

## Synopsis:

In 1937, Frank Avery, a young reporter from Washington, DC, volunteers for an assignment covering the Spanish Civil War. He arrives in Madrid to find the city besieged, but a populace unbroken and carrying on with everyday life. Mentored by veteran journalist George Ferrell, Avery learns what it is like to witness death and report on it objectively.

While filing his daily war reports, Avery decides he wants to find a bigger story, one that goes beyond the battles. At a hotel room party hosted by Ernest Hemingway, Avery spots a black American soldier. He is told the soldier is Oliver Law, an officer with the American volunteers. Two months later, Avery learns Law, who had been promoted to lead all Americans, had been killed in battle. He realizes this could be his story.

Avery delves into the story of Oliver Law and the Americans who had come to Spain to fight. They were all volunteers who chose to defend the Spanish Republic, a freely-elected Socialist-leaning government, from a fascist rebellion led by General Franco and elements of the military. The 3000 Americans, a group made up of labor activists, members of the Communist party, and a large number of Jews anxious to fight the Nazi-backed fascists, traveled to Spain despite the US government's declaration that its citizens should not get involved. Over a third of them never made it home.

The second part of Frank Avery's story concerns his relationship with female English magazine journalist Claire Radcliffe. At first their relationship is purely professional as they cover the war and related stories (such as the evacuation of all art from the Prado museum in Madrid to safety in Valencia), but Avery eventually realizes he is in love with her, despite the fact that Claire is engaged.

In January, Avery is recalled home when interest in the war wanes in American newspapers. He is devastated to leave Claire but has no choice. Back in the States, he finishes his story on Oliver Law after traveling to Chicago to interview Law's widow. As German power grows and conflicts began to erupt, Avery's editor offers to send him back to Europe. Avery agrees if he can make London his home base. At least there, he hopes he can be reunited with Claire at some point.

## First three chapters:

### The Greyness of Dust

A Novel

By Chris Holaday

“In that book which is my memory, On the first page of the chapter that is the day when I first met you, Appear the words, ‘Here begins a new life’.”

— Dante Alighieri

“In Spain, the dead are more alive than the dead of any other country in the world.”

— Federico Garcia Lorca

*July 19, 1936*

Captain Rafael Vega leaned against the white stucco wall and smoked his third cigarette of the day despite the fact it was only 7 a.m. A dozen or so other officers of the Spanish Army of Africa stood nearby, several of them peering at the sky with one hand sheltering their eyes from the bright morning sun in the Moroccan sky. No one spoke.

Eventually the distant buzz of an airplane engine could be heard far to the south and all of the soldiers turned to look. Vega sighed quietly to himself when he heard it.

The plane, on a secret flight, was carrying General Francisco Franco from the Canary Islands to the Tetuán garrison to assume command of the more than 30,000 men stationed in North Africa. Colonel Eduardo Sáenz de Buruaga, their commander, had assembled his officers two days before and told them of Franco's impending arrival.

There had been talk of a coup attempt for months but now it was really here. No one, at least of Vega's rank, knew the details yet but he could guess who else was involved. General Sanjurjo, who had failed in a 1932 coup attempt, was in exile in Portugal and General Goded was in Mallorca. Like Franco, the right-leaning Goded had been sent to the outer fringes of Spanish territory in an attempt keep him out of trouble. Vega assumed both generals were complicit in the rebellion and also moving to seize control.

Every soldier had been on edge for two days as they waited for this moment. There were rumors that some officers and soldiers—those suspected as having political ideals that leaned to the left—had been rounded up and placed under arrest as Sáenz de Buruaga made sure he faced no opposition. Vega had even heard a series of gunshots off behind the barracks. He hadn't asked what they were; he didn't want to know.

Vega had learned long ago to keep his political views to himself. He was a professional soldier—had been for nearly 15 years—and not a politician, after all. But he also knew that in times like this some other officer might see a chance for

advancement and denounce a comrade merely for personal gain. Nothing was guaranteed and no one would be safe.

As the plane grew closer, the colonel walked out into the middle of the hard dirt field and waved, the agreed upon signal that he was still in charge and it was safe.

The large silver and white biplane circled the field once then lined up to land. Certainly not a military type, the plane was unfamiliar to Vega. It touched down, slowed and began to taxi, followed by a cloud of dust, toward the colonel and his entourage. As it drew closer, Vega could read the words painted on the fuselage in blue letters: Olley Air Service Ltd. "Hmmp," Vega exclaimed quietly to himself. An English plane. He wondered what that implied.

When the plane came to a stop and the pilot shut down the twin engines, two soldiers rushed out to open the side door and lower the steps. Sáenz de Buruaga and a few other senior officers were all smiles as they heartily welcomed the man who was supposed to be their new commander.

'So what now?' Vega thought to himself. 'We go back to Spain and fight other Spaniards?' He had fought in the Rif War over a decade earlier as a young soldier but that was against Arab tribesmen. He remembered the feeling on the eve of battle, a mixture of anticipation, excitement and fear. 'But what does one expect in a situation like this?' he wondered. A coup could be peaceful, he supposed, trying to be optimistic, but with the current political divisions in Spain he doubted it. No, he admitted, there would be blood, probably lots of blood. The thought of shooting at other Spaniards in his own country, perhaps even on the streets of Córdoba, his hometown, made Vega's stomach turn.

Vega dropped his cigarette on the ground and crushed it out with the heel of his boot. He turned and solemnly walked back to his barracks to await orders. 'I'll be lucky to survive this,' he thought. 'Hell, I'll be lucky even to survive this day.'

## *December 1936*

The winter wind raced, needle-sharp, down 47th Street until it burst out over Lake Michigan a few blocks east. Trying to stay out of its reach—an impossible feat during any Chicago winter—a figure huddled in the doorway of closed store on the corner with St. Lawrence Avenue.

He tried to shrink inside his turned-up collar and stamped his feet and blew on his gloved hands. Every few minutes he stepped out of his refuge to scan the nearly empty street.

Eventually an old Ford, wearing at least a dozen years worth of dents and faded paint, pulled up the curb. The waiting man rushed down to the car, opened the door and athletically jumped inside.

“You have the address?” he asked.

“Yes,” the driver replied, “over in Back of the Yards.”

They pair made their way west and left the familiarity of the Grand Boulevard neighborhood behind. They didn’t relish the thought of driving through the edge of Canaryville, the white Irish neighborhood infamous for its dislike of the black man. On a cold night like this, however, almost everyone was staying inside but the occupants of the car were still uncomfortable.

Eventually they neared their destination and the driver slowed the car as they scanned the address numbers on the buildings. “There,” said the passenger, pointing to a three-story apartment building. The driver found an opening between parked cars a few doors down and pulled over to the curb. After bracing themselves for the cold, the men jumped out and hurried to the address they sought.

They climbed the stairs to the second floor and knocked on the number of the apartment they had been given. A small man in his fifties, who could have passed for a schoolteacher and very well might have been, opened the door. “Welcome, gentlemen,” he said, extending his hand. “Please come in.” His voice had a slight indeterminate Eastern European accent; a Jew, the arrivals both assumed.

“Have a seat,” said their host, indicating chairs crowded around a small kitchen table. “We’re waiting for a few others.”

The two men did as they were instructed and sat silently. Not more than five minutes later there was a knock at the door. The host answered and greeted three men.

The new arrivals, all white men, joined the others at the table. Perhaps stock yard workers, stevedores on the docks or laborers in some factory, they probably had much in common with the first two, the one exception being skin color.

The members of the two small groups acknowledged each other with nods but no one spoke as they all settled in around the table. Finally the host joined them and spoke.

“Thank you gentlemen for coming this evening. I know it is very cold outside but we are here for a very important reason.

“As you know, there is a war going on in Spain. It is war that can have great repercussions for equality, freedom and the working class everywhere.

“White or Negro, Jew or Protestant, Communist or not, it does not matter. What does matter is that we stop the Fascist threat that is threatening to spread across Europe and then across the world.

“I know some of you wanted to go to Ethiopia and fight the Italians but unfortunately that was not easy to do. Now is your chance to do something. We can help you get to Spain and join the fight there. Our international comrades already helped save Madrid last month and with your help they can end the war. You’ve probably all experienced strikes and labor riots but this is real war with real bombs and real shooting. I will be very honest with you; if you volunteer to go there is a chance you might never come home.

“But,” he paused, “if you do go, you might help do something that will be remembered forever. Change the world.”

He stopped and looked around the room at his five guests. “So, who wants to go?”

One of the black men was the first to stand. “I’ll go,” he said. The other four followed suit.

*March 28, 1937*

The white-jacketed steward stood in the front of the cabin and faced the passengers to make his announcement: "*S'il vous plaît être conscient que l'Espagne est un pays à la guerre. Si nous sommes attaqué, est préparé si le pilote est exigé faire des manoeuvres pour la sécurité.*"

"What? What did he say? *Anglais, s'il vouz plait?*" The anxious passenger in the third seat on the port side asked his questions to no one in particular, unsure who spoke English.

The well-dressed man across the aisle spoke up in a crisp English public school accent, "He essentially said to please be aware that Spain is a country at war and that if for some reason we come under attack, be prepared as the pilot may have to take evasive measures for safety. Essentially, if anyone shoots at us, hold on and get your head down." He extended his hand and added "Anthony Cunningham, British Embassy."

"Frank Avery, *Washington Herald.*"

"Ah, off to the cover the war, I assume?"

"You guessed it. Is there really a chance of someone shooting at us?" he added, trying his best to conceal the shakiness in his voice.

"Probably not, but accidents happen. Some nervous anti-aircraft gunner or pilot from either side could mistake us for an enemy bomber or something of that sort. I doubt anyone would intentionally fire on a plane belonging to a foreign airline. Bad publicity and all."

He paused, taking stock of the young American, before continuing, "Ever covered war before?"

Avery shook his head no, realizing there was no use pretending to be a hardened veteran war correspondent.

"Messy business. Particularly this one."

Avery settled into his seat and fastened his safety belt. He thought about Spain.

The land that had long ago sent armadas and conquistadors and colonized much of the new world. He remembered names like Cortes and Pizarro. Treasure-laden galleons, the Inquisition, the Moors. Velazquez and Goya. But beyond those hazy memories of things learned from schoolbooks, he knew little about Spain. It almost seemed as if the whole country had been relegated to history; probably no one in the United States had even thought about it since the brief Spanish-American War of 1898. None of it mattered to Avery, though. He only knew he was bored, there was a war going on and Spain was the perfect place for a journalist seeking adventure and stories to tell.

The flagman waved green and the Potez 62, liveried in the silver and blue of Air France, rumbled onto the runway at Bordeaux-Merignac Airport. The twin engines roared as the pilot pushed forward on the throttles and the high-wing plane picked up speed, lifting off well before the end of the runway.

Avery glanced around the cabin. A somber group consisting only of men, most of the other 13 passengers on the full flight seemed at ease. He wondered why they were also heading into the chaos he was sure awaited them in Madrid. Diplomats? Doctors? Spies? War profiteers? His imagination was guided by remembered espionage movies and adventure novels.

He tried to relax as he settled in for the journey of over two hours and roughly 350 miles. He looked out the window and saw the Garonne River below. Far off to the west the Bay of Biscay shimmered grey-blue. His ears popped as the plane's altitude increased.

Cunningham spoke up. "Ever been to Spain before? Beautiful country. Well," he paused, "at least it was. Things have changed since last summer."

"No," replied Avery. "To be honest, I've never been to Europe before. I didn't even see much of France. After the ship docked at Le Havre I took the train to Paris. Only had a couple of hours to look around there before catching the next train to Bordeaux."

"I was in Madrid until last November," said Cunningham. "A lot of people left when we thought the city would fall to Franco. Now I'm going back to assess the situation. I must say, I'm curious as to what I'll find."

"Do you think the war will end soon?"

"Hard to say. It's a bit of a stalemate now, at least around Madrid. Honestly," he continued, "I think the war could still go either way. Of course as a representative of His Majesty's government, which has taken a neutral position, I'm not supposed to officially care one way or the other. It's a rather complicated



business. Say, do you have someone meeting you in Madrid?"

Avery nodded. "A colleague. Fellow journalist. Actually, I've never met him but he's an old friend of my editor."

"Good. It's probably not the sort of place one wants to go running about without a little guidance."

Avery leaned back, closed his eyes and hoped the droning of the engines would lull him to sleep. After what seemed like minutes but must have been close to two hours, he felt Cunningham gently shake his arm. "Look," pointing out the window, "we're getting close."

He looked and saw mountains drop away and the terrain change to what appeared to be an arid plain, Castile's Meseta Central if Avery had known his geography better. He began to see the geometric shapes that indicated farm fields, a mosaic of tans and browns, with occasional light greens indicating the arrival of an early spring. Soon he was able to distinguish the winding ribbons of roads and the shadows and outlines of buildings as the plane began its descent. The sun was shining on what seemed to be a cloudless and beautiful spring day. Avery had a hard time imagining it was a war zone.

"Barajas airfield is east of the city," said the diplomat. "Fortunately for us, most of the fighting is on the other side."

The city grew larger as the plane continued its descent. Soon he saw their destination, a large grass circle, outlined in white with the city name in its center. The wheels dropped from the nacelles as the plane circled in to the field. Avery clenched his teeth and grimaced slightly as he watched the ground rise. He had only flown a few times and he wasn't sure which part he disliked more, the takeoff or the landing.

Moments later the wheels screeched as they touched down on the hard packed dirt runway. Dust immediately kicked up from the props; the pilot cut the power and began braking. Sufficiently slowed, the tail-dragging plane taxied to the terminal building where a member of the ground crew, clad in blue coveralls, waived a large red flag to signal stop. Another crewman emerged from the building and the pair—apparently in no hurry—slowly walked over to the plane. Taking care to avoid the spinning props, they chocked the wheels and rolled steps up to the door.

The steward rose and walked to the rear of the plane where he unlocked and opened the door. He exited first and took his position at the bottom of the stairs to assist passengers.

Relieved the flight was over, Avery unbuckled his seat and rose to retrieve his hat, overcoat and the case that housed his Corona typewriter from the overhead shelf. He followed Cunningham and the others as they made their way down the sloping fuselage to the port side door.

One of the ground crewmen had climbed up into the luggage compartment in the tail of the plane and handed down suitcases to the other, who then stacked them on a cart. The passengers gathered around, each reaching for his bag as it appeared.

“Best of luck to you, my friend,” said Cunningham as he collected his bag. “Hope you find a story. No shortage of them here, I would imagine.”

A gust of cold wind that almost took his hat made Avery realize the temperature was less than he expected, probably only in the forties. He shivered and put on his overcoat. Avery had always thought of Spain being hot and dry, but the altitude of the capital made for chilly winters and springs. He picked up his suitcase, bought new for this trip, and joined the procession of other passengers as they made their way into the terminal building.

Avery knew absolutely nothing about the man meeting him except that he was a reporter named George Ferrell who wrote for a news syndicate. If Ferrell was old friends with his editor, then he assumed he was in his mid-forties.

He looked over the likely suspects in the building. Other than the few passengers who had arrived with him, he saw no one who was obviously a foreigner, especially not one who looked the part of an American journalist.

Walking out to the taxi stand, he saw a cab driver in a heated discussion with a tall man standing beside a small black Renault sedan, apparently because the man was parked in a spot reserved for taxis. They were speaking Spanish but the sedan driver had mannerisms and clothing that looked distinctly American.

Taking a chance, Avery interrupted the altercation. “Mr. Ferrell?” he called loudly.

Startled, the man turned. “Yep, that’s me,” he answered. “But I ain’t your daddy or your boss so call me George. You must be Avery. Come on let’s go before I have to teach this guy some manners.”

Ferrell opened the trunk and threw Avery’s suitcase inside. Giving the cab driver one final dirty look, he climbed in and started the car. Avery hopped in the passenger seat and clung to the typewriter case on his lap as they sped away.

“So you work for Arthur Bowen, eh? I knew him way back when we were young, covering that last great European war. Tell me about yourself, my boy, and don’t spare the details. We’re writers and the details make all the difference.”

“There’s not a whole lot to tell,” said Avery, unsure where to start. “Born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. Journalism school at the University of North Carolina. That was partly because I loved it and partly to escape family shadows. And I guess I throw a pretty mean curve ball. Well, at least I did. I used to think about pursuing a career in baseball after college, but a bad shoulder put an end to that. So I pursued journalism. I’ve always liked writing. Worked for the school paper then got a job back home with the *Times-Dispatch* when I graduated.

“That wasn’t as exciting as I hoped it would be,” he continued. “Wrote lots of obituaries and articles about debutantes and the town’s upper crust. But I wanted to write news, real news, and uncover great stories. How guys like Meyer Berger do it. So my father knew a guy in Washington with the *Herald*. One thing led to another and I got a job. So I moved to a D.C. and ended up writing the exact same obituaries and society articles.

“Along came this war and they finally decided they ought to send somebody to cover it. As soon as I heard, I volunteered for the assignment. I think they were relieved. If I happen not to make it back, at least they won’t have lost one of their seasoned reporters.”

“Good ol’ Art,” Ferrell said, laughing. “You’re probably right. Why not send the new guy to cover the dangerous war that readers are only marginally interested in? But I do know this: volunteer or not, Art wouldn’t have sent you, if he didn’t think you could do the job.”

“Hate to tell you,” he continued, “but you’re going to have to jump right in it. I’ve got to go down south near the front and see if there’s any interesting news. Might be quiet today, might not. A big battle at Guadalajara, northeast of Madrid, just wrapped up not long ago. The government forces won a pretty big victory over the rebels.”

Ferrell headed toward Madrid’s southern edge, expertly avoiding donkey carts, pedestrians and slow-moving trucks. As they drew nearer to the front, military vehicles began to become more prevalent.

Finally, a pair of soldiers stood in the road and blocked further advance by civilians. Ferrell showed his press papers and was waived through.

He turned to Avery. “By all the activity, I’d say somebody launched a little offensive,” he said, not trying to hide his excitement.

They slowed to a stop and Ferrell killed the engine. Without saying a word, he opened the door, extracted himself from the small car and stood silently, all of his senses searching for information. Unsure what to do, Avery also got out and watched his companion for cues.

The first thing he noticed was the rumble of thunder. It dawned on him that what he was hearing actually artillery fire. Every once in while, the thumping was interrupted by the staccato cracking of heavy machine gun fire. Avery couldn't tell how far away the shooting was. At first it seemed unreal, like being in the audience of a war movie. He watched as two open trucks passed them and stopped maybe 50 yards down the road. Soldiers piled out of the back, gathered their gear and hurried off through a grove of neglected olive trees. The whistling of an artillery shell overhead woke him from his daze and made Avery—suddenly nervous—aware of just how real the situation was.

Ferrell spoke. "Let's head east a bit. We want to avoid that artillery. Always remember, a good journalist wants to be near the story but not *be* the story. In other words, try not to get shot or blown up."

Back in the car they drove on but less than a mile down the road they were forced to come to a stop as they waited for groups of soldiers and military vehicles, several towing artillery pieces, to clear the road. Unfortunately for Avery, directly out his passenger window, a row of a dozen or so bodies was laid out beside the road, apparently waiting to be loaded into a wagon. Avery had seen dead people before, but they were always neatly dressed and appeared to be peacefully sleeping in their coffins. There was nothing peaceful about these bodies; they had met violent ends. Some had probably suffered and cried out and bled as life slowly faded. Others, if hit by an artillery shell, may not have ever know what happened, their lives over in an instant, as if a light switch had been turned off.

Avery wanted to look away but he couldn't, focusing instead on the first body in the row. The dead soldier was probably his own age. Not long ago he had probably been drinking wine and laughing with friends, or maybe spending time with a girlfriend in Madrid. This morning he had awoken, maybe had coffee with his fellow soldiers, and wondered what the war held in store. And now, in the late afternoon on a cool spring day, he lay beside a dirt road, his torn uniform coated in dried blood and dust, one arm bent in an unnatural position and one eye half open in a visionless stare.

Avery looked at the blood-soaked canvas sheets that wrapped two of the dead, the shapes suggesting that they contained pieces rather than complete bodies. As they finally began to move again he fought off rising nausea. Able to resist no

longer, he pleaded for Ferrell to pull over. He flung open the door, practically fell out of the car, and threw up, unfortunately on the rear wheel. Nothing left in his stomach, he rose and tried to clean himself up. His first thought was embarrassment. He had known Ferrell, a respected veteran reporter, only a couple of hours and already he had lost all dignity in front of him.

Ferrell didn't laugh and seemed unphased by Avery's actions.

"War up close and in person is a lot different than reading about it from a safe distance, isn't it?" he asked, his voice solemn. "No one is ever ready for the real thing. You'll get used to it, though. Trust me, I know. I started out in New Orleans, covering things like dock worker strikes and boll weevils. The occasional murder—usually some guy who stabbed another in bar fight. The next thing I knew they decided to send me to France for a little war they were having over there. Boy was that fun. I had no idea what I was getting into."

He pulled out a slightly crumpled pack of Gauloises and opened it. "Want one?"

Avery politely refused.

"Word of advice: these things are like gold here so if someone offers one, take it. Same goes for any quality indulgence. Real coffee. Chocolate. If you come up with a bottle of decent liquor to share you'll be king for a day."

Ferrell pulled over near a group of soldiers. "Just wait here in the car. Let me go see what the story is and I'll be right back."

Avery waited, trying to focus on something other than his queasiness. Sweat ran down his forehead, even though it wasn't hot. He noticed a canteen Ferrell had on the back seat so he reached for it and took a drink.

Ferrell returned minutes later and leaned in the driver side window. "So it turns out a group of 100 or so rebel troops made a little incursion up the hill over there. The government forces called in some artillery and then went up and finished pushing them back. A bloody afternoon but not really international news-worthy."

He opened the door, got back behind the wheel and started the engine. With gears grinding, Ferrell turned the car around. Avery was happy to have a breeze from his window again, no matter how warm.

"So, as I was saying, war ain't pretty. It's not supposed to be. I remember when I got to France. Took the train into Paris. I thought 'Hey, this ain't so bad.' It was a bit subdued maybe, but it seemed a million miles away from any fighting. 'Go out and report from the trenches if you can,' they said. That's where the fun began. I

remember that ride out there. Not too much different than this except instead of dryness, we had rain and lots and lots of mud. We weren't allowed to officially cover the war from the front during the fighting but I saw the aftermath of plenty of fighting and I snuck rides with the ambulances a couple of times.

"Men were damn near drowning in mud at the bottom of the trenches, just waiting for that order to go up and over the top. Poor bastards. When they'd hear that whistle blow they knew their odds of seeing another day were pretty slim. And the stench. I can't even describe it. Days after battles there were bloated, rotting bodies out in no-man's land combined with the sewer smell of the trenches. Good God. Actually you stop believing there is a God. And I can't imagine a man is ever quite the same after surviving something like that. I'll still never forget the time I saw a guy get blown in half. It was calm and there was no fighting so I'd gotten permission to go out and interview an officer. Out of a clear blue sky one shell comes screaming in. Maybe it was an accident or maybe some German thought it would be funny but there were a couple soldiers just waiting in their trench, not even on the front line, and the shell apparently hit right beside them. I heard the explosion and ran down to see what happened. Blood and guts everywhere and one body was in two mangled pieces on either side of a crater. I did exactly what you did back there."

He paused for a moment as he relived memories he cared not to. The tip of his cigarette glowed as he inhaled deeply.

"Well," Ferrell continued after exhaling smoke out the window, "this war is brutal, too, but at least the scenery changes. In France sometimes the lines might not change more than 100 yards over the course of a year.

"Buy hey, we're supposed to be emotionless professionals and just report the facts. We're here to give narrative to this war and share it with people in other parts of the world. Easier said than done, of course. My next bit of advice to you: red wine. Lots of it. It's cheap here and good and it takes the edge off. You won't feel so bad when the story you've worked your ass off on—or worse yet, been shot at to get—ends up censored down to nothing.

"When you finish your first story I'll take you over to the Telefonica building, which is sort of the media headquarters, and show you the ropes. Arturo Barea is the man in charge. Nervous, exhausted-looking fellow. He's not too bad; you've just kind of got to play by his rules. It's actually a lot better than it was when his boss was here, Rubio Hidalgo. That bastard is down in Valencia now. Panicked when Franco's boys were knocking on the door last fall. He was mainly interested in keeping the party line and making sure everyone had their rose-colored glasses on when they reported on events.

“Anyway, Barea stayed here and kept the press office running. Now he and his girlfriend, Austrian woman named Ilsa Kulcsar, run the show. He seems pretty honest and he’ll let you report the truth more or less— unless your version of the truth sounds overly pro-rebel.

“This is a dangerous war for reporters, by the way. The guys on this side can be frustrating to deal with at times, but for the most part they’ll treat you well. I’d hate to get caught on the other side, however. They caught a French reporter who was with the government forces when they tried to retake Mallorca last summer. Shot him. Supposedly they even torched his body. Don’t know if they were trying to send a message to journalists or if it was just something personal, but I’d rather not find out.”

Listening to Ferrell talk as they drove back into town helped distract Avery and he began to feel better. Entering the city they passed underneath a banner that read *No Pasaron* with some other words in Spanish underneath.

“Oh, you’ll see that slogan a lot,” said Ferrell. “It says ‘They shall not pass. Madrid will be the tomb of fascism.’ Guess we’ll see.”

Ferrell maneuvered through the busy streets. With no idea where he was and no point of reference all Avery could do was try to take in as much as he could. Ferrell finally pulled the car up to the curb near the corner of a side street. “Your home while you’re here will be the Hotel Gran Via,” he said, indicating the building a few yards down the street. “Lots of press and other foreigners staying there.”

Ferrell retrieved Avery’s suitcase from the trunk and the pair walked to the hotel. Bellmen had been in short supply since the war began. They entered the dark lobby and approached the desk, where Ferrell spoke in Spanish to the clerk. He obtained a key and indicated to Avery to follow him to the stairs. “You’re on the third floor,” he said, adding, “I’m on four.”

They stopped at the third floor landing and Ferrell passed Avery a key. “Alright, my boy, just down the hall. You’ve had a full day. Get some rest. Tomorrow I’ll give you some schoolwork. And, if you learn enough, I’ll take you to a party as a reward.”

Avery found his door, unlocked it and entered the room. Mentally and physically exhausted after less than a day in Spain, he collapsed, fully clothed, on the small bed.

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The next morning, shortly after eight, a loud knock on his door startled Avery. Despite his fatigue he'd been awake for some time. He rose and opened the door to find the seemingly ever-exuberant Ferrell.

"Ready?" he stated more so than asked. "Let's go down to the restaurant in the basement and get something to eat. It's not great but it's edible."

Avery closed the door behind them and followed. As they descended the stairs to the lobby, Ferrell reached in his pocket and extracted a small book, "Here, you'll need this."

Avery took what proved to be a worn, hardcover Spanish dictionary.

"Learn some important words and keep this handy. You'll find people are friendly here but the more you can communicate, the better."

At the bottom of the stairs they passed through the marble-covered lobby to another back staircase that led to the restaurant. The place reminded Avery more of a nightclub than a restaurant, but people were eating at several long tables around the room. Ferrell spoke to the waiter and ordered for them both, a meal of what turned out to consist of bread, cheese and coffee.

"I guess the first thing we need to do," he said between bites, "is get you a basic understanding of this war and all the concerned parties. It's a very complicated situation and Spain is a very complicated country. You've probably noticed that some things here seem as modern as you'd find in the States. Other things haven't changed in centuries—for instance you've seen the peasants with their donkey carts.

"Support for the monarchy in Spain had long been waning and when candidates who sought a new republic swept the elections in April of 1931, King Alfonso XIII fled to Rome. Basically the Spanish were left with a new more-or-less Socialist government and they proclaimed it the Second Republic. The current president is Manuel Azaña.

In his to-the-point but rather humorous style, Ferrell continued his lecture. "The Republic made many big changes and wrote a constitution that allowed freedom of speech, allowed divorce and gave the vote to women among other things. It also passed new laws that seriously limited the power of the church and took away the special rights of the nobility.



“Of course these big changes didn’t sit well with everyone, particularly the old establishment that controlled the military. After five years of social unrest, a group of generals decided to revolt. The main conspirators were Generals José Sanjurjo, Francisco Franco and Emilio Mola. I’m sure you know this but the revolt was announced on July 17th of last year. It actually began in Spanish Morocco and troops from that territory crossed the straits and began what they thought would be a quick campaign. Right away there were problems, the biggest one being that many top military leaders refused to join and remained loyal to the Republic. Then Sanjurjo died in a plane crash as he attempted to return to Spain from exile in Portugal and the rebel military failed to take any major cities except Sevilla. They did grab a fair amount of territory, however, with major forces pushing from the north, led by Mola, and from the south, led by Franco. Now Madrid is on the western edge of government territory. The government moved to Valencia last November when it looked like the city would fall. Barcelona is the Republic’s other big stronghold.

“Each side is sort of an alliance of various parties, each with their own agenda. Supporting the rebels, or Nationalists, as they like to be called, are basically the old wealthy elite of the country, the Catholic Church, the fascist Falange party, the Monarchists and the Carlists, who want a monarch, but a different one.

“On the Republic side, there are the Socialists, big worker’s unions, the Communists, the Anarchists, and various separatist groups like the Basques, Galicians and Catalans. These are broad descriptions but essentially everyone who leans right supports the rebels, while moderates and leftists support the Republic.

“When war broke out the Republic thought that other countries, like France and Great Britain, would come to their aid but none did. They, particularly the British, were apparently wary of the government’s socialist label. Just a little too close to communism, which, in theory, gives control and ownership of everything to the community as a whole. Big companies and rich people fear that more than they do fascism. Actually, Leon Blum, Prime Minister of France, agreed to send planes and artillery when the war first erupted but soon changed his mind when pressured by more conservative members of his government as well as British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin.

“With the encouragement of Baldwin, and later Blum, most countries that matter ended up signing a non-intervention agreement last August. That left the door open to the Russians, who were more than happy to take advantage of the situation. Of course the Russians signed the agreement as well and they had to provide support in secret at first, but now everyone knows they’re here. Their planes and tanks have bolstered the Republican forces significantly. Mexico is

really the only other country to officially offer support, but militarily I don't think they can do enough to make much difference.

"When the rebels' initial offensive bogged down they also sought foreign assistance. Coming to their aid were the Germans and the Italians. The Portuguese have also played a role. Germany's biggest contribution so far seems to have been planes. The Italians have sent tanks and thousands of troops. At Guadalajara a few weeks ago they led the attack but were beaten soundly. An embarrassment for Mussolini, I'm sure."

Avery nodded as he finished his plate. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until their food appeared.

"The other important group playing a role in this war is the international volunteers who have showed up to support the Republic. You'll hear lots of languages being spoken around here because these guys come from many different countries, including the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Yugoslavia and Poland. There are even quite a few German and Italians, opponents of the governments in their own countries. Most who have come seem to be socialists and communists though some are mercenaries and a few are just here for some adventure. The International Brigades, as they are called, first made an appearance last November during the siege here in Madrid. Some give them credit for saving the day and stopping Franco's advance. I'm sure they helped militarily but I think their biggest impact was as a boost to the morale of entire city.

"A lot of these volunteers come from countries that signed the non-intervention agreement so their governments are not exactly thrilled they are here. In the States, the government tries to stop them and threatens to seize passports of anyone attempting to go to Spain. There is really no way to prove where a person is going, however, if they get on a ship. Most of them just say they going sightseeing in Paris or London and then sneak down here. The Communist party has set up networks to help smuggle them in. The toughest part is the border with France. From what I've heard, the French do catch quite a few and they send them back to wherever they came from.

"OK, that's your crash course on the war. Hope you've been taking notes."

It was a lot for Avery to digest but he knew it would make more sense the more time he spent here. "So who do you think will win?" he had to ask.

"Ah, if I knew that I'd be placing some bets. Honesty, though, I really don't know. It will depend a lot on how much foreign aid each side gets. It will also depend on whether or not the factions on each side can put aside their differences to focus

first on winning the war. Either way, it's not like a baseball game, where everyone on one side goes home happy. No matter who prevails in this, they're going to have a lot of shit to deal with."

"That's enough war talk for now," Ferrell continued. "Let's take a walk." Finishing their coffee, they left the restaurant, went up the stairs and exited the hotel. They turned east after crossing the busy street.

"So this is the Gran Via. It's sort of the heart of the city; the Great White Way of Madrid. It's full of restaurants, hotels, shopping. Well, it was anyway. Many places have closed due to the war and it gets very dark around here at night. The road runs from the Calle Alcala on the eastern end, where you'll find the famous Metropolis building, to the Plaza España on the other end; near the royal palace. From there you can continue on as it becomes the Calle de la Princesa, which will take you out to the University City section. That's the front. Shelling, snipers, building-to-building fighting; very dangerous.

"Right here we have the Telefonica Building. Completed in '29, it's 14 stories tall and the tallest building in the country. Here's an interesting fact for you: the telephone system in Spain, headquartered here, is owned and operated by American company IT&T. When war broke out they threatened to withdraw technicians and cut off spare parts if either side interfered with it. Since neither side has the ability to run a partial system, phones have remained in operation. In theory we can place a call across lines to anywhere in the country, even Franco's headquarters, as long as the censors don't stop it. The censorship office is on fourth floor, by the way."

Avery looked at the huge building with its white marble façade. If not for some of the Baroque-esque details it had the appearance of a modern American skyscraper, the same as one might find in New York or Chicago. He noticed scars in the marble and a couple of boarded-up windows.

Also noticing the damage, Ferrell continued, "I told you no one interferes with the telephone system; that's not exactly true. The rebels love to lob shells at this building every once in a while just to keep everyone on their toes. So be warned."

After walking a few of blocks, with Ferrell offering little tidbits of information all along the way, they crossed the street and returned in the direction from which they had come.

Eventually reaching the Hotel Gran Via, Ferrell spoke, "So that's the end of today's tour. Tips are always appreciated. Seriously, I've got some errands to run so go study your Spanish book and maybe try to talk to some people. I'll come

back and get you in a couple hours. Hemingway is having a little party at the Hotel Florida. Good for you to meet some of the other press folks.”

“More importantly,” he said over his shoulder as he walked away, “there will be booze!”

Avery did as he was told and studied his little dictionary as he sat in the hotel lobby. He looked up words that might be important and then wrote them and their meanings in English in his journal so he could quiz himself. He also made notes about his first impressions in the country. Reporting about a war in a foreign country, one that he was experiencing firsthand, was going to be a lot different than any type of writing he had done before.

True to his word, Ferrell returned around five o’clock. He led Avery off on what promised to be a little adventure, one that undeniably made the younger journalist a bit nervous. They left the Hotel Gran Via and headed west toward the Hotel Florida, a walk of maybe 300 yards. Located on the Plaza de Callao, an area known for its theaters, the marble-façaded hotel bore the same scars as the Telefonica building. Being closer to the front, it was generally regarded as less safe than the Hotel Gran Via. But many foreigners took the risk, primarily for one reason: each of the hotel’s 200 rooms had the luxury of a bath with hot water.

Inside, Ferrell led Avery across the polished marble lobby to the elevator. He pushed the button for the fifth floor and the doors closed.

“Yeah, sometimes the power flickers when there is shelling,” said Ferrell as they began to rise. “Don’t think I’d want to be in here when that happened. We’d get a quick ride to the basement.” Avery, obviously a bit nervous, started, then realized he was having his leg pulled.

The doors opened and Avery, relieved, followed his colleague down the hall. Two women, both laughing and possibly a little drunk, were walking toward them. Heavily made up, their bright red lipstick and rosy cheeks gave them the appearance of dolls. Attired similarly, they wore short dresses and high heels, with black fishnet stockings spanning the distance in between.

As they approached, they smiled. One of them said something in Spanish, to which Ferrell replied, “*No, gracias*” and gave a slight bow.

Avery, suddenly realizing what had been declined, turned to watch as they walked past. Ferrell, however, put a hand on his shoulder and steered him down the hall.

“Oh, you’ll see a lot of that around here. Anywhere there are soldiers and foreigners with cash, their profession flourishes. My advice to you, my young friend, would be to politely refuse their offers.” He laughed. “Of course, I’m not always known for listening to my own advice so take it for what you will.”

The hallway was crowded as they approached Hemingway’s room, the party having apparently spilled over into several other neighboring rooms. Ferrell looked around the assessed the crowd. “You’ll see these guys a lot and get to know them, I’m sure. Hemingway, you recognize,” he said nodding in the direction of the famous author who stood near the window and handed out drinks from a dresser that was doing double duty as a bar.

Avery couldn’t help but think it was odd to see the novelist, whom he recognized from dust jacket photos, here in a hotel room in a distant country.

“Let’s see,” Ferrell continued. “Over there we’ve got Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times*, Henry Gorrell of the United Press, James Minifie with *New York Herald-Tribune*, Sefton Delmer from the British *Daily Mail*. Lots of the others, I’m sure, work for various newspapers or magazines from all over the world.”

Scotch flowed and someone showed up with a few bottles of champagne. The crowd spilled out into the hall. Avery was a little surprised to see a black soldier, apparently American, laughing with some of his comrades just outside the door. Though they were dressed in civilian clothes, it was obvious they were soldiers, maybe because of the way they carried themselves. Maybe it was the way they laughed, laughed as if they trying to get the most out of every moment, because they didn’t know what tomorrow held.

“Who’s the guy over there?” he asked Ferrell.

“His name is Law, Oliver Law. Officer in the Lincoln Battalion, which is made up of Americans. I don’t know much beyond that-these guys come and go so quickly. I’m pretty sure I heard he had served in the US Army. That little group are all international volunteers. Hemingway is a supporter so when they are on leave it’s not uncommon to see them here.”

Avery sipped his Scotch and looked around the room. He noticed it wasn’t just men. One woman he knew to be Martha Gelhorn, the *Collier’s* reporter who was Hemingway’s constant companion. A feminine laugh behind him, one of those rare laughs that can light up a room, made him turn.

He turned to Ferrell. “And who is that?”

“Ahh. That, my young friend, would be an English magazine reporter. Radcliffe, I believe her name is.”

“Maybe you really do have the makings of a reporter,” he continued. “You’re picking out interesting characters in the room—colored fellow, pretty young thing—and asking questions. Good work, my boy. Now it’s up to you if you want to find out more.”

Avery and Ferrell enjoyed Hemingway’s hospitality for another hour before Ferrell announced he was starving and they headed off in search of food. Avery had met a few people and politely chatted, but feeling somewhat uncomfortable—like the rookie on a team full of veterans—he had spent most of his time standing on the sidelines and trying not to appear nervous, despite being half drunk.

Downstairs, Ferrell told Avery to wait while he stopped in the bar and asked about food. Apparently satisfied with the offerings, he waived Avery in and pointed to an empty table.

Avery took a seat and sighed audibly when he saw the bartender hand Ferrell a bottle of wine and two empty glasses. Food or no food, the thought of red wine on top of liquor made him feel slightly queasy. With the heavy knock of glass hitting wood, Ferrell set the bottle on the table. He placed a glass in front of his young colleague—who briefly considered refusing but realized the futility—and filled it to the rim. Ferrell then poured himself a glass, drank half of it in a single gulp, and topped it off again.

Soon the bartender appeared with two plates and set them on table. Each was full of fried potatoes covered in a pink sauce and accompanied by a link of sausage. Ferrell nodded in approval. “Mmm...good stuff. Dig in.”

Avery did as he was told, hoping the food would help counter some of the evening’s alcohol.

“So you’ve written lots of obituaries, huh?” asked Ferrell, his mouth half full of potatoes.

“Ha! Don’t remind me,” said Avery with a laugh. “Most of my writing goes something like this: ‘Mrs. Myrtle J. Appledorn, 83, of Silver Spring, passed away peacefully in her sleep on Wednesday. She leaves behind three children and six grandchildren. Mrs. Appledorn was pre-deceased by her husband of 37 years, Archie. Hospital nurse...Episcopal Church...born in New Jersey’...blah, blah, blah...’

“No disrespect to the dead but I didn’t know these people. They were just names and dates and places. Life stories I had to summarize from facts provided to me. They all had dreams and passions and hobbies but I, the obituary writer in a newspaper office, would never know them. But those lives and those interesting stories are what I wanted to know, what I wanted to share with anyone who will read them.”

“You know, I think I admire you,” said Ferrell, as he dug in his pocket for his lighter. “You actually ran toward this, this war and this lifestyle, just because you wanted to write stories. Hell, a lot of foreign journalists are running away from something. Debt or an angry ex-wife or any of number of other reasons.”

Bold though it was, Avery couldn’t resist the obvious question. “So what about you?”

“What do you mean?” Ferrell replied with half his mouth, the other half holding the cigarette he was trying to light.

“Did you run away from something? You brought it up so I have to ask.”

Ferrell paused, scrunched up his brow, and seemed perplexed. “Good question. You know, I’ve never really thought about it. I guess it was a combination of things. Commitment I guess is the best answer. Commitment to one place, to one city, to one job, you name it. The thought of sitting at the same desk in the same office, day after day, and the boredom that goes with that scares the shit out of me.”

“Then of course there is the whole female element to it,” he continued. “The thought of being with the same woman forever scares me more than being tied to a desk. Guess I think I’ll always find someone better if I keep moving.” Ferrell hesitated and seemed to think twice before continuing. “You know, if I was sober I wouldn’t admit this, but I guess I’m at the age where the thought of settling down permanently with one nice girl isn’t so unappealing as it once was.” He leaned back in his chair, balancing it on two legs, and blew smoke up toward the ceiling. “Maybe I’ll settle down with a nice French girl. Buy a small vineyard in Bordeaux or somewhere.”

Ferrell suddenly gave his head a quick shake, as if someone had lightly slapped him to wake him from a bad dream. “What the hell am I talking about? I’d miss the smell of battlefield smoke too much and I love the thump of a distant artillery piece. That’s what get’s me up every morning. Let’s get out of here.”

He slapped down a pocketful of cash and coins on the table and headed toward the door. Avery smiled as he followed. For just a moment he'd seen behind the hard, crusty exterior the veteran reporter liked everyone to see.

## *April 1937*

Avery had spent his first few days in Madrid walking. He wanted to become familiar with the city that had been so highly praised by Hemingway himself in *Death in the Afternoon* five years earlier. He wanted his first article to be about the city and what daily life was like for Madrileños during wartime.

He left the hotel with nothing but an old tourist map Ferrell had provided him and his little Kodak Retina camera. Though he was certainly no professional photographer, Avery did like to record his travels. Plus, if he ever wrote anything about this adventure in the future, it would be helpful to see details that had been lost to memory. Unsure how easy it would be to get film here, Avery had brought five rolls with him.

As he walked he had that same realization that many from the New World have when they cross the Atlantic for the first time: that Europe is old. Many of these buildings had stood since North America was a wilderness. Passion and artistry had gone into creating these buildings; they were not just the utilitarian structures that were becoming so prevalent across the Atlantic. The South, with which he was so familiar, had its share of neoclassical buildings but most were less than 100 years old. Nowhere in the States could one find the baroque architecture so apparent here. Mixed with the numerous other styles, including the modern Art Deco found on the Gran Via, the city was rich with beauty and character.

He wished he could see the fountain in the Plaza de Cibeles, which featured a Roman goddess on a chariot pulled by two lions. Now it was a mound of sandbags and masonry, the giant marble sculpture inside safely cocooned to protect it from bombs and artillery. Further down the Paseo del Prado the huge Neptune fountain was also buried under a gigantic protective mountain.



He passed the city's massive Prado museum, which housed one of the world's greatest collections of art. But it was empty now, all of the paintings shipped to Valencia for safekeeping.

Avery walked by Gaylord's Hotel on Calle de Alfonso XI, which, with a three-star rating, had been one of the city's finest before the war. Now it had been taken over by the Russians to serve as their headquarters. He'd heard the food inside was still good and that they even had cold beer but he'd probably never know. The armed sentries at the door made sure no uninvited guests wandered inside - and foreign journalists were rarely on the guest list.

Propaganda posters with various crowd-rallying messages were plastered everywhere and the ever-present *¡No Pasaron!* Banners were strung across many streets. He began to admire the strength and determination of these people. He even saw the huge visages of Stalin, Lenin and President Azana emblazoned on the Puerta de Alcalá monument, accompanied by a thank you message to the people of the Soviet Union.

Some stores were open as if it was business as usual but others had steel shutters rolled down over their fronts. He saw scars on buildings, shell holes in the streets, and rubble neatly swept up into piles on the sidewalk. Here and there he came upon shattered buildings, reminders of the previous November when German bombers had pounded the city for several days. Everywhere he went there was such contrast between utter destruction and complete beauty.

Sometimes planes buzzed overhead. The bombing raids had mostly stopped now, thanks to the Russian fighters that patrolled the skies over the city, but the sound of aircraft made everyone immediately look up to try to determine if the planes were friendly. The small Russian planes, shiny silver underneath with red-painted bands around the tails, eased fears as they sped past.

Several times he heard the boom of artillery fire in the distance, off in the direction of the Casa de Campo, the huge urban park on the western outskirts of the city. The Nationalist advance had been halted there but they had set up batteries with which they harassed the city. Sometimes, sirens followed the shelling as the fire trucks raced to respond. It struck Avery how the alternating high/low sound was so different, so foreign, than the wailing of an American siren.

He walked through the one of the city's most famous squares, the busy Puerto del Sol. Farther west down the Calle Mayor he entered the portico into the huge Plaza Mayor. The beautifully designed square with its multitude of balconies and delicate towers dated back over 300 years. Once, he imagined, throngs of people

had met here to socialize. Now, they hurried through, staying close to the shelter of the the sides.

One afternoon, Avery had even ventured toward the front, all the way until barricades blocked the street as he approached the University City section. Madrid's Complutense University was one of the world's oldest and most distinguished in the world. Now the campus, filled with trenches and makeshift barriers, was on the northern line between Republican forces and Franco's rebels. This was where, by the School of Pharmacy, the inspirational Catalan anarchist Buenaventura Durruti had died the previous November. Occasional gunfire echoed through the buildings of the school as Avery approached, probably snipers he thought. Deciding there was no need to take unnecessary risk when essentially only being a tourist, he turned back after watching for a few minutes.

Now, on his fifth morning in Spain, he descended to the hotel bar where he hoped to find good, strong coffee and a place to work on his article. As he walked through the dark lobby he saw the girl with the laugh from Hemingway's party. She sat alone on a lobby chair that had seen better days, writing notes in a journal.

Avery found something about her very appealing. Her longish brunette hair appeared naturally curly and she wore it in a low-maintenance style that would suit her profession. Her eyes were a greenish hazel and—almost sad at first glance—but her most distinctive feature was a large mouth with full lips. She wasn't a classic beauty by those definitions set forth by art or Hollywood but when she laughed, as he'd seen a few nights before, she had been truly beautiful.

She also appeared to be wearing no make-up. Of course that was not something regarded as practical in a war zone, but Avery had seen plenty of other women, even other foreign journalists, in lipstick and rouge. No, this woman had the confidence to know she didn't need it, but undoubtedly also knew that she would be stunning if made up for a formal event.

Avery noticed the ring on her left hand. Oh, well, he thought. It didn't really matter; he wasn't here looking for romance. He really just thought it would be nice to get to know another foreign journalist, especially one who spoke English. He decided to introduce himself.

She looked up as Avery approached.

"Hello," he began. "I believe I saw you at Hemingway's party at the Florida a few days ago. My name is Frank Avery. I'm a reporter with the *Washington Herald*."

“Oh, hello,” she replied, rising and extending her hand. “Claire Radcliffe. *The Listener* magazine. Won’t you join me?”

Avery shook her hand –it was as firm and confident as he’d expected– and accepted her invitation, then settled in to an equally worn chair beside her. Suddenly feeling a bit awkward with regards as to what his next line should be, he went with the obvious: “Have you been in Spain long?”

“Only about two weeks this time,” she replied. “I was here last November. The planes were bombing; it was quite a scary time. My editor called me back to London when things appeared not to be going well for the Republic. Lots of journalists left. We didn’t want to be here when Franco marched into the city so we evacuated to Valencia. I made my way home from there.”

“But how about you?” she asked. “I assume you’re a new reporter?”

Avery shook his head in mild dismay and smiled. “Is my inexperience that obvious?”

“I didn’t mean that,” she said with a little laugh that showed off her large, white and perfectly straight teeth. “I just meant I hadn’t seen you before. Most of the foreign journalists interact quite frequently.”

Avery smiled. “Yes, I’ve been here less than a week. I’m just trying to get familiar with the city, learn the names of the important players in the war and so on.”

“As I’m sure you’ve gathered, this is a complicated war”, said Claire. “People in Britain are interested because I think they worry it could escalate. I think it makes them nervous that the Germans are involved. But many are also hesitant to support the Republic. Probably scared of the Reds taking over Europe or some such nonsense.”

Avery agreed. “I think it’s the same in America. My newspaper didn’t send anyone to cover it last year. I think they thought Franco would win quickly and the war would be over by last Christmas. Finally they decided to send someone to report from the scene when it looked like it would drag on.” He paused before adding with a smile, “And yes, they sent the inexperienced reporter.”

Talk of the war soon turned to more pleasant topics. Claire shared that she had grown up in a small town in Hampshire, near the southern coast of England, but had lived in London for several years after studying at Oxford. Her job had taken her to places like Rome and Amsterdam and Budapest. Even more exotic locales

like Egypt and South Africa, places Avery would love to see. She told him about the pyramids and the Nile and the wild beauty of Cape Town.

Her only trip to the States had been to New York. Avery was quick to point out that, while a great city, New York was not really an accurate representation of the whole country. He told her about Virginia and North Carolina and other places his travels had taken him. He described the monuments of Washington, DC and sailing on Chesapeake Bay.

It turned out Claire was engaged to a London barrister. His name was Roger and he was five years older than she. They'd met through mutual friends and been together three years. They had hoped to marry in the fall but the assignment to cover the war had interrupted those plans. Now they were hoping for the next summer.

Avery suddenly realized how long they had been talking. "Do you know George Ferrell?" he asked, "He works for the United Press Syndicate."

"We've not officially met but I know who he is," answered Claire. "Big fellow, a bit loud, but a good writer."

"Yes, that's him," he said with a smile. "I told him I'd meet him for lunch today. Would you care to join us? I'm supposed to join him a place called Café Mateo."

"Sure. Sounds lovely."

They left the hotel and stepped out on to the Gran Via, into what had turned out to be a beautiful spring day. After several blocks of walking, they found the address on Calle Montera, near the Puerta del Sol. The timing couldn't have been more perfect because as they approached the door they saw Ferrell coming up the sidewalk from the opposite direction.

Avery could see his friend was smiling as he approached, undoubtedly because he noticed Avery's female companion.

"George Ferrell, this is Claire Radcliffe."

"Nice to finally meet you," he said, extending his hand. "I've seen you around the hotel and at the Telefonica."

"Nice to meet you as well," she replied. "I'm a fan of your work."

"Why, thank you," he said with a smile. "I think I like you already."

Ferrell held the door open as the other two entered the small restaurant before him. The dimly lit interior with its dark wood paneling gave the establishment a distinctly Old World appearance. A somber bartender indicated with a wave of his hand for them to sit wherever they liked.

A white-shirted waiter emerged from the back carrying two plates, which he delivered to one of the only two other occupied tables. Avery selected a table near the back, next to one occupied by two men who were speaking French.

Affected by shortages, many restaurants had closed. Some of those that remained open had limited hours and most had to raise prices to reflect the difficulty they had in obtaining supplies. Dining out was a luxury many Madrileños had to give up out of necessity, leaving restaurants to rely on foreigners or soldiers for their business.

“What time is it?” said Ferrell, pulling back his sleeve and glancing at his watch before answering his own question. “12:30. Good. My rule is that I try not to drink before noon. Of course that’s only a rule, not a law, and I said ‘I try,’” he added with a laugh.

Ferrell called to the waiter, who was apparently named Javier, and ordered in Spanish a bottle of wine. “I’m starting to worry,” he said, turning to his companions. “Decent alcohol is getting harder to come by but if you know the right people, or are willing to pay the right price, I guess anything is still possible.”

The waiter returned with a bottle of Tempranillo, which he opened for them and poured into three glasses. “There’s no point in ordering off the menu since they’ll be limited in their offerings,” said Ferrell. “I’ll just tell him to bring whatever they’ve made for *la comida* today.”

The meal turned out to consist of a delicious, garlic-laden bean soup, small fried potatoes, and, of course, bread. There was no meat for the main course but a classic Spanish tortilla, a spicy potato, egg and cheese omelet, filled the role. “Normally, they serve some nice seafood here, but these days that’s almost impossible to get,” Ferrell explained. “They still get lamb sometimes but they offer it only on certain days.”

For dessert Javier brought them each a small plate bearing a perfectly shaped, round custard. Golden yellow on the sides and browned on the top, they sat in shallow pools of caramel sauce. “Oh, good” said Ferrell, spoon ready in his hand. “They have flan today. I love this stuff.”

After they finished small cups of strong coffee, the waiter dropped off a small piece of paper that was apparently the bill. Avery reached for his wallet but Ferrell stopped him.

“No, no,” he said, pulling out a wad of crumpled peseta bills. “My treat.”

“Thank you, George,” said Claire. “That was quite delicious. I never seem to take time for a proper meal and usually end up with some bread and something out of a tin,” she added with a laugh.

“I love Spanish food,” said Ferrell. “It’s a shame we can’t get everything that was available before the war. Nothing like some good Serrano ham and Manchego cheese with a bottle of nice Rioja to wash it down. And all the *tapas* dishes and the fish and shrimp. Mmmmm. If you make it to Valencia or Barcelona, or anywhere else on the coast, be sure to find some seafood.”

After lunch they headed back toward the Gran Via. Claire needed to finish work on an article so she bid them farewell and returned to the hotel but Ferrell talked Avery into following him to the Telefonica building.

“Have you finished an article yet?” he asked.

“I should have my first one done by the end of the day, mainly just about my arrival in a war zone,” Avery replied, hoping he could turn his jumble of notes into a coherent story about his first impressions of the war.

“Good. You might as well go with me now to see how the censors work.”

As they crossed the busy street, Ferrell turned to the younger reporter.

“So... I like your new friend, Frank. Not bad at all.”

“Now don’t start thinking like that, George,” said Avery, knowing what was being implied. “That’s all she is going to be, a friend. Besides, she’s engaged. It’s just good to have someone else to talk with and share the fun of this war. You didn’t really want me following you around every day, did you?”

“Whatever you say, my boy,” he returned with a smile.

On the fourth floor of the building, Ferrell walked up to a desk occupied by a small man wearing a baggy suit and round, wire frame glasses. “*Buenas tardes, Diego,*” he said. “Here is my article for today, for your approval.” He handed the man, who had only mumbled a reply, two typewritten pages. He read it, pen at the ready in his hand, but marked nothing. He handed it back and waved Ferrell

down the hallway. Avery followed as they proceeded to a large switchboard room, staffed by several young women.

“So,” said Ferrell, “they have to approve whatever you write. Once you go through the process a couple times, you get a feel for what you can and can’t say. Sometimes it all depends on how you phrase things and on how fluent the censor is in English. If they don’t like something, they’ll mark it out. Then you come down here to these lovely ladies who operate the switchboard. They’ll put through a phone call to wherever you like and you have to dictate the article. Sometimes someone will listen in to make sure you don’t deviate from the approved story but if you don’t give them any trouble they usually won’t bother after a while. Still, it can be a time-consuming process.”

Avery found a chair and waited while Ferrell spoke with a switchboard operator and had a call placed. Fortunately, the call went through quickly and Ferrell, speaking loudly and slowly, was able to get his report in.

“Oh, by the way,” he added, when he had finished. “There can also be censorship on the other end. Knowing Arthur Bowen, I doubt you’ll have a problem with him but in some places, where editors are very pro-Catholic, I know articles have sometimes been greatly changed from the time they were submitted to when they made print. Guess it’s backlash from the Republic taking away a lot of the church’s influence here.”

“Now, let’s go back to the hotel. It’s time for me to partake in a great Spanish tradition: the siesta. Avery agreed. After the meal and the wine he could use a nap as well.

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The following day, Avery ventured to the fourth floor of the Telefonica building alone. For his first article, hoping it would ingratiate him to the censors, he decided to go with a basic piece on the strong defense of Madrid and the bravery of its residents. After he had typed it up he went in to the press office and waited as, one by one, the censor on duty saw three other English-speaking journalists.

Finally, Avery was called to the desk and he handed over his 350-word article. The slightly disheveled man, who reminded Avery of his college philosophy professor, took the piece of paper and studied it. A couple of minutes later, the censor wrote something on it and handed it back, saying simply, “Good. No problems.” With a casual flick of his wrist he waved Avery down the hall to the switchboard room.

Entering the room, he again waited with other journalists until one of the operators became free. She waved him over and he handed her his approved paper and the numbers to place a call to Paris. There, due to the cost and unreliability of a trans-Atlantic call from Spain, his newspaper had arranged for an agent to act as an intermediary. The agent would write down the dictated story and cable the article back to the Washington office.

Avery picked up a handset and waited until the call went through. It did and Avery began to read to the woman who had answered on the other end. A man in a grey suit Avery had noticed floating around the room came and looked over his shoulder at the typed article. He assumed the man spoke English because, though he said nothing to Avery, he listened to the dictation and then walked away.

When he was finished dictating, Avery thanked the Paris agent and hung up the phone. He also thanked the operator before leaving. As he was riding the elevator down, he smiled as he suddenly realized that this was a momentous occasion: he was officially a war correspondent.