



Chapter 10 Tiergarten

Ernst's feelings were mixed as he moved on to the next camp. He had found Quality, and she was well, and now she knew that her situation was not hopeless. But how was he going to get her out of Gurs? She was a foreign national who had committed a crime by the standard of the Reich. He had spoken of repatriation, but he doubted that would come to pass. The Reich hardly cared what distant America thought, and any captives were more likely to be used as hostages than guests. So about all he had accomplished was to make her treatment better. That was a short term expedient.

But that was only part of it. What was this feeling he felt for Quality? She was his friend's fiancée, and he had searched for her at his friend's behest. He had no business entertaining any other notion. He had a girlfriend of his own, who was smart and beautiful and who offered him anything he might desire.

"Thank thee, Ernst," he murmured, remembering.

He shook his head. Perhaps he could not control the foolishness of his feeling, but he could discipline his actions. He would see that no one else ever suspected the nature of his wayward fancy.

He completed his tour of the camps, and returned to Berlin. He turned a reduced list of names over to Canaris, but his verbal report covered the situation: "As a mission, it was a waste of time. None of these are likely to be of use in the current situation."

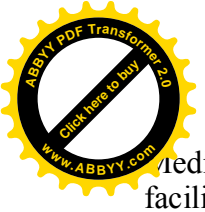
"It no longer matters," the Admiral replied heavily. "There will be no settlement there."

Ernst did not understand what Canaris meant, but thought it best not to inquire. As it turned out, there was plenty else to occupy his attention. He had to continue to correlate incoming Spanish information, because there was a growing fear that the British would invade Spain, seeking better access to France and Germany. They could use Gibraltar as a stepping stone. It was likely to prove to be sheer disaster, leaving that rock in British hands, but it was not up to Abwehr to second guess the decision of the Führer.

But the main effort was Operation Barbarosa, which related to the boundary Germany now had with Russia. German troops were going there in such number that it was evident that an invasion of Russia was planned. It had to be a surprise, for even the Communists could make trouble if forewarned. So Abwehr had to devise false orders for troop deployment, purposely leaked to diplomatic reports and even statements of Propaganda Minister Goebbels, to decoy the British and the Russians. "The British are not our real enemies," Canaris confided. "They are Aryan like us, and perhaps will accept peace in due course. But the Communists are an abomination, and must be destroyed."

So it was made to seem to the Russians that the troop concentrations along their border were merely a decoy to hide a planned invasion of England, and it was made to seem to the British that the troops were being used to counter the Russian military presence. False reports abounded: mysterious German tourists were watching bases in French Morocco. Sixty thousand German troops were moving quietly through Spain. Eight German divisions were being withdrawn from the Russian frontier for action in the west.

"It is disaster to open a second front," the Admiral confided privately. "We must first defeat Britain, making her sue for peace. Then Spain will join us. Then, secure in the Atlantic and



Mediterranean theaters, we can deal properly with the Communists. But we must do what we can to facilitate the Führer's wish. It is not my business to make policy."

Early in April Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece. Suddenly Ernst understood what the Admiral had meant about that theater no longer mattering: because the plans for that invasion had already been set. So Canaris had thrown himself into Operation Barbarosa, which at least had some future.

A new plan was devised to foil a British invasion through the Spanish peninsula. It was code named Isabella. It was strictly a military operation, with little direct Abwehr activity, but Ernst nevertheless was sent on several reconnaissance missions as the plans evolved. During these he made sure to check on Quality, under the guise of searching out any information she might have on Spain. He talked to her in Spanish. When he was sure that there was no one else in earshot who understood that language, he was able to speak with greater candor.

"How are they treating you, truly?"

"Well," she replied.

"You have lost weight."

"Everyone has lost weight. There is not enough food to go around. But they give me more than the others, keeping me healthy."

"And you share it with others, going hungry yourself," he said with sudden insight.

She dropped her gaze. "I have to do what I can."

He realized that she would starve herself, to help others. Conditions were worsening in all the camps, and brutality was becoming more commonplace. She had evidently escaped it so far, perhaps only because of his directive that she be saved, but that could not endure indefinitely.

Ernst dug into the deep pocket of his overcoat. He brought out a chunk of cheese left over from his hurried lunch while traveling. "Take this," he said gruffly. "Eat it now, while I interrogate you."

Meekly, she obeyed. It was the only way he could be sure that she did eat it, instead of giving it away. He had promised Lane to do what he could for her, and it was very little, but all he could manage at the moment.

On June 22 Germany invaded Russia. The Russians were caught completely by surprise, thanks to Abwehr's efforts, and suffered horrendous losses. This was perhaps the Admiral's greatest intelligence coup.

Meanwhile Krista was persistent. She was not satisfied with occasional dates; she wanted commitment. "Take me to your room for a night," she urged him. "Let me show you exactly what I can do for you."

He shook his head, smiling. "I would have no judgment at all, with you there. I am not ready to marry."



"I have told you, you do not need to marry me."

He waggled a finger warningly in her face. "I would need to, if you were with me for a night."

She caught the finger between her teeth, pretending to bite. "You are like a rat, wary of the bait."

"Very like a rat," he agreed.

He managed to check on Quality at Gurs in August, and again in October. Each time she looked thinner, and the camp looked worse. She always had a positive attitude, but he distrusted that; she was trying to persuade him that things were better than they were. The little bits of food he gave here were pitifully inadequate; only if he could do it every day could he stabilize her. That was impossible.

"You are pensive," Krista told him later in October. "Do you fear for the progress of the war?"

"I do," he agreed. For he could see that the German initiative was slowing, and that boded no good. "The Allies are building an expanded runway on Gibraltar, which means they expect to use it to attack us, and Spain still refuses to join the Axis. The Russian resistance is stiffening, and our losses there are mounting; winter could be cruel indeed."

"But there is something else on your mind."

"Perhaps so." He cursed his foolishness, but he could not rid himself of his brooding concern with a single prisoner he had promised to help.

"Is there something wrong with me?" Krista asked. "Have I given you offense, or is that shadow on my ancestry--"

"No!" he exclaimed. "There is nothing wrong with you, Krista! The more I know of you, the more I appreciate you. You are beautiful, smart and competent."

"But you will not trust me with your secret," she said.

"What secret?"

"The thing that is weighing on you, making you morose."

He gazed at her. She was right: he could not tell her what was truly bothering him. Because all she would hear would be the words "other woman." It wouldn't matter that the woman was his friend's fiancée whom he had promised to help, and that instead he was standing by to watch her slowly die.

"I wish I could marry you, and go with you to some secret garden, and forget everything else," he said sincerely.

"Tiergarten," she said brightly. "The park close by your hotel. We will go there now."

He laughed, and part of his mood lifted. "And you will get me in a private place there, and show me what maddens me. It is your way of torturing me."

"Exactly," she said, inhaling.



Late in November Admiral Canaris visited Spain again, and Ernst drove down separately to join him. The Admiral truly loved Spain; only there did he seem happy. His mission was to sound out the Spanish government on Isabella. But it was becoming obvious that despite the Allied buildup at Gibraltar, they were not going to use the distraction of the Russian campaign to invade Spain. That meant that Isabella might prove to be unnecessary.

Canaris returned to Germany December first. That left Ernst to make another routine check on the camps, and return separately.

But before he reached Gurs, the Japanese bombed the American base at Pearl Harbor, in the Pacific ocean. That meant that America would enter the war. It could be only a matter of days before it became formal, for Germany as well as Japan.

That meant that Quality Smith would no longer represent a neutral nation. She would represent an enemy nation. That would be the end of her preferential treatment--and surely the end of her life, from privation. Others were dying in the camps, as conditions worsened.

Distraught, he thought it through from every angle as he drove to France. It was a desperate situation, requiring a desperate measure. There was no guarantee of success, and perhaps he would only drag himself down too. But he had to try it.

Quality looked thinner than ever. She still wore her original clothing, but now it hung on her. Yet her face possessed a preternatural beauty, her eyes seeming huge, her lank brown hair smoothing the angles of her jaw.

"Japan bombed the American base on the Hawaiian Islands," Ernst told her. "They destroyed American power in the Pacific. This may not be of importance to you, because you are a pacifist--"

"The poor people!" she exclaimed. "The lives lost."

"America will rebuild. But it affects you in this way: you are an American, and Japan is allied to Germany. So very soon America will be at war with Germany, too."

"And I will become an enemy national," she said, comprehending the significance.

"I must get you out of here," he said. "This is now imperative, and there can be no delay. It must be today. But I can think of only one way to do it."

She shook her head. "There is no way. They will not release me."

"SS officers have certain privileges. I dislike deception, but see no other mechanism. If I suggested that I wished to have you for--for my use, they would not stop me from taking you."

She stared at him.

"I would not actually use you," he said quickly. "I give you my word on that. I promised Lane to find you and to help you if I could. I wish I knew a better way. I fear for your continued detention here. I fear for your life. But still, you would have to agree to go. Others would have to be given the impression



at it was so. Would you do that?"

She considered. Then she whispered, "Yes."

She had agreed! He coughed to mask his astonishment. He had feared that she would elect to die. "Then I will see to it. But--you must not appear to be willing. Your agreement is for me, not for them. You must be resigned, perhaps in despair. You understand?"

She nodded.

Ernst dismissed her, then went to the commandant. "This American woman--I think she knows more than she has told. I wish to take her for more thorough interrogation. Release her to my custody."

The man looked at him. "She is beautiful," he remarked. "Or would be, when better fed."

Ernst returned his gaze. "And what of it?"

"There must be higher authorization."

This was the risky part. "Here is a code-name for Reinhard Heydrich. Contact him and say that Ernst Best is making a requisition." He had given his true name, knowing that it was unknown here, but would be known to Heydrich.

The name of Heydrich evidently impressed the man. This was a most powerful contact. But Ernst could see the lingering doubt. Was it a bluff?

"I will wait," Ernst said firmly.

The commandant left the office. If he did contact Heydrich's office, what would happen? Heydrich was at present in Czechoslovakia, and difficult to reach, so his home office would demur. Would the commandant pursue the matter further? Ernst was betting that he would not, for fear of making a powerful enemy unnecessarily. The man believed that Ernst was simply appropriating the most attractive prisoner before some other officer did; this kind of thing was known to happen. What was the harm in it? So probably he would not risk a challenge, and would not even enter the matter in the records. It would simply be one less prisoner to feed. One who might otherwise soon be dead anyway.

Sure enough, the commandant returned in less time than it would have taken to reach Czechoslovakia. "Take her," he said.

"Have her brought to me and signed out," Ernst said.

"That will not be necessary. Authorization has been given."

So he was right: the man preferred no record. Quality would remain on the camp rolls, but would simply not be there. Soon enough she would be forgotten, or possibly her name would be put in place of another woman who died.

Ernst returned to the main camp. He saw Quality standing there, waiting. He strode toward her. "Come with me," he said gruffly, taking her arm.



She tried to hold back, but he hauled her along. He brought her to his car and shoved her roughly in. He got in himself and started the motor. Quality hid her face as if terrified or ashamed. Possibly that was true. He was passed on out of the camp without challenge.

"There is bread under the seat," he said, looking straight ahead. "Take it."

She reached under and found it. "I think thee, Ernst."

"I will take you to my apartment in Berlin. Others will think what they will think. You must always appear afraid of me. But I tell you again: I mean to help you."

"I am afraid *for* thee, Ernst," she said. "This is a great risk for thee."

"I promised Lane." But it was more than that. He would have had to do it even if Lane had never existed. Quality was simply too good a person to allow to wither and perhaps die in such a camp, or to be brutalized or raped there.

He drove her to Germany. It was a two day journey, with a night in Paris. The hotel there had a bath adjoining the room, and he was glad for that, because Quality stank of the camp and her own forced lack of hygiene. On the way they talked, as they had in Spain, and he kept her supplied with food. Freed of the environment of the camp, she was willing to eat, and she did so voraciously. That was part of the reason he maintained the dialogue: to distract her, so that she would not feel guilty for eating, and stop.

"We can talk freely here," he told her. "But not in my apartment. Anyone might overhear, and if it became known that I am trying to save you for an American airman, it could be very bad for us both. You must seem to be a captive woman, chosen for her appearance, afraid to try to flee. Since you do not speak German, the pretense should be feasible. If anyone can hear, I will treat you with contempt, a creature of no value. You will have to do menial tasks, and after the hopelessness of your situation is apparent, you will do shopping for me. If I can arrange temporary papers for you."

"I understand," she said quietly.

"My apartment is not large, but there is an alcove where you can have privacy. I will give you my bed, as before, and--"

"No."

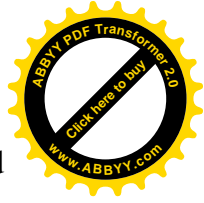
He glanced at her, surprised. "It is the best I can do."

"No, thee must not give me privacy," she said. "Thee would not do that for a kept woman. Neither would thee put her in thy bed, with thee elsewhere. She would share thy bed."

"But--"

"I trust thee, Ernst."

He was silent, knowing that she was right. The role had to be correctly played, or it would be obvious that it *was* a role. But how was he to share his bed with her, when already she intrigued him in a manner he needed to expunge?



They drove rapidly north through France. Ernst's Abwehr authority eliminated challenges, and there were no delays. Even so, it was late by the time they approached Paris.

"Will thee have to report to the SS headquarters here?" Quality asked.

"It is not necessary. Surely you do not wish to put in an appearance there!"

"Surely I do not," she agreed wanly. "They might recognize me. I was there to arrange for food for the Jews being transported to Spain. They took my money, but the Jews wound up in Gurs and similar camps."

"Spain would not admit them," he agreed. "I am sorry your trip was for nothing."

"It cost me more than money," she said. "That was when I was arrested. Perhaps it is God's punishment."

"I thought Quakers did not believe in that sort of thing. In a retributive God."

"We do not define our beliefs in that way. I thought I did not believe that, but I did sin."

"Sin?"

"I told a lie. It was not the first time."

"To help a man escape death," he said, catching on.

"Yes. But still a lie. A sin. I have meditated much on that. I have learned the consequence of it."

"I think I would disagree with you on much else, but I appreciate your problem. I am doing something similar by taking you from that camp. I would not do it were I not afraid that there is no acceptable alternative."

"Yes. Thee understands."

They were silent as he threaded his way through Paris to reach the hotel where his room was reserved. "You understand the way this will appear," he reminded her.

"Thee has a prisoner, nominally for questioning, actually for entertainment."

"Yes. Another lie we share."

"Is it, Ernst?"

"A half lie. I did claim you for questioning, letting them believe otherwise."

"Is it otherwise?"

He was taken aback. "You said you trusted me."



"I do, Ernst."

"Then I do not understand."

She smiled. "Perhaps I am teasing thee. I meant that possibly thee does find my company entertaining. Thee said thee enjoyed it before, in Spain."

He relaxed. "That is true. But knowing that for you this is necessity rather than pleasure, I did not think of it that way."

"It is both, Ernst."

He did not answer, again. Her words had touched him deeply, but he feared misreading their implication. She could not know that his feeling for her was verging on the forbidden. She was his friend's fiancée.

He took her to his room without ceremony or apology. Officers did sometimes take women to their rooms, and it was not wise to question them about this.

There was no need for a meal; they had been eating fairly steadily while driving. Ernst locked the door, then guided her to the bathroom. She made a little squeak of delight when she saw the fancy tub.

"Wash yourself, woman," he said gruffly in German. "But do not waste water. There is a war on."

She did not speak German. This was his reminder that they could not trust the seeming privacy of the room. "Ja," she said. That much German everyone knew.

Ernst turned on the radio fairly loud and tuned in the news to help cover the sounds of her bathing. He tried not to picture her naked. It was no business of his. He had taken her from the camp to safeguard her health and life, and he intended to safeguard her dignity too. She must never know his illicit fancy.

In due course she emerged, wrapped in a towel. She went to the bed and got in.

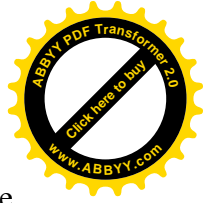
Ernst turned off the radio and went to use the bathroom. There were her clothes, washed and hung up to dry as well as they could. He realized that he would have to get her new ones; hers were so worn as to be on the verge of uselessness.

He stripped and washed at the sink. Then, in underclothing, he returned to the room. He saw her towel folded beside the bed. She was well over to the side, leaving space for him. He remembered what she had said about sharing the bed. That applied in Paris as well as in Berlin.

He got in and turned out the light. He would ignore her proximity as well as he could.

But in the darkness her hand came across. Her cool fingers touched his shoulder. They squeezed it, lightly, once, and retreated. It was her way of thanking him, since it was not safe for her to speak.

He closed his eyes and willed himself to sleep.



Ernst woke before dawn. He got up, used the bathroom, and dressed. He felt Quality's clothes: they remained damp. She would have to don them anyway. At least she and they were now clean; the smell was gone.

She remained asleep. He knew she was recovering from the privation of the camp. She would need more sleep and food. But now he had to rouse her, for they had a long day's drive to Berlin.

"Woman, wake," he said gruffly in German.

Her eyes opened. They were blank for a moment as her mouth tightened in apprehension. Then she oriented, and smiled up at him. She flung back the blanket and sat up before he could turn his back. He saw her small breasts against her gaunt ribs. She had lost more weight than he had realized. He should have taken her out of Gur before this.

He faced away as she got out and walked around the bed to the bathroom. In a very short time she emerged, wearing her damp clothing.

He had donned his overcoat in the interim. Now, afraid of the effect the outdoor chill of the morning would have on her, he took it off and put it around her shoulders.

She shook her head no, but he insisted. What good would it be to save her from the camp, if she died of chill? The coat fell to her ankles, protecting all of her body.

He led her out of the room and down to the lobby, where he checked out. The clerk ignored her. They went on out to the car. He started the motor, then turned on the heater. "Eat," he said in English, digging out the remnant of bread and cheese from the prior day.

"Thee is circumspect in commenting on my appearance."

"No self-respecting SS officer would settle for an emaciated woman. Not in Berlin."

She nodded. "I had not thought of that. I will try to achieve the required plumpness." She ate with a will, and later in the day slept in the seat.

He stole a glance at her. It was probably his imagination, but she seemed to look better already.

They reached Berlin late at night. He took her to his room, and she stripped immediately and got into the bed. He was tired from the long drive, and did the same. Again her hand touched his shoulder; then he slept.

It got cold in the night, and the hotel was not sufficiently heated. Ernst was used to it, and his thick blankets normally were enough. But he became aware of Quality shivering. She was lean and weak, and needed more.

He got out in the darkness and found his overcoat. He spread it over her, then got back in himself. But still she shivered. Could she have some illness? What more could he do? Insulation did not help enough; she needed heat.

"Please--may I?" she whispered. "In the camp, we protected each other from the cold."



"Ja." He hoped he understood her correctly.

She moved over toward him, then lay against him, as close as she could get, her arm and leg half across his body, her head beside his. He put his arms around her, drawing her in, and drew the covers in close. She was so light and thin! Then he lay quite still.

Her body was cool, but gradually it warmed. "Thank thee," she whispered, and slept.

He found to his surprise that he could relax. He was doing his best to safeguard her, and had found the way to secure her from the cold. He was well fed and healthy, and had body heat to spare. He was sharing it with her. In this situation he had no sexual inclination; his fear in that respect had proved to be groundless. She was not an object of sex appeal, at this time, but of pity.

In the morning he disengaged and tucked the blankets closely about her. Then he did calisthenics, unkinking his arms and warming up. It was a regular morning ritual, and he saw no reason to change it; those in the neighboring rooms were used to this morning noise. No need to alert them to any change in his situation; soon enough they would realize that he had a woman in his room.

When he finished, Quality was awake. She lay huddled in the blankets, watching him. Embarrassed, he quickly dressed.

Then he recovered his overcoat. He made a gesture of eating: he had to go out to purchase food. He brought out his key and gestured as of locking the door: he would lock her in. She nodded. She understood that she could not go out alone.

He went to a store he knew, and bought bread, cheese, milk, lettuce and as an afterthought, chocolate. The proprietor lifted an eyebrow but did not comment. An SS man could indulge himself if he chose.

He also bought a newspaper--and discovered that Germany had declared war on the united States of America the day before. He had gotten Quality out of the camp just in time.

Ernst brought the food to his room. Quality had dressed, then wrapped herself again in a blanket. Her eyes were big under the impromptu hood the blanket formed. He showed her the chocolate. "Eat," he murmured. "It will make you warm." He ate only sparingly himself, saving the food for her, because he could eat elsewhere.

Then he left for the Abwehr, locking her in again. This was the way it would have to be. This set the pattern for the following days. He found books printed in French and English and brought them to her. Several were by Nietzsche; he doubted that she wanted more of that, but there was no great assortment cheaply available in those languages. She welcomed each new book, and evidently read it. She had little else to do during the days he was at work.

The first evening when he returned he found her sitting by the window, gazing out. He set down his groceries and books and came to stand close behind her. "That is *Tiergarten*," he said in a low voice, in Spanish. "The 'Animal Garden.' A popular park. I chose this room because of that view."

"Tiergarten," she repeated. "I thank thee, Ernst, for that view. It cheers me."



"Eat," he said gruffly in German. "I must go out again."

In an hour he returned with assorted items of clothing for her. He knew the fit would be imperfect, but he couldn't leave her in her inadequate original garments. One of the items was a nightgown, so that she would not have to sleep naked again, and would have what slight additional warmth it provided. She made a pleased exclamation when she saw it, and that night she wore it. Now she seemed ethereal rather than thin, and angelically attractive. He did not dare compliment her appearance, for fear his sincerity would betray his feeling.

The days passed, and she began to recover her flesh, but Ernst knew it would be months before she was restored to full health. In the interim, there were other problems. Once a week the hotel's cleaning woman came through; she had a passkey, and he could not keep her out. So he dealt with the potential problem forthrightly: he went to the manager.

"I have a woman in my room. I rescued her from a camp. She does not speak German. I want her left alone, and I do not want word of her presence spread. There may be additional expense to the hotel because of her occupancy. I hope this will cover it." He proffered a suitable amount.

"There will be no problem," the man said, pocketing the money.

"And I would like to have a second key. Here is the deposit on it."

He got the key. Then he gave it to Quality. She was no longer a prisoner, physically, though without papers this made little difference.

Another problem was Krista. The Christmas season was coming up, and though the official Nazi line frowned on the religious aspect, the celebration was allowed. Krista would have time off, and so would he, and she expected to share it with him. She hoped to come to his room, if not for a night, at least for a few hours. That would be extremely awkward.

"Who is Krista?" Quality inquired when he tried to explain why he would be absent much of the time.

"My female friend. She would like to marry me."

"I wish you well."

He found himself uncertain. She had not said "thee." Then he realized that she meant the plural. "She is a fine young woman. Any man should be well satisfied to marry her."

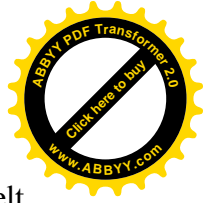
"Surely so." She seemed almost amused.

It remained awkward. "But to explain your presence here--I do not think she would understand."

"Thee must bring her here, Ernst, and I will explain."

"She might feel obliged to report you. She is I fear a better Nazi than I am." He looked around the room. "She would also note that we use one bed."

She smiled. "This, too, I will explain. I do not wish to interfere in thy life, Ernst."



She had already done so, if she but knew. At night, when he held her for warmth, feeling her flannel nightgown against him, and her slender body, he imagined that she was his fiancée, and he felt guilty. Yet that fancy brought him delight, and he could not abolish it. If Krista saw Quality, she would immediately divine the truth in his heart, regardless of Quality's innocent explanation. But he could not say that without betraying the trust he had assumed for Lane. "I think it best that we not chance it."

She looked down. "Thee knows best, Ernst."

It was no easier with Krista. "This is the holiday season," she pointed out as they sat at a table in a restaurant. "The time for joy and license, yet you remain withdrawn. Let me take you somewhere where I can make you truly relax."

"I fear that is beyond your power."

"But you must give me a trial. Perhaps I will surprise you." She moved her leg so that her knee touched his. When he glanced down, he saw that she had hiked up her skirt so that he alone could see her leg above the knee. It was a fine leg, and the shadow into which it rose was indeed alluring. Her body had lost none of its appeal for him. But until he came to terms with his illicit feeling for Quality, he could not afford to take any part of what Krista offered.

Ernst wished he could get out of this. "It is not that you are in any way inadequate. It is that I know of nothing that can ease my situation."

"If only you would tell me!" she exclaimed, frustrated.

"If only I could."

"Last year we went home together. Why not--"

"This year I can not."

She gazed at him in a calculated manner. He feared her next question. But she did not ask it. "You must tell me when you can, Ernst." She did not broach the subject again. But he was not reassured.

Then in January he had a surprising and unwelcome visit at his room. It was Dohnanyi, the civilian associate of General Oster, who was notoriously anti-Hitler. Ernst had traveled with him, and found the man compatible and useful, but the last thing he needed now was the political complication that further association with him would bring. Worse, he could not hide Quality's presence.

Quality sat in a corner, facing the man without speaking. She was in one of the dresses Ernst had bought for her, and already it hung less loosely on her as she regained weight. She had done some sewing on it, and fashioned a kind of sash that helped conceal her slenderness, and her bosom was filling out again. She could have been taken for German.

"So you are keeping a woman now," Dohnanyi remarked, eyeing Quality in a manner Ernst did not like.

"That has no relevance to my work," Ernst said shortly in German.

"But I understood that you had a regular girl."



"I prefer not to discuss the matter."

Dohnanyi laughed. "You are a more ambitious man than I took you for! A girlfriend and a mistress both."

"What is your business with me?" Ernst asked evenly.

Dohnanyi got serious. "Surely it is apparent to you that Hitler is a madman. First Poland, then France--had he stopped there, perhaps it would have been all right. But then Russia, and now America. These are not pygmies! They will overwhelm us, unless we renounce this folly while we yet can. While we still have our strength."

"Our troops are at the verge of Moscow, and America is far away," Ernst retorted, noting how Quality picked up on the word "America." But privately he feared exactly what the man suggested: that Germany had assumed too great a burden, and was extended on too many fronts.

"If we depose Hitler and make peace now, we can spare ourselves much agony," Dohnanyi said. "But we need internal support before we can challenge Hitler."

"You won't get it here!" Ernst retorted angrily. "Hitler is a great man. He has made Germany great." He brought out his silver swastika on its chain. "I value this symbol of what he has made of Germany. Now go away, and we shall pretend you never came here."

Dohnanyi departed without further argument. Ernst locked the door behind him. What had possessed the man to come here like this, spouting treason? Ernst had never given him any encouragement.

"What was it about?" Quality asked quietly.

He changed to English, lowering his voice. "He wants to overthrow the Führer! He seeks to convert me to his cause. But I am loyal. He knows that. I don't know why he came here."

"Perhaps to verify my presence," she suggested.

Ernst nodded. "And now he has a hold against me. If I report him for treason, he will report you. I must be silent."

She shook her head sadly. "I did not wish to complicate thy life, Ernst."

He put his arm around her shoulders. "I would not have it otherwise." Then, realizing what he had done, he withdrew. "I meant that I must do what I must do, and you are not to blame."

She did not look at him. "Thee sleeps embracing me, but thee will not touch me by day?"

He laughed, without force. "At night there is reason. By day, it is a presumption."

"A presumption of what?"

"A presumption that what others think is true."



"And is it false?"

She had questioned him in a similarly oblique manner during their drive to Berlin, a month before. Again, it made him nervous, because his attraction to her had not abated. It was essential that he reassure her, so that she would not come to fear his intent. "If I ever touch you in a way you do not wish, there will surely be compelling reason for it," he said carefully. "I deeply regret holding you prisoner here, and would free you if I could."

"I am perhaps prisoner," she agreed. "But I would not care to take my freedom from thee."

"Not in the middle of Berlin!" he agreed. "But I hope the time will come when it is possible." Then he would marry Krista, and try to forget.

The next week the trouble was abruptly worse. There was another peremptory knock on the door, and when Ernst opened it, there was Major Stummel of the Central section, the legal department. He was young and friendly, but deadly. His report could destroy Ernst's standing in the Abwehr, or exonerate him from suspicion. "I was in the area, and thought I would pay a call," Stummel said politely. "Have you time?"

Ernst could hardly decline, knowing the significance of such a seemingly coincidental visit. "By all means, come in."

The man entered. "Freulein," he said, spying Quality.

She nodded, not knowing what to expect.

They sat down. "I see you have a view of the Tiergarten," he remarked. "That is nice."

Ernst agreed. They exchanged other pleasantries. Then Stummel began to zero in on his business. "It is such a pleasure to work with the able officers of the Abwehr. Colonel Lahousen is a fine soldier, though his loyalty may be primarily military rather than political."

"I have worked closely with Lahousen," Ernst countered. "I regard him as a fine and loyal soldier in every sense."

"And of course Admiral Canaris is a brilliant espionage officer, but perhaps not as fine an administrator or manager. Perhaps he allows himself to be unduly swayed by underlings of dubious quality."

"Such as General Oster," Ernst agreed. Now he was on safe ground. "A strutting peacock, a man so consumed with his own opinions that he questions the decisions of the Führer and speaks treason carelessly. The only reason he has not been court-martialed is that his incompetence safeguards his rashness. And his friends: Dohnanyi, that sly lawyer who knows nothing of discipline and cares nothing for the Volk, a scheming weasel who embodies everything that national socialism stands against."

"Yes, there are rumors of Jewish ancestry and black market activities." Then Stummel remarked with seeming innocence: "I noticed that you talked to Dohnanyi. I believe you have worked with the man before--or do I misremember?"



Of course his memory was perfect. "I did travel with him last year. He was a pleasant conversationalist, but I did not take him seriously."

"I believe he visited here recently. To review old times?"

"I do not wish to speak ill of an associate," Ernst said tightly.

"Ill? In what manner?"

"He remains extreme in his politics. I had to ask him to leave."

"Ah, you do not subscribe to his notions?"

"I thought I had made that clear," Ernst said wryly.

Stummel smiled. "Ah, you did; I apologize for forgetting." But Ernst knew that the man had not forgotten; he had phrased his question again, verifying that Ernst's answer remained constant. His gaze flicked about the room, touching as if coincidentally again on Quality. "Forgive me if I am once more forgetful, but I had understood you are not married, Captain Osterecht."

"I am not," Ernst agreed.

"But I see here with you a most attractive young woman. Is she your cousin, perhaps, come for a visit?"

Treacherous water! "I do have her with me. She is not my cousin. I do not care to discuss her situation."

"Of course not," Stummel said with deceptive ease. "I understand that more than one officer prefers, shall we say, the comforts of home to those of the street." He was implying that Quality was a prostitute.

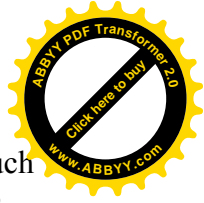
Ernst knew that he should let that implication stand. Keeping a woman was an indiscretion, but an understandable one, and there was a general policy of silence in such matters. But he was unable to allow this particular lie about Quality to stand. Dohnanyi's assumption that she was his mistress had been bad enough, and probably should have been countered so as to avoid any chance of blackmail. "No. She is not that kind of woman."

"No? I would not for a moment imply that such an attractive person could be an agent of the treasonable faction, sent to corrupt a good man. Yet such things have been known."

Ernst felt a terrible chill. Stummel was springing his trap, suggesting that Quality was evidence of corruption. "I have no such relationship with her!"

"She is nothing to you? Then perhaps we could take her off your hands, so that she will not remain a burden."

There was the threat. How was he to abate it? He could claim neither prostitution nor indifference, yet to suggest that she was important to him was a worse trap. They would use her mercilessly to bend him to their will, and he would have no independence.



"She does not speak German," he said carefully. "I took her from a camp, not wishing to let such an attractive creature go to waste. What she may be to me in the future is a private matter. I prefer to have no publicity."

Stummel stood and approached Quality. "I must say that she does not look like a Jew; were she such, it would be unfortunate."

"She is no Jew," Ernst said. Would Stummel never give over?

"Then surely you will have no objection if I check for a tattoo," Stummel said. His hand shot out, catching Quality's arm.

Quality mistook the nature of Stummel's intention. She thought he had rape or removal in mind, and Ernst could not clarify it for her without revealing the closeness of their association. "No!" she cried, jerking away.

Now Stummel showed his nature. "So she is willful. This is no fit companion for an officer." He stepped toward her again, determined to break her to his will--or to make Ernst betray his true feeling for her. It was a two-edged trap, skillfully set up. Either Quality would become worthless, subject to being taken and thrown in prison or perhaps turned over to other officers for their use. Or she would be revealed as Ernst's lover, a perfect hold against him, with the implication that he was being corrupted.

Ernst acted instantly. "Silence, woman!" he shouted, striding across the room. He caught her by the shoulder himself and spun her around. Her sleeve tore, baring her arm, showing that there was no guilty tattoo. Then he struck her with his open hand across the face. He felt her nose give way under the force of his blow. He winced, inwardly; he had intended to strike her on the side of the face, relatively harmlessly.

She made a stifled scream and stumbled back, the blood flowing from her nose. She fell to the floor, sobbing. But Ernst paid no overt heed. "Never talk back to an SS officer!" he shouted. He took another step toward her, lifting his foot. She cringed away from him, whimpering, her blood dripping on the floor.

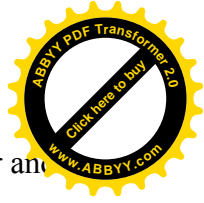
Making an exclamation of disgust, he spun about to face Stummel. "My apologies for this scene," he said curtly. "The woman has not yet quite learned her place. That will be corrected, I assure you."

"So I see," Stummel said, stepping back. He was evidently satisfied: the woman was not a Jew or other condemned person, and obviously was here for Ernst's convenience, not his love. "I shall leave you to it." He turned away with distaste, and departed.

Ernst listened until he was sure the man was not only away from the room but out of the building. Only then did he dare to Quality.

She, too, had remained where she was, holding her nose to stop the bleeding. Her hair was disheveled, and a bruise was forming around her left eye. There were tears on her cheeks, and blood and tears on her chin.

"Oh my love," he murmured, the horror welling up. He had exonerated Quality and himself from suspicion, but at what price? "What have I done!"



Afraid to approach her, he hurried to the bathroom and got a towel. He soaked an end in water and brought it out to her. "I am so sorry," he said. "How can I explain?"

She took the towel and dabbed at her face. There was less blood than there had seemed to be, and her nose had stopped bleeding. Her face was quickly clean, but her eye was starting to swell. "There is no need to explain, Ernst."

He put out a hand to help her up, not quite touching her. She took it and got to her feet. "Yet I must try," he said as she steadied. "I would not--I would never--you are to me so--" But that was what he must not say.

She lifted a dry corner of the towel and dabbed at his face. "Thee has explained."

He realized that his face was wet with his own tears. "He would have taken you--" he said lamely.

She dropped the towel, put her hands to the sides of his head, and drew his face in to hers. "There must be truth between us, Ernst. We have lived a lie too long."

"The truth is not proper," he said.

She brought his face the rest of the way down to hers, and kissed him on the mouth.

His arms went around her body. He embraced her with infinite gentleness. Truth, at last.

She drew back slightly. "I love thee, Ernst."

"But it may not be!" he protested.

She merely looked at him.

"It is true," he said. "I love you, Quality. But you are not mine to love. Lane--"

"I have had time to think," she said, in a kindly but considerable understatement. "I have realized that my feeling for Lane has diminished, and my feeling for thee has increased. I know now that I am not a perfect match for Lane, or even a suitable one. I fear I am not ideal for thee, either, but my heart has spoken. So also, I think, has thine."

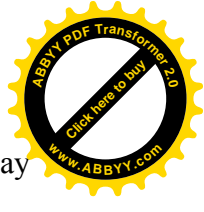
"But I had resolved never to speak of it!"

"I saw thee struggling throughout. But I wished to avoid imposing on thee beyond the minimum, until I realized that I could no longer avoid it."

The world seemed to have faded out around them. There was only himself with his arms around Quality, her face close to his. "Yet surely when I struck you and hurt you--"

"To save me from disaster. Thee told me before that thee would never touch me in a way I did not wish, unless there were compelling reason for it. I believed thee. I knew the charade was necessary."

"Charade!" he cried, looking at her swollen eye.



"Thee had to pretend that I was nothing to thee. Violence is not my way, and I think not thy way either, but perhaps it was required in this instance."

"I fear it was. I hope it never is again. But how could you conclude from this that I love you?"

"Why, thee said so, Ernst. Thee said 'Oh my love, what have I done.' I knew thee meant it."

He was astonished. "I said that? I did not realize."

She smiled faintly. "Thee was evidently distracted at the time."

He shook his head. "You are more poised than I at this moment. But I must not keep you standing. You must lie down and recover, and I shall get you medicine--"

"No, Ernst. I do not feel discomfort at the moment. I will lie down, if thee will lie with me."

He shook his head ruefully. "I think your phrasing is unfortunate. The vernacular of your language--"

"I am familiar with it. This is the meaning I intend."

"But I never thought of you in such manner!"

"I am sure of my love and desire for thee, Ernst. Is thee?"

How perfectly she had framed it! He yielded, and went with her to the bed. He let her undress herself and him, still afraid to presume too much. Her body remained thin, but she had recovered considerably in the past month. Then they lay together, in the Biblical sense, and it was such a perfect union that it seemed impossible that it could ever have seemed otherwise. He found that the passion he had suppressed before had become overwhelming. His concept of her had changed dramatically. Now it seemed wholly fitting that he be inside her as well as around her.

"If I may ask," he said as they lay still embraced in the ebbing of passion but not the ebbing of love.

"Anything, Ernst."

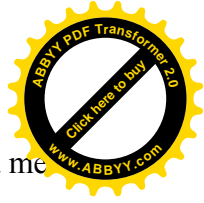
"When, for you--?"

"When I first employed plain talk with thee."

He was astounded. "But that was in America! We argued there! We did not get along."

"It was not love, then," she agreed. "But it was the dawning of respect, which I do not give lightly. It was the first step. When we met again in Spain it was the second step. I suspect I could have retreated, then, for I did not expect to see thee thereafter. But when thee came for me in France, I took the third step, and could no longer retreat."

"But I came at Lane's behest!"



"And tried thy best to honor it. I respected that, and would not have held thee. But thee helped me more than perhaps thee realizes."

"A little food at the camp, and more here."

"Thee gave me hope at the camp. I loved thee then, and it buoyed me so that I could survive."

Now her somewhat confusing references were coming clear. She had questioned his intentions while saying that she trusted him. She had known of his growing feeling for her, and had shared it, but had given him time to work it out independently.

"Thee knew me better than I knew myself," he said, emulating her plain speech in English. There was a certain additional pleasure in that, for it seemed to bring him even closer to her.

"No, Ernst. I merely was in a better position than thee to realize the changing of my feeling. I did not have to fight myself as thee did."

"Perhaps thee did not fight because thee is a pacifist."

She laughed, and kissed him. "Perhaps one day thee will be one too."

After a time they got up and cleaned the blood from the floor and rinsed out the towel. Then they ate and returned to bed. They clasped each other much as on previous nights, but now neither tried to hide the love that went with the embrace. The appearance of their clasped bodies had hardly changed, and neither had the reality of their hearts, yet a new world had opened for them.

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