promised to be a strategic masterstroke that would protect the otherwise vulnerable underbelly of the Axis.

On July 24 Canaris appeared, accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Pardo of the Spanish military intelligence. They were in civilian clothing, as Ernst was, and showed no papers. They operated only by personal recognition. It turned out that the Admiral had used a false passport himself to go to Madrid and meet with Spanish representatives, and even with General Franco himself. He had explained to



Spain's ruler the German proposal for a surprise assault on Gibraltar. Franco had been supportive, but had reservations about the strength of the British Navy.

So did they all! But that strength certainly would not diminish as long as Gibraltar remained to service it. With the ocean supply route cut off, the pressure of the Luftwaffe and the U-boats should be decisive. The British would have few places to hide.

Admiral Canaris set up residence in a German safe house, Villa Leon, and used two other houses to establish surveillance of Gibraltar. The town commandant's office in La Linea, adjacent to Gibraltar's access to the mainland, provided a view of the northern defenses. The lighthouse at Punta Camero gave a good view of the west face.

It was Ernst's job to work with Captain Witzig of the Abwehr to establish whether an airborne assault on Gibraltar was feasible. Witzig was a small slim man, but he had a good record: he had been a paratrooper at Eben Emael in Belgium, and had been decorated for valor. Ernst took the man to the various observation points he had located, and discussed the situation with him.

"Why not just send in overwhelming force across the peninsula connecting Gibraltar to the mainland?" Witzig demanded.

"That route is obviously mined," Ernst explained. "British guns control it from many angles. Assaulting troops will experience ruinously heavy losses, and it will not be possible to make a broad enough front to assure that any get through."

"What about siege equipment? Bring down big guns from Germany, blast out the mines and the fortifications behind them, so that the troops have clearance?"

"We would have a time getting them here at all, let alone in necessary haste and privacy," Ernst replied. "The Spanish railways use a different gauge track from the French, requiring the transfer of all supplies and shipments at the border. This is a tedious process at best, and impossible to conceal from the eyes of spies. Also, the lines to Alceciras move through Madrid, making secrecy impossible in the light of British intelligence. In addition, Spain is constrained by limited resources for road maintenance, ordinance repair, communications requirements and foodstuffs."

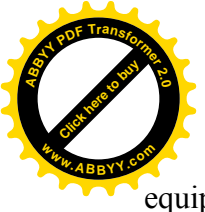
"This is not exactly the Third Reich," Witzig muttered appreciatively. "So then it must be landings by paratroops or gliders, bypassing the peninsula."

"The slopes of Gibraltar are precipitous," Ernst reminded him as they studied the solid silhouette of the great rock. "The winds are irregular. It might as well be a minefield of the air."

Witzig nodded regretfully. "Then it seems that we are without sufficient resources to take the rock at this time. Nevertheless we shall take pictures, in case others are able to fathom what we do not."

"That is a diplomatic way to put it," Ernst agreed. He had thought it should be possible to storm Gibraltar, until he had taken a good look at it. It would be a phenomenal prize to achieve, but the cost would be prohibitive.

They took pictures. Because they did not want to be spied in the act, they took them by night. Consequently all they could come up with was murky silhouettes. This, too was a bad job; better pictures were already on file.



Canaris, disappointed, nevertheless acceded to the logic. He ordered improved observation equipment to be sent to Algeciras. Then he settled down with his consultants to draw up a feasible assault plan, taking into consideration all the problems they had noted. He also ordered the commander of the Brandenburg's third battalion to determine whether he could take Gibraltar with a surprise attack by German troops smuggled through Spain in trucks and supported by an engineer battalion infiltrated by sea.

In due course the word came back: NEGATIVE. Canaris and his party had by then returned to Germany, but Ernst remained in Spain, signifying that the Admiral had not given up the quest.

Heydrich, evidently keeping close track despite Ernst's lack of a direct report, arranged to have a sealed letter delivered to him. He found it on the floor of his room in Algeciras, slipped under the door during his absence. It was apparent that Ernst was not the only secret agent in the area.

He opened the letter. DESTROY AFTER READING was stamped at the top of the sheet, and Heydrich's signature was at the bottom. It was authentic.

It informed him that there was a plan to abduct the British Duke of Windsor, who was in Portugal now, about to take the ship *Excalibur* to the Bahamas, where he would be governor. The Duke had been King Edward VIII of England in 1936, but had gotten romantically interested in an American divorcee. Faced with the choice between her and the throne, the King, not the brightest of men, had abdicated the throne and married the woman. He was understood to be sympathetic to the Nazi cause, and might agree to make a statement on Germany's behalf. That would be a political coup that might sway others toward the cause. Ernst was to go to Portugal immediately to assist, since he spoke English and could serve as a translator. He was to tell no one else of this, but to pretend he was merely traveling, as before. There was a name and address: his contact in Portugal.

Ernst stared at the letter. Abduct the former King of England? In the hope that he would then endorse Nazism? This was utter folly! Even if the man was sympathetic, he would surely be alienated by the abduction, and in any event he would never publicly betray his country. He might not be smart, but he could hardly be that stupid. What nitwit had hatched this scheme? It couldn't be Heydrich!

But Heydrich would not directly counter a directive from his superior. He would go along with it, then arrange to divert it before real damage was done, in such a way that he would not be blamed. So this was form without substance. Ernst would have to go to Portugal and make the contact, but he doubted that it would go much farther than that.

Sure enough, when he reported to the address two days later he was told to forget it; the plan had been canceled. He was instructed to forget that it had ever existed, and to pretend that he had never entered Portugal. He was glad to oblige. Heydrich had succeeded in diverting the inanity.

Ernst, left to his own devices, resumed traveling around Spain, awaiting further orders. Something was bothering him, and it did not take any great concentration to figure out what: he wanted to see Quality Smith again. He knew this was idiocy, because even if she were not the fiancée of his friend, what interest would she have in a Nazi SS officer? Ernst was the opposite of everything she stood for. Yet he remembered her plain talk, and the way she had waved to him at the end, and his soul was restless.

In mid August he could stand it no longer. He drove to Barcelona and went to the headquarters of the Quaker Relief there. Only to be told that all of the Quakers had left Spain, and the project had been



nut down. It seemed that they had done something to annoy the government, so had been abruptly expelled.

Ernst's emotions were mixed. He was sorry not to see Quality again, but glad that she had escaped the country. Now if it should come to pass that Germany invaded Spain, she would not be caught in the crossfire. She was safe in America, where she belonged.

Meanwhile it seemed that there was intense negotiation to try to get Spain to join the Axis voluntarily. Admiral Canaris came down for a week in late August to see about that, and Ernst joined him as a driver.

This, too, came to grief. After a week of intensive dialogue with Spanish officials, Canaris formed the opinion that General Franco would not join in the war until England was beaten. They would have to wait for the big effort of the Luftwaffe to break England down. Already the bombers were crossing the channel to England daily, so the capitulation should not be long in coming.

The Admiral returned to Germany, but still Ernst was relegated to Spain. Canaris was unwilling to give up on Felix, and intended to keep his personnel "on-site" until the project could be realized. This was in effect a vacation for Ernst, because he had nothing to do except drive around Spain, remaining inconspicuous. He could not remain in any one region long, lest folk realize that he was up to something. This included the Abwehr post in Algeciras.

So he toured the country in thorough fashion, reading whatever books were handy, but finding them all boring. The nights were lonely. It had been better on the floor, with Quality Smith, than in the bed alone. He thought about Krista, whom he hoped to see again soon, and about Quality, whom he expected not to see again. The two were so different, yet now occupied similar sections in his mind. Krista was beautiful, self-possessed, and decisive, and she wanted to marry him. Quality was beautiful too, in a more ethereal way, and sure of herself in a more subtle way, and decisive in an oblique way. The two were seeming opposites in nature, yet parallel. Krista wanted what was best for Krista, and would do what she had to to achieve her ambition. Quality hardly seemed to care about herself; she wanted what was best for the world, and had been doing what she could to improve it. Of the two philosophies, he preferred the latter.

But Krista was available, and Quality was not. Quality was back in America, and she was Lane's fiancée. She was a pacifist who hated the artifacts of war and despised the Nazis. He had always known that there would never be anything between Quality and himself. Why, then, was it her face that came to his mind?

He forced his imagination to picture Krista as she might be the day he agreed to marry her. She would go with him to a private place, and take off her clothing to show her fine body, and say "I thank thee, Ernst."

The picture exploded. That had not been Krista talking, but Quality! He could not keep her out of his fancy, though every aspect of her nature was foreign to his.

Ernst shook his head. There were currents of foolishness in him he had not fathomed. But they would fade in time; it was inevitable.

The Spanish press carried news the German press did not: the Battle Over Britain was not going well. Too many bombers were not returning. By the middle of September it was obvious that air power



was not going to bring England to her knees. Ernst wondered whether Lane Dowling was part of the reason. He suspected that it was.

Admiral Canaris continued to campaign behind the scenes for Felix, and Ernst continued to travel Spain. He agreed with the Admiral: it was now more important than ever to deny England the use of the Mediterranean, so that the surging British aircraft could not go there to raid Axis installations. There was only so much the British ships could do, but buttressed by air power they would be formidable. The failure over England had to be redeemed by a success here, beginning with the capture of the Rock of Gibraltar. They had to make the Mediterranean theater impregnable.

In late October Adolf Hitler himself met with General Franco, trying to charm him into joining the Axis. But Franco remained noncommittal. Did the fool think he had any other course? He had gained power because of Hitler's help; now he was stalling about returning the favor.

On October 28 Italy invaded Greece. That involved the Axis in a Balkan war, because of the "Three Power Pact" signed between Germany, Italy and Japan the month before. Ernst did not like it; to his mind the Italians had delusions of the grandeur of ancient Roman days, and were not militarily competent now. This was all too likely to become a mess for Germany to clean up. Admiral Canaris originated an armistice proposal which gained Hitler's backing, but somehow there was no follow-through, and the mess remained.

But it had one beneficial effect: it revived Hitler's interest in the Mediterranean. Two weeks later Felix was given operational status, and Canaris came to Spain again to determine how Abwehr units and combat teams could best contribute to the Felix assault. There were several code names: Felsennest, soon changed to Basta, and an Abwehr Captain worked on it under the name Roderigo. But it was really Felix.

"We need reconnaissance from the other side," Canaris said. "To pinpoint the nature and number and placement of their defenses, and to spy out any possible access route. Just a good description would be immeasurably helpful."

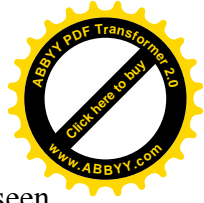
"I wish I could get there," Ernst said. "I can speak Spanish and English, so I might pass as an educated Spaniard."

"You know better than I that the isthmus is closed off and guarded, and the surrounding waters are mined," the Admiral said. "But if you can find a way, by all means do it." He smiled at the humor of the notion.

Ernst searched for a way. He learned that there was a local smuggler, Jorge, who made regular visits to the Rock, selling dubious goods at exorbitant prices. Could they bribe Jorge to smuggle a man to Gibraltar? Probably they could--but the rock was so small and tight that any stranger there was all too apt to be spotted and challenged. A failure would be worse than not trying, because it would betray the German interest in Gibraltar. So he concluded that this was not a viable option. There had to be some other way to get the information they needed.

But there was one thing they could do. Ernst went into the town of La Linea, just north of the Gibraltar isthmus. "I am looking for Jorge," he said in Spanish. "I think he has something for me."

It was surprisingly easy. Jorge regarded himself as a trader. He took Spanish goods to Gibraltar, trading them for British money, which was valuable to some parties in Spain. Twice a week he loaded



p his small boat and rowed down to the west shore of Gibraltar where he delivered Spanish wines, exotic condoms, rare expensive canned food, dirty pictures, spices, and items of female apparel not seen on the street. The British authorities knew about it, but ignored him as long as he smuggled no dangerous drugs or weapons. Ernst could understand why: such trade served as a certain relief valve for bored military men, and helped keep the internal peace. "I have many officers as customers," Jorge confided. "They don't come in person, but I know them by their tastes. I have the only brand of tea they really like, and the herbs to make women wild for sex."

"I don't believe that," Ernst said.

Jorge eyed him cannily. "But *they* believe, and that is what counts. What is it that you believe in?"

In other words, what did he want badly enough to pay an outrageous price for it. "I believe you could smuggle someone to or from Gibraltar, and back again on your following trip."

"You believe too much! They would have my head!"

"Who?"

"The British! They watch that rock like hawks. They look the other way when I trade, but if I ever tried to bring anyone else there, they would shoot me."

Ernst nodded. "Surely they would. And what do you think the Spaniards would do if you brought a Britisher from the rock to Spain?"

He became canny. "The Spanish don't care. They sell me the goods I trade. Anyone who comes from the Rock is here for a good time, with much money to spend. There are no women there, now; the British expelled them all. The local women know how to get it all from a man, and leave him happy."

So he did conduct some British to Spain! "And the Germans? What do you think they would do to such a visitor?"

"Oh, the Germans do not know about this."

"Are you sure?"

Jorge looked at him, beginning to catch on. "Who are you?"

"I am Captain Osterecht of the Abwehr."

"What do you want with me?" Jorge asked, alarmed.

"I want information. I want you to tell me of any future British you bring here."

"But if you take them, my business will be destroyed! I must bring them safely back, or I will not dare show my face at the Rock again."

"Let me explain what I have in mind. You will inform me of any Britisher you bring here. I will encounter him by seeming coincidence, interrogate him, and let him go. You will be blameless and he will not be harmed. Your business will not be affected."





"But why should I tell you? My business will be safer if I protect the business of my clients."

Ernst slowly drew his service pistol, the one that had impressed and horrified Quality. He hoped it would have similar effect here. "Because your business will be in trouble if you do not." He paused, letting the man's fear build as the threat sank in. "And because I will pay you generously for your cooperation."

Jorge's expression changed from fear to greed. "You will pay?"

Ernst put away the pistol and brought out a packet of bills. The threat had been a bluff, but the bribe was not. "This now, and the same again, for each one you tell me of." It was the stick and carrot approach, normally quite effective.

So it was that the deal was made. With luck, they would have a Britisher to interrogate about the defenses of Gibraltar. They had a drug that would make a person talk fairly freely, and forget what had occurred.

A week later Jorge contacted Ernst by calling the number he had been given. "There is one."

Ernst went immediately, taking pesos. Jorge told him where the Britisher was dallying, and Ernst gave him the money. Then the agents of the Abwehr closed in on the target.

But it was only a seaman, fresh in port and determined to get what he usually got in port. He would not have any worthwhile knowledge. They let him go without interrogation.

The following week there was another. Again they paid handsomely for nothing. Jorge was getting far the best of the deal.

But the third week it was different. "This time an airman," Jorge said as he took the money.

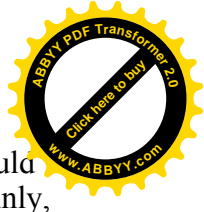
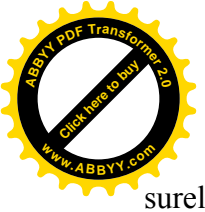
That could be good news. An airman should have seen the rock from above, and know where its main defensive emplacements were. Ernst went himself to check this one.

The man was not going to the house of the prostitutes. In fact he was not staying in town at all. He had already rented a car and was driving rapidly north. What was going on? There was nothing entertaining in that direction.

"He must be a secret agent!" someone said.

Now that seemed likely. What better way to introduce one to Spain? "We must discover what he is up to," Ernst said. But he was the only one free to pursue the agent. He got his car and set off. Now it was not merely information on the Rock he was after, but a line on what the British were trying to do in Spain. This could be extremely important.

Ernst knew the roads of Spain, and could drive them at night. The British agent evidently did not. He took wrong turns and got enmeshed in the dead ends of bombed out roads. He got lost in obscure towns. But he seemed to be headed up the coast, toward Valencia. He seemed to be in a hurry to get there, so was driving all night. But Ernst was able to catch up to him, before turning off so as not to give away his pursuit. He knew which car it was, so would not lose it.



The agent would not make it to Valencia quickly. Ernst knew of a bombed-out bridge that would surely catch him and force him to retrace a goodly segment of his route. The bridge was marked plainly, so there was no danger of driving off it and into space, but it would cause the man to turn around. Ernst drew up to the turnoff and parked his car sideways, blocking it. Now he would find out who the man was and what he was up to. It seemed pointless to follow him hundreds of miles until he reached a big city, where he could be lost. But to brace him here, alone.

Ernst got out of his car and stood beside it, his hand on his pistol. It was quite possible that the agent would be dangerous when he saw himself trapped. But it was also possible that this was not a saboteur, but someone trying to infiltrate an office or simply to make an observation and retreat with his notes. Exactly as Ernst would have done, had it been feasible to reach Gibraltar. So he would not be too ready to use his pistol. He preferred not to reveal himself as German, if he could avoid it.

At dawn the lights of the agent's car appeared. They speared down to strike Ernst's car. This was the critical point. Would the man stop? Would he talk?

The car stopped. Its motor died; the driver did not want to waste petrol. The man came out in the early light.

"Who are you?" Ernst called in Spanish. A true agent would know the language.

"I don't speak Spanish."

Ernst was amazed. *He* knew that voice!

"Lane Dowling!" he exclaimed.

"Oh my God--is that you, Ernst?"

They walked together and embraced, after each put away his ready pistol. "I thought you were a secret agent!" Ernst said.

"I thought you were a Spanish highwayman. What are you doing here?"

"Following you." Then Ernst made a connection. "Quality! You are coming to see her! But--" He hesitated.

Lane frowned. "Have you seen her?"

"Yes. I did not know she was in Spain. I was inspecting the Quaker facilities in Barcelona, and there she was. She did not expose my cover."

Lane's attention was fixed. "When was this?"

"July tenth. We traveled together, to see Guernica. I returned her to her station July twelfth."

"She was well?" There was an intensity to Lane's question.

"Physically she seemed somewhat worn, but well. Mentally--she saw war, Lane. It hurt her."





"Where is she now?"

"Why, America, I think. When I returned to Barcelona in August they told me that all the Quakers had left Spain. You did not know?"

"She did not go to America or to England. That much I know."

Ernst gazed at him in consternation. "Then where is she?"

"That's why I came here. To find out. Only I haven't been able to get papers for Spain. So I had to sneak in, hoping to reach Barcelona without being discovered."

Ernst shook his head. "The Quakers are not there. Franco deported them. The food trucks are not moving. She would not remain if she could not help. Perhaps there was a mistake in the listing, and she is after all in America."

"No," Lane said grimly. "No mistake. I checked and rechecked every report. She did not leave Spain with the Quakers."

"Lane, I know nothing of this. She--I would not want her to be hurt. When we traveled together, it was compatible. It is easy to see why you love her. Had my mission in Spain had anything to do with her disappearance, I would have known. I must conjecture that either the Spanish authorities arrested her--"

"They tell us they did not."

"They will say what they choose to say. But surely they had no reason. She meant no harm to them."

"So what is the other prospect?"

Ernst sighed. "That she somehow fell afoul of--criminals, perhaps. There are many desperate people in Spain."

"But she knew enough to stay clear of them."

"Yes. She was competent." Ernst did not like the thought of Quality being killed by criminals much better than Lane did. He cast about for something else. "Or--the Quakers had connections in France. If she went there--"

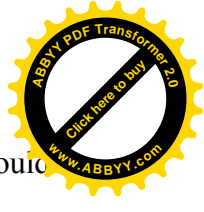
"Would the Vichy have arrested her?"

"Things are confused in France. It is possible. Yet they should have released her when they saw her papers."

"Suppose it was the Germans?"

"They might hold her as hostage. Because she was working with the British, and we are at war."

Lane grinned mirthlessly. "Don't I know it! Can you find out about her?"



"Yes. I should be able to, if she is in any Vichy or German list. But I do not know whether I could do anything to help her. If she is in a camp--they can be very strict."

"You could surely do more than I could!"

Ernst laughed, but not with humor. "I might suggest to the commandant of the camp that she is of interest to certain parties, and must be kept healthy. But that would not get her free. At least it would help until a prisoner exchange could be arranged. But prospects for any such thing are bleak."

"You will do what you can."

"I will do what I can."

"Now I am glad we met. You know it would be no betrayal of your side to help her. She's a pacifist."

"No betrayal," Ernst agreed.

"If you learn anything, maybe you could have news sent to the Spanish authorities."

"I will try."

"Then my effort here has not been for nothing, thanks to the incredible coincidence of meeting you."

"Coincidence? I think not. It was Quality who brought us together-even in her absence."

"Must be. But I'm glad it happened, Ernst. I never expected to see you again, when the war got going. Is there anything I can do for you, in return for looking out for Quality?"

"There is one thing. My people believe that I was in pursuit of a spy. I must make a report. Can you tell me of the defenses of Gibraltar?"

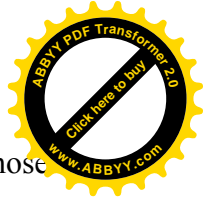
Lane paused, considering. "That question tells me your mission here."

"I am afraid it does. But if I do not get the answer to my question, from the spy, they may choose not to let you return."

Lane laughed. "I know how it is. Okay, Ernst, I don't think it will materially compromise our security to tell you what you already know. Gibraltar is practically invulnerable to any attack short of a major invasion. You could beat it down by shelling it from artillery based in Spain, or by continuously bombing it. But you'd take heavy losses in planes. I'm a fighter pilot, and I looked at their ack-ack. I'd never want to go up against it. I honestly believe that unless you can base your artillery in Spain, you don't have a chance. Not by land, certainly; you know the isthmus is mined. So is the harbor. So my advice to you is give it up. Don't even try to take it."

"Can you give specifics?"

"Yeah, sure. They'll only prove my point." He went on to do so.



"I think my people will be satisfied," Ernst said. "They will know that I could have come by those details only by interrogating one who had seen the defenses directly."

"For sure."

"Then let us return to La Linea. I believe our business is done. I will follow your car, and will advise my people to let you proceed unmolested. We prefer that the British not suspect that we are observing them."

"They already suspect. But they hardly care."

"With reason, I think." Ernst stepped back.

Lane relaxed. He offered his hand. Ernst took it. Then they got in their cars and Ernst drew his out of the way, letting Lane pass.

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Ernst's report was no comfort to the Abwehr. "Nothing short of a massive assault will take it. We don't have the resources. There are no weaknesses I could find."

"What about Jorge? If we smuggled soldiers--"

"He wouldn't do it. If he did, we could smuggle only two at a time. They could not do enough damage to make a difference."

However, Ernst did make sketches and write out descriptions of the defenses in fair detail. He had succeeded in defining the enemy emplacements. The problem was that this only confirmed that the notion of taking Gibraltar by assault was foolish. He suspected that his report would not be forwarded to Admiral Canaris.

Meanwhile, when he was free, he drove again to Barcelona and questioned the proprietor of the house where the Quaker office had been. "We suspect that one of them did not depart with the others."

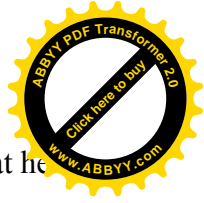
"They all left," he was assured. "None are here now."

"Did any trucks go to France?"

"There was one, but it did not return."

That was all they knew. But it opened an avenue. Quality could have driven to France, and been caught there! But there was nothing more he could do until he returned to Germany and reviewed the lists of detainees. It was galling to have to wait, but he was on assignment in Spain and had to remain there.

In December Admiral Canaris returned to Spain to meet with General Franco. Ernst accompanied him to Madrid. The Admiral's mission was unsuccessful: Spain was "unable" to join the war, or even to give a date for entry into the war, because of the current economic and military situation. "The Führer will be annoyed," Canaris muttered. "I am here on his direct order. But if we can take Gibraltar, that may make up for it. We can still secure the Mediterranean theater."



Ernst wanted to tell him that Gibraltar was hopeless, but the man was already so depressed that he remained silent.

So the consideration of Felix continued. Despite Ernst's firsthand report of the layout of the defenses, they wanted more pictures. In order to conceal their real intent, they took them by a local brothel, with some of the girls posing in the foreground.

That was a mistake. The authorities in Germany got the idea that the Abwehr personnel were playing with harlots instead of doing their work, and demanded that it stop. Project Felix was canceled.

But later in the month it was revived, as a possible diversion to relieve the hard-pressed Italians in Greece. It didn't matter; it remained hopeless.

Felix was canceled again, resurrected again, and finally canceled for good, and the Abwehr units were reassigned. But before that, Ernst was recalled to Germany. It was a relief. Now at last he would have the chance to check on Quality--if she were a prisoner of the Vichy. He hoped she was, because otherwise there was no hope for her.

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Ernst returned to Berlin. It was the Christmas season, and though the Nazis frowned on Christianity, they had no objection to festivities. So Ernst had a week's leave to visit home. He could not return directly to Wiesbaden, because of his cover, but he found a way to manage it indirectly.

The first thing he did was look up Krista, whom he had not seen in almost six months. She was getting holiday leave too. She remained almost startlingly beautiful, and her interest in him was undiminished. But Berlin was crowded, and there was no sufficiently private place for her to demonstrate her interest in her normal fashion. So their first date was quite open and chaste.

"Do you think your family would object if I accompanied you, to meet them?" he inquired.

Her eyes lighted. She understood his situation, and saw opportunity. "They do know I have been seeing someone in Berlin. I think they might appreciate learning more about him. But it may be difficult to get train tickets, this late; tickets have been sold out for weeks."

"I believe I could requisition a car for a few days."

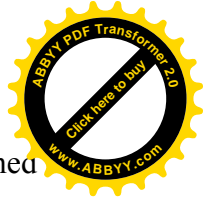
Those were magic words. "Then we must do it!"

They did it. She understood that when they arrived in Wiesbaden they would separate, each returning home alone, to avoid awkward questions both political and personal, and that when they met again there he would be Ernst Best. She was good at secrets.

As they drove toward Frankfurt, she turned to him. "We could stop anywhere along the way, for anything." Her meaning was clear.

Ernst was sorely tempted. But he resisted. "I want it to be right between us--completely right."

"But you must let me tempt you, in case it is already right. You must play fair, Ernst."



He had to smile. When they came to an intersection with a minor road, her turned off, and turned off again, finding a deserted section in a wooded region. He stopped the car.

Krista slid over to embrace him. She kissed him. Then she opened her shirt to him. "Touch me, and tell me it is not right."

"I fear that would be too much temptation."

She loosened her bra and drew it out of the way. "If you wait too long, someone will come and see me, and then you will have much explaining to do."

She was daring him to gamble on delay! And she was right: he could not afford to have anyone see her this way, and he did need to demonstrate that he could hold his course despite her.

He reached out and took her full breasts in his hands. The whole world seemed to fade out, except for that rapturous contact. His desire for her intensified to the point of seeming madness.

Then he heard something. Was it the approach of a distant car? He slid his hands around and up, catching the straps of her bra on his fingers. He drew it down to cover her breasts, and then closed her shirt over the whole.

The sound faded. It was a car, but not coming this way. But the false alarm had enabled him to do what he should.

She sighed. "You have not changed. I think it is your constancy I love most about you, though it frustrates me horribly. When you do commit, I will know it will never change."

He nodded. He rather thought he would indeed commit, when he was free of this mission. Krista was ideal for an SS officer.

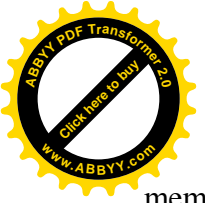
The rest of the visit home was uneventful. Four days later they returned to Berlin. Did Krista know how close she had come to overwhelming his resistance? Perhaps she did, and was satisfied merely to inflame his passion without actually doing anything forbidden.

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Meanwhile, in Berlin, the Abwehr was involved in plans for the next campaign: the relief of the Italian effort in Yugoslavia and Greece. As Ernst had anticipated, the Italians were messing up the job and needed to be bailed out. The Admiral had worked out an armistice proposal which had gained Hitler's support, but the Greek Premier opposed it.

"It is essential that Germany not be drawn into this action," Canaris insisted. He seemed almost desperate. That was odd, because it was obvious that German forces, if committed, could quickly reduce both Greece and Yugoslavia. It would have been better if it had been possible to take Gibraltar from the British, thus protecting that flank, but that would not stop land action.

Then Ernst had a bright idea. "Haven't a number of foreign personnel been interned in French camps? Refugees from the International Brigade may be of any nationality. They could be interviewed by military intelligence to determine whether they possess information or contacts of potential value to Reich concerns in other areas. If we can ascertain whether any are of Greek or Yugoslavian derivation--"



Canaris paused. "Any lead we can get is worthwhile. If by chance there are any with family members in important positions in Greece who might be blacmailed, that would be better yet. But it would take time to do this, and I have no personnel free." Then he did a doubletake, looking at Ernst. "Except for you. Do it. Requisition a list of interred foreigners, and go to see them. See about translators who know the languages. If any camp directors balk, refer them to me."

That was exactly what Ernst wanted. He would check every name, and if there were any Greeks or Slavs he could certainly do his utmost to get their information. But he would also check for one particular name: an American.

Soon the lists arrived, because it seemed that Hitler himself wanted Canaris to succeed in his effort. Ernst wondered what was so important about that region, that Germany had to remain clear of it? This was unlike previous campaigns.

Ernst pored over the names, noting prospects. It was not enough to check foreign names, for a name was no certain indication of origin. He had to catch the familiar names that might nevertheless have foreign connections. Also, some might have given false name to conceal their origins. He would have to actually see them and hear them speak to be sure. It was a big job he had gotten for himself!

Then he checked Gurs, a camp along the Spanish border. the name leaped out at him. Quality Smith, American! She was there! He had found her!

But Ernst did not allow anyone else to know his excitement. He completed his review of the lists, and prepared to travel to the camps. He had to do this in such a way that his interest would not cause any possible additional trouble for Quality. For despite his excitement about this confirmation, which was evidence that she was at least alive, he knew that her situation was in other respects dire. She must have been arrested for some reason. He would have to discover what that was, without tipping his hand.

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He interviewed the internees at Gurs in rigorous order: first those suspected of having any Greek or Yugoslav connection, then those of other nationalities. He had to use translators for the various languages. The results were disappointing, in terms of his official mission, but he was establishing his credits so that no one would catch on to his personal mission. One of the last was the American, deliberately, as a wrap-up of what remained.

They brought her in, clad in her worn and soiled shirt and skirt. There was no money for uniforms for internees, so armbands distinguished them. Her hair fell partly across her face, not from any artful device but because she evidently lacked pins to hold it in place. She was completely unremarkable--yet his heart leaped.

He did not give her a chance to betray their prior acquaintance. He spoke brusquely in English. "Your name is--" He paused to peer at his list of names. "Smith. Of Britain?"

Her surprise could have been taken for fear of the interrogator. She had never seen him in uniform before. "I am Quality Smith, of America."

"We are not at war with America. You were caught spying for Britain?"

"I was caught trying to smuggle a man from France into Spain."





He frowned. "A Jew?" he asked sharply.

"Yes."

He glanced at the camp commandant. "See how openly she confesses it! Americans are notoriously naive about this matter. She probably did not even think she was doing wrong." Then he fired the question directly at Quality. "Is it wrong to harbor a Jew?"

"No."

He turned again to the commandant. "It is a mistake to aggravate a noncombatant nation unnecessarily. It would be better to repatriate this one. Notify the American ambassador of her presence here, and advise him that we will deliver her there for a nominal fee to cover our costs in boarding her for this time. In the interim, she should be kept in good health, so that the Americans will have no claim against us."

He watched as she was led away. He had done all he could to safeguard her. He doubted that she would be released, but he had accomplished two things: he had verified that she was alive and in health, and he had let her know that he would help her. To whatever extent he could.

What he had not anticipated was the strength of his personal reaction to the sight of her. He had addressed her with calculated indifference, but he had wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her. The emotion was different, in subtle and unsubtle ways, from what he had felt when touching Krista's breasts, but as strong.

In fact, he realized now that Quality was the major reason he had resisted Krista's allure. It was sheer foolishness and mischief in every respect, but his heart was drawn to her. He *had* to help her, though he dreaded the price of it.

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