

FORTIFIED

SAMPLE EXCERPT

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ONE

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“I’ll be back.” Nathan said low. “Keep an eye on things here.”

Eddie nodded, finishing his beer and getting the attention of Margot, signaling for another. Nathan moved quickly amongst the crowd, using its presence to not draw attention to himself as he made his way towards the back. Slipping past the barman, he quickly made his way down the hall and up the first flight of stairs to the fire escape he had hidden in the night before. Slipping out onto the metal scaffolding, he hunched low, tuning his ear to the conversation below.

“...that’s all he said.” Nathan heard Ava reply, watching the Lieutenant General pace back and forth, clearly not happy about something.

“That’s it? That’s all you have?” Richter spat back at her.

“Yes. That’s all we’ve gathered tonight.” Nathan was impressed with how measured Ava was keeping her tone. If she was intimidated at all by the Lieutenant General, it didn’t show.

“What about the Führer? What more of his visit?” Richter

demanded. This caught Nathan's attention. There had been nothing about Hitler travelling to Dresden in the comms they had intercepted.

"Nothing. The Lord Mayor hasn't been in tonight nor any of the councilmen."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am sure." Ava's tone became defensive. "Do not presume I don't know how to do my job. If they don't come, I can't get you any information."

Richter stopped in front of Ava, the palm of his hand connecting with the side of her face with such force that the slap echoed off the walls. It took everything in Nathan not to jump down from the fire escape and lay into the sordid excuse for a man.

"It would serve you well to remember that my lack of turning you in does not signify I have some need for you." He hissed at Ava who was cradling the side of her face. "You, like every other woman, are replaceable. Especially a Jewish one at that."

Surprise rippled through Nathan's mind as the weight of this revelation landed. He was starting to see the arrangement that existed between the two of them. He had only caught the last few seconds of their conversation the night before, but it was clear from that short interaction that Richter held something over Ava. Nathan now knew what it was.

Richter stepped back slightly. "Get me what I need, or I won't be so careful with the placement of my punishment." He reached out and tilted Ava's chin towards the light. "And we wouldn't want the Golden Goddess to be without her golden looks, now would we." A sadistic smile crept across his lips as he traced his fingers down her neck, lingering where her exposed chest dipped beneath the

plunging top. He leaned in close to her ear. "One of these days Ava, I will have you."

Nathan watched as Richter turned and marched back inside, leaving a trembling Ava still clutching her cheek. He paused for a moment, watching the woman below him, the shadows concealing her face. She was shaken but he was unable to tell how much. Either way, this was his chance. He dropped from the fire escape to the snow below. Ava spun around at the sound, ready to fight for her life.

"It's ok, it's ok." Nathan quickly raised his hands, trying to communicate he meant no harm. "I don't want to hurt you."

"Captain Rolf, what are you doing here!?" Her eyes were wide and wild, anger seething from her.

"I just came to talk." He said, clearly not convincing her as Ava darted her eyes about, looking for the nearest escape route should she need it.

"You can't be back here!" She said through clenched teeth.

"I know, I just came to talk." Nathan's mind was running rampant, trying to calm Ava and not lose the opportunity. Their eyes locked, tension palpable between them as they stood eyeing each other for a moment.

"I know." Nathan broke the silence first.

"You know what?" Ava asked sternly.

"I know who you are."

"And?" She shrugged.

"I know *what* you are." Nathan watched Ava's face shifted, showing she new what he meant. In an instant her demeanour changed.

Squaring her shoulders back, Ava lifted her chin and rose to her full height.

“What’s the price?” She looked down her nose at Nathan.

“What do you mean?”

“What’s the price?” Ava stated her question again. “What must I pay for your silence? A night with the Golden Goddess? A night with every woman in there? What? What do you want?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Well something.”

“Of course, you’re a man.”

“Not what you think.”

Ava’s left eyebrow lifted in question. “There is a line, even for common prostitutes, Captain Rolf.”

“No. I don’t want to sleep with you or any of your girls.” Nathan clarified, uncomfortably.

Something shifted in Ava’s face, like she suddenly understood what he meant. “Captain Rolf,” she began to move towards him moving her hips in a mesmerising way. “Am I to understand that either you don’t want sex,” Ava placed her hand on his shoulder as she circled around him, the sensation of her touch sending Nathan’s heart into overdrive. “Or...that you don’t want sex with me?” She stopped right in front of him, the smell of her heady perfume clouding his mind. “Perhaps you would prefer Heinrich?” Ava’s left eyebrow this time lifted in suggestive surprise.

“What? No!”

“We don’t judge anyone’s fantasies here at the Zwinger.” She cooed.

“No, no. Look, listen,” Nathan locked eyes with Ava. “I don’t want anything from you but some information. I’ll keep my mouth shut if you can get me what I need to know.” Nathan, even in that moment, was taken back by the flecks of green he found in hers under the moonlight. Any other place, any other time and he would have not held back from doing what he really wanted to.

Ava paused, clearly considering Nathan’s request. “What information are you after Captain Rolf?”

The clang of trash cans caught both their attention. Instinctively, Nathan stepped in front of Ava, scanning the darkness for the threat. Ava leaned forward, her breath warm against his neck, sending chills up and down his spine.

“Alley cat.” She whispered and pointed to the tabby running off. “And I don’t need your protection, Captain Rolf.” Ava stepped out from behind him. “Much like that alley cat, I can take care of myself.”

“I don’t doubt it for a minute.” Nathan turned to face Ava.

“Now what information do you need in exchange for your silence. The name of a politician’s mistress? A list of things you can blackmail the Orpo with?”

“The location of the secret munitions factory and the Führer’s travel itinerary for the next 3 weeks.” Nathan cut to the chase.

A furrow formed in Ava’s brow. “The Führer’s itinerary will be easy but what secret munitions factory are you talking about? There is no munitions factory in Dresden.” Ava’s tone changed and Nathan couldn’t sense if it was due to fear or the difficulty of his request. “And why do you need to know this?” Ava’s eyes narrowed. “You’re in the army, surely you could find this information for yourself?”

“I could, but someone with your...expertise...would be able to find it faster.” He replied. “I’d be willing to pay for it.” A look of anger

flashed across Ava's face. "Do you think by throwing money at me I'll just roll over and do what you ask?"

"I was hoping it might persuade you, yes." Nathan sighed, realizing he was losing her quickly and increasing putting himself in danger. "I can assure you, Ava, we want the same thing. So if you can do this for me I will make it worth your while."

"And what's that?" She asked.

"What's what?" Nathan asked, confused.

"What is it that we both want?" Ava pressed.

Nathan paused weighing up what he was about to say. He sighed. "The end of this godforsaken war."

"But Germany is..." Ava's voice trailed off. She paused and looked Nathan up and down. The look only increased Nathan's pulse but he kept his cool, the mission was of highest importance.

"You're a spy, aren't you?" Ava finally said.

"Do I look like a spy?" Nathan asked, motioning to his uniform and doing his best to dissuade where her thinking was going.

"You are dressed like a Nazi but you don't act like a Nazi." She stepped closer. "No real Nazi soldier would want this war to end. But every Jew and Allied soldier would. You are clearly not Jewish, so that must make you a spy." A look of satisfaction swept over Ava's face. She was clearly pleased with herself. Nathan slid his hand under Ava's arm and moved them both into the shadow of the fire escape. "Let's say I was what you think I am, would you help me?"

Ava's eyes were bright with the energy of a million questions swirling in her mind. Nathan waited for her to respond not wanting to rush her in case her loyalty to Germany was stronger than her Jewish heritage. This dance of trust was proving difficult to read.

“What will the Allied’s do with this information?”

“Use it to their advantage, of course.” Nathan responded honestly. “The war is being fought on many fronts, but if we are able to take out the munitions factories then we will be able to cripple Germany’s war efforts quicker and hopefully bring an end to the mass genocide of your people.” Nathan could see the wheels turning in Ava’s mind as she looked away. Her intoxicating brown eyes flickered back to his with a clarity that stunned him.

“Can you get me and my family out of Germany?” Ava asked, barely above a whisper.

The sound of the backdoor opening drew both their attention as a very drunk Klaus, stumbled out onto the snow. “Avaaaa!” Klaus stood calling her name, scanning the back alley. Nathan and Ava, hidden by the fire escape stairs, watched and waited.

“I have to get back inside, they’ll be wondering where I am.” Ava whispered.

As she went to step into the light, a small bird landed not far from their hiding spot and Nathan heard Ava take a sharp breath. They watched it, willing it to not move for fear of it exposing their location. But just as quickly as it had arrived, it flew off, the movement drawing the attention of Klaus. He began to trudge towards where the bird had landed.

“Ava! Is that you? The Judge wants to see you...” Klaus slurred in their direction.

“Kiss me.” Ava hissed.

“What?”

“Just kiss me!” Ava grabbed Nathan’s lapel and pulled his lips to hers, using his body to shield both their identities. Klaus appeared behind the fire escape stairs and averted his eyes. “Oh,

entschuldigung!” Klaus commented, seeing the two lovers fully. “Have you seen the Golden Goddess?” he asked, not at all deterred by the scene before him. Nathan pointed around the corner with his hand, not releasing his lips from Ava’s.

“Excellent. Guten abend.” Klaus clumsily stumbled towards the direction Nathan had pointed. “Ava! Avaaa!” His voice trailed off as he rounded the corner. Ava pushed Nathan away. “I have to get back inside. But can you promise?”

“Promise what?” Nathan asked, still reeling from the kiss.

“Can you promise to get me and my family out of Germany if I get you the information?” She pleaded.

“Yes. Of course. I’ll do whatever it takes.” Nathan whispered. Ava stepped around him, making her way to the bottom of the fire escape. “I’ll get you the information but you must leave. Now. And do not comeback until I have sent word.” She began to ascend the stairs.

“How will I know you’ve sent word?” Nathan grabbed her arm. Ava turned and paused for a moment.

“Be at the Martin Luther Monument every day, at midday. Wait for 15 minutes. If a small child does not show up wearing this pin,” She pointed to a tiny bird pinned to her top. “Then leave and keep returning every day until the child shows up. Now go!”

“I can’t, my partner’s inside.”

“I will send him out. But you must leave. If Richter sees us coming back in even remotely close to the same time, he will be suspicious. Go!” Ava turned and made her way up the stairs. Nathan waited as she slipped into the building via the same window he had come out of. He slowly turned and walked away, the taste of the Golden Goddess still lingering on his lips.