

## CHAPTER 1

LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND | DECEMBER 1943

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The hotel room in Grenoble, France was drafty with a chilling wind coming off the Alps. However, it did possess the luxury of a private bathroom with a bathtub. A temporary refuge for perhaps no more than a day. Arriving by train the prior afternoon from Lyon, Marc Fraser and his wife Fiona Marchand knew the *Gestapo* would soon discover their identities. Their clandestine activities in the French Resistance exposed after participating in the murder of an SS officer and the failed attempt to kill the Lyon head of the *Gestapo*, Klaus Barbie. *Gestapo* agents and the Nazi-collaborating French *Malice* across occupied France undoubtedly alerted by now. Heighten security possibly armed with their photographs made escape to neutral Switzerland difficult.

How to get across the border? Must be a better way than attempting to cross at some remote wooded area. Probably guarded by roving German patrols. It was also cold in November at these higher elevations. They were not dressed for a trek in rugged terrain making nighttime out of the question.

Consulting his map of France, what about Lake Geneva? What drew his attention was the line in the middle of the lake defining the French-Swiss border. Looked to be less than twenty kilometers across the lake. Maybe a boat for hire? Steal one if necessary? Should be easier than his desperate ocean escape made from Bilbao, Spain to France during the civil war in 1936.

The map indicated a small French town on the southern shore off the lake, Thonon-les-Bains. No way to know if it was assessable by rail. If not, difficult to get to without raising suspicions.

Turning to Fiona, he said, "Here," putting his finger on the map. "If we can cross the lake into Switzerland we will be safe. I know someone in Switzerland who will help us."

After the chance assistance by the train conductor to escape this far, their fortunes continued to improve. Returning to the train station in the morning there was only one French gendarme in sight. Fraser looked at the train schedules. There it was. Thonon-les-Bains. The route went north from Grenoble via a town called Bellgarde-sur-Valserine then skirted the Swiss border east to Thonon-les-Bains on the south shore of Lake Geneva. A four-hour trip with a departure at noon. Enough time to buy some clothes and warmer overcoats before setting out.



With fresh clothes, a shave for Fraser and a touch of make-up for Fiona, they felt human again. Fiona was almost cheerful. Fraser cautioned her they were not yet out of danger. Must not let their guard down until they crossed into Switzerland. Well-dressed with first-class tickets they looked the part of their cover story. The ticket seller commented that Thonon-les-Bains was nothing more than a remote spot on the map. He commented, *in winter an unusual destination for people like you.*

The movie business ploy again became a convenient cover that explained everything.

"Need an ocean background scene from a boat on the water. Wintertime. Not allowed to film on the Atlantic coast or the Channel with the German military defenses. Therefore, Lake Geneva is a stand-in. A large enough expanse of water for what I need."

Arriving in Thonon-les-Bains in the late afternoon allowed some time to reconnoiter. Not much of a town in winter. Few people were about on this blustery November afternoon. A cold breeze out of the northwest blew across the lake. No German

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soldiers in sight. No French gendarmes patrolling the small marina. An unguarded border? Not likely. Probably just keeping warm somewhere.

Using their cover story, they arranged for a charter immediately after setting eyes on the perfect boat. A handsome mahogany motor launch. Big enough, fast enough. A good charter boat for the summer crowd in season. The captain was an older man with a gray beard. Weathered complexion. Looked like a sailor. Wool pea coat over a turtleneck sweater, smoking a pipe.

They told the man they needed to scout the view using the remaining daylight then into the twilight hours. After sunset, they needed some night shots looking back on the lights of the town from out in the lake. Perhaps they could use him as an extra in the movie? They would pay well for the four hours work but they had to push off right away. Fraser handed over enough money to counter any objections.

Once well out into the lake, Fraser asked, "Do the Germans run patrol boats out here?"

"Oh yes. Two fast patrol boats. They moor at a dock a short ways from here. That a problem?"

"Could be. Here is the situation. That was all lies about making a movie. You are going to take us over to the Swiss side of the lake. Is that a problem, old timer?"

The man remained silent, no expression readable. After sizing up Fraser and Marchand the man said, "It is if I get caught coming back. Germans are a little sensitive about people sneaking into their territory. The patrol boats are armed. Not worth the risk no matter what you are willing to pay."

"Not sure you understand, Monsieur. First, you have no choice." Fraser pulled out the Webley revolver from his overcoat pocket. "Second, I'm going to pay you double. Or if you prefer, you can decide to escape occupied France with us and stay in Switzerland. I will even help you. You do not have to return."

Puffing on his pipe, "Since I have little choice, I will take the offer of the money. Not much of that this time of year. Times are difficult. I cannot leave my wife alone. Poor woman is not doing well with her arthritis. The winter cold gets harder each year. Harder yet with so little food.

"No need for that big gun, Monsieur. Do not see myself jumping a young fellow like you holding a gun. If you are running from the Germans that is not my affair."

Fraser smiled. "Then head to Switzerland. Can you get us all the way to Lausanne? Don't care to walk too far in the middle of a cold night."

"Guess so. Be close to three hours though. I must keep the speed down to make less noise. No need to announce our presence out here at night. I do not know if the Germans patrol at night, but I suspect they must. Big lake though. Keep as quiet as possible. Only the engine noise. If there are any patrols boats out they should not hear us above the noise of their own engine. No talking. No lights. No smoking."

Within ninety minutes darkness descended under a moonless dense overcast. Looking toward Fiona the old man said, "Looks like you're a bit chilled out here, Madame. There is a bottle of cognac down below. Some shot glasses. Perhaps we should all take the chill off this damp night."

The shallow draft fast boat had a shallow hold in the bow section. Marchand ducked her head and stepped down inside.

Just as she disappeared below there came the sound of a large engine coughing to life in the distance. A patrol boat? Were the bastards sitting idle just listening? The engine noise grew louder.

Seconds later a strong search light beam traversed in an arc while approaching fast in their general direction. Only a couple of hundred meters away. Close enough to hear commands yelled in German.

"*Merde!* I am cutting our engine," the old man said in a loud whisper. "It is our only chance. Stay absolutely quiet and hope they do not spot us with their search light. No talking."

A much larger craft by the sound of the engine. Could they out run it? No way to know. If they ran for it and guessed wrong, surely fired on by machine gun. The old man was right not to try making a run. Avoiding the search beam their only hope. If luck held, they could then resume at low speed. As long as they continued to hear the patrol boat engine then the Germans would not be able to hear the speedboat's engine.

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The tactic to sit silent and hope the German patrol boat passed without sighting them proved only partially right. The Germans did not see them. The search light never picked them out in the blackness. However, the German boat's speed lifted its bow causing the search light to play over the low-sitting speed-boat as it closed the distance to only a hundred feet.

Fraser looked on in horror as the patrol boat approached at high speed. Its position and proximity obvious by the search light. *Heading directly toward them!* He instinctively tried to get to Fiona in the hold but he was too late.

The heavy patrol craft with its bow raised out of the water under speed came over the top of the bow of their motor launch. The impact smashed the wooden hull of the smaller boat then slammed down with its greater weight forcing it under water. A terrible noise of splintering wood as the smaller boat's bow section broke away.

The German boat pushed through the wreckage of the smaller craft under power to a short distance away before stopping.

The halves of the severed wooden boat sank immediately. The old man was gone, presumably thrown overboard. Frantic shouts in German came from the patrol boat. The water immediately closed around Fraser in the sinking rear section of the motor launch as he desperately reached down hoping to grab hold of Marchand. However, the severed bow section sank quickly into the black water underneath him.

His water-laden overcoat and suit dragged him down. Sinking two meters below the surface with no further breath, he thrust his way to the surface. Even then, it was all he could do to tread water to keep afloat. Everything was black. Biting cold. No stars, no moon.

Something struck him in the head. Then a shout in German, "Take hold of the pole."

A German soldier hauled him on board the patrol boat using a Shepard's crook rescue pole. With difficulty, the soldier hoisted Fraser out of the water dropping him face down on the deck.

The intense cold of the water already began to inhibit the use of Fraser's freezing fingers. His only thought, *Fiona was gone.* Drowned in this cold black water.

From the other side of the patrol boat two other soldiers were seemingly searching for someone in the water. Calling out for 'Fritz', one soldier worked the search light now pointing toward the rear of the patrol boat. A comrade obviously thrown overboard in the collision.

The soldier rescuing Fraser turned him over. Even while shaking with cold, Fraser reached into his waistband and withdrew the Webley revolver. Would it still fire after soaked in the water?

The young soldier pulled back in surprise raising his hands. Fraser then yelled at the other two in German, "Halt what you are doing. Make no move for your weapons or I will shoot."

The other soldiers turned in Fraser's direction. Immediately, the one holding the search light swung it around into Fraser's eyes. Turning away from the glare, Fraser saw the other soldier reaching down for a submachine gun on the deck. Fraser fired twice hitting the soldier and spinning him over the railing into the water. The younger soldier that hauled him out of the water scurried away out of sight.

The search light beam now fell downward toward the deck. The soldier working the light let it drop trying to get to the mounted machine gun. A mistake that cost him his life as Fraser scrambled closer as the man reached the machine gun but too late. Two shots from the reliable Webley killed him.

The remaining soldier had time to find a weapon. A rifle. At least not a submachine gun thought Fraser. Nonetheless, the soldier was now pointing the weapon at him. Fraser pointed his revolver at the soldier while stepping closer to him. The barrel of the rifle now only a meter away. A standoff.

"No closer! I will shoot!" the soldier said. "Drop your gun!"

This close, Fraser judged the soldier probably no older than seventeen. The heavy Mauser rifle shaking slightly. Fear, cold, or the weight holding the weapon?

Continuing to point his own weapon, Fraser said, "Just us now. Your comrades are dead. You and I too if that is the way it must be. You shoot and I will still get off a shot. Right into your face. I will not lower my weapon so you must kill me. Can you do that?"

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Fraser had no idea how this would go. Did not matter anymore. Seconds passed. Fraser's hand was also shaking as the effects of hypothermia became more acute.

"Help!" A faint cry from the other side of the boat. From the water? "Help me!"

Fiona?

For a split second, the soldier diverted his eyes toward the direction of the voice. It was long enough for Fraser to grab the barrel of the rifle while ramming the Webley into his throat.

The soldier released his grip on the rifle.

Fraser flung the rifle overboard then pushed the soldier toward the side of the boat. Fraser reached down picking up the submachine gun and throwing it into the water.

"Find her you sonofabitch!" Fraser yelled in German. "The search light!" he said pushing the soldier toward the still illuminated search light.

Within seconds, the light beam found her. Ten meters from the boat. Too far to grab her with the rescue pole.

Marchand struggled frantically to keep her head above water. Fraser grabbed the soldier by the front of his tunic and pointed the Webley in his face. "Help her!"

As the soldier looked at Marchand bewildered about what to do, Fraser pushed him into the water.

As the soldier's head bobbed up spitting water Fraser pointed the gun, "Save her or you also die."

The soldier was his best choice. Fraser was in no shape to rescue Fiona. He was dangerously cold, having difficulty now even focusing his thoughts. A death sentence if captured by the Germans.

The soldier shed his water-soaked overcoat, but saving someone from drowning was a different skill. With her wet clothing weighing her down, Fiona Marchand could do little to help as hypothermia rendered her limbs unable to function. Once the soldier got to her, it was all he could do to stay afloat. Slow progress back to the boat. His head going under repeatedly as he struggled to keep her head up. Yet he was young, fit, and motivated to save his own life.

After several agonizing minutes, he got her to the boat. All Fraser could do was keep her afloat with the rescue pole hooked onto her overcoat while the soldier hoisted himself to the deck. The soldier reached down and grabbed her coat while Fraser pulled her up with the pole. Eventually Fraser tucked the Webley into his waistband to use both hands.

Once on deck she was barely conscious. Fraser by now was also struggling physically. His fingers barely able to grip the revolver as he pulled it out of his waistband.

Shivering, the soldier said, "In the pilothouse. There is heat below from the engine. Blankets too."

They dragged Marchand into the shelter of the patrol boat's pilothouse. Lifting an access door in the floor, revealed a storage hold below.

Fraser said, "Get the blankets."

The soldier started to disappear below when Fraser said, "Bring a weapon from down there and I will kill you."

Fraser began stripped off all of Fiona's wet clothing. Difficult using only one hand. He still had to hold the gun on the German and his fingers were not working well.

The soldier brought out several blankets from below. Fraser ordered him to help finish undressing Fiona. Under different circumstance, her naked body would delight the young soldier. Right now he was freezing. Nothing else mattered than getting warm. He knew he had to help the woman before allowed to tend his own needs.

They wrapped Fiona tightly in several blankets.

"We should move her below," the soldier said. "The engine's heat exchanger is rigged to provide some heat into the pilothouse. Comes up from the engine compartment. Much warmer down there. Running the engine faster might produce more heat."

Fraser and the soldier moved Fiona below into the cramped hold, wrapped tightly in the blankets like a mummy. She appeared better but still looked in a bad way. Deathly pale. Her breathing was shallow and seemed at a reduced respiratory rate. Fraser increased the engine rpms. He could feel the blessed



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warmth coming from a vent in the hold. He hoped enough to save Fiona.

Shaking uncontrollably, Fraser knew he must quickly get warm. The soldier looked no better. They must get out of their water-soaked clothing. All they had were blankets and the clothing of the one dead soldier on the deck.

Fraser left the shelter of the pilothouse. Dragging the dead soldier near, he said to the young soldier, "Strip his clothing off. Hurry!"

After the soldier removed his dead comrade's coat and uniform, Fraser said, "Give me the overcoat. You get the uniform."

The soldier nodded appreciatively. He expected Fraser might take all the clothing and let him freeze to death. Perhaps shot later when no longer needed. Still, he was alive for now.

Fraser removed all his wet clothing including his underwear. Wrapping a blanket tightly around his body under his armpits, he draped the overcoat around his shoulders. The German's jackboots offered some warmth to his feet. Still cold, hypothermia possibly averted.

With dry clothing and a blanket wrapped over his shoulders, the soldier joined Fraser in the pilothouse for the meager warmth coming up from the engine.

Fraser sat holding the Webley in his lap. "Do you know how to get us to Lausanne on the Swiss side?"

"No."

"Do you know how to handle this boat?"

"No."

"Neither do I but we will learn. Get below and see if we are taking on any water from the collision."

The navigation chart next to the wheel suggested a heading of north-northeast to Lausanne. However, he did not know their current position.

The soldier returned from below reporting no unusual amount of water in the bilge.

Fraser checked the fuel gauge. No way to tell if enough to get them to the Swiss side of the lake. He pushed the throttle forward and increased speed. No need to be quiet. It was a German patrol boat.

Once a few lights became visible indicating they were nearing the Swiss shoreline, Fraser turned parallel to the shore. Reducing speed, he was looking for a populated spot suggested by more lights. Once on land, they needed to find help quickly. Fiona needed to get to a warm environment with medical attention. There remained the problem of finding help once on shore. Fiona could not walk. Carry her? Send the German for help? Becoming harder to think clearly.

The problem resolved quickly as a search light beam played across their boat.

From a loud speaker in German came, "Halt! Idle your engine. You are in Swiss waters. Put down your weapons." The Swiss obviously saw the German military markings. "Stand down. Prepare for boarding."

Fraser cut the engine. The Swiss patrol boat slowed as it eased closer.

"Drop your weapons. Show your hands."

Fraser yelled back, "We are French refugees escaping France. Commandeered this German patrol boat. Need medical help. Injured on board."

To the soldier he said, "Stand up. Raise your hands," punctuating the order with the Webley.

Fraser bent down to Fiona, "Hang on, Fiona. We made it. You'll be warm soon."

She managed a weak smile, mouthing silently, "I love you."

As the Swiss boat came along side, the enormous relief Fraser felt gave him a sense of generosity toward the young German soldier. Why not? He looked like a kid. Not every German was part of the *Schutzstaffel*. Nor every SS a sadistic murderer and torturer.

"You're a lucky young man. Germany is losing the war. No need now to die for the Führer. Your war is over. You are young with a life ahead of you. Now you can eat Swiss chocolates, drink beer, and make love to pretty *fräuleins*."



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The Swiss patrol boat made for their base in the small lakeside town of Morges. Huddled below to keep warm, Fraser sat close to Fiona trying to impart his body warmth. A Swiss border guard brought a steaming cup of coffee, which Fraser coaxed her to drink. She was still in a bad way evidenced by her quivering cheeks. Given a set of weather gear to wear, Fraser sufficiently recovered his core temperature.

Thirty minutes later the patrol craft docked. Having radioed ahead, the ever-efficient Swiss had an ambulance waiting. Bundled in layers of blankets, the attendants closed the ambulance doors. Two Swiss border guards restrained Fraser from joining her. In German, one said to him, "She will be well cared for in the hospital in Lausanne. Only thirty minutes from here."

"And me?" Fraser asked.

"You have entered Switzerland illegally. We are taking you into custody."

At the police station, they mercifully provided clothing. Shabby workingman's clothing, but at least laundered, and a pair of badly worn work boots.

"I am an American citizen," Fraser said to the Swiss officer sitting across the desk.

"Really?" the incredulous officer said. "How is it you were in France?"

In English, Fraser replied, "I am a journalist. My name is Marc Fraser. The woman is my wife. Her name is Fiona Marchand. I would appreciate you contacting the United States Embassy as required by protocol."

Twenty minutes later, after being ushered into an office, a sergeant handed him a telephone.

The American consular officer asked him his name followed by a string of questions. Interrupting, Fraser said, "Sir, are you familiar with a fellow American by the name of Allen Dulles?"

The consular officer remained silent for a moment. "Dulles you say?"

"Yes. Allen Dulles. The head of the American Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland. He is there in Bern I believe."

"Are you claiming to be with the OSS?"

"Affiliated you might say. Mr. Dulles knows me."

The OSS, America's WWII spy agency operated in neutral Switzerland under the full knowledge of the Swiss government. So did Britain's MI6 and Nazi Germany's Reich Main Security Office, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or RSHA. While neutral, Switzerland walked a precarious line. Surrounded by the Axis powers of Nazi Germany, Austria, Italy, and German-occupied France, Swiss banking served to finance the Third Reich's war effort.

Neutrality was a balancing act for Switzerland. The threat of German invasion countered by the need for the Third Reich to use Swiss neutrality to convert German Reichsmarks to internationally accepted Swiss francs. This allowed Germany to purchase materials critical to the war effort. It further offered Germany the means to launder gold and other assets plundered from conquered countries into Swiss francs. That included works of art and of course the confiscated wealth of Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

From the Swiss perspective, this arrangement preserved their independence while earning vast wealth for banking billions of Reichsmarks. An arrangement with the devil. Outside the Swiss banking industry, prevailing Swiss popular sympathies were largely anti-Nazi accounting for Allied intelligence presence. Like Lisbon in neutral Portugal, Bern Switzerland was a denizen of Allied and Axis spies.



Although under detention in a dreary locked room at the border guard barracks, Fraser received a hot meal and warm clothing. Concern remained for Fiona's unknown condition. Two hours later his circumstances abruptly changed.

Following the sound of a key in the locked door, in walked Allen Dulles. Well-dressed in a vested tweed suit, ten years older than Fraser, Dulles looked like a lawyer, which he was.

"Been a long time, Marc," Dulles said pumping Fraser's hand and placing his other hand on his shoulder. "Obviously circumstances went badly in France?"

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"I will tell you all about it, but first, what about my wife? They took her to a hospital in Lausanne."

"Don't be alarmed. I already checked before I took the train here. She is doing fine. No injuries apparently, just the effects of the cold. We will go to the hospital immediately."

"I'm to be released?"

"Oh yes. You and your wife will soon become legal residents of Switzerland. At least for the duration of the war."

Three days later Fraser and Marchand boarded a train for Bern. Marchand suffering no residual effects from her ordeal. Discharged the previous day, she took charge of shopping for clothing for both with money provided by Dulles.

"So Mr. Dulles is the American intelligence chief in Switzerland? At the hospital, he sounded as if you were old friends, Marc. How are you acquainted?" Fiona said on the short train ride to Bern.

"I met Allen in 1933. Before he was an intelligence officer. Back then, America did not have an intelligence agency. The Office of Strategic Services came into being only after Pearl Harbor. Before that, it was only the Navy and Army that engaged in intelligence. Mostly signals intelligence. Radio traffic, codes, and the like. The OSS was formed under control of the Joints Chiefs of Staff to wage espionage behind enemy lines. True spying, but also nastier operational stuff like the British SOE we worked with in France."

"Dulles doesn't look like a military officer? More like a professor."

Fraser laughed. "No, Allen isn't military. He is a lawyer. Served in the State Department during the First World War. In the twenties and thirties he was a legal adviser to the League of Nations."

"So how did you come to know him?"

"You recall when I told you William Randolph Hearst himself sent me to Europe as a foreign correspondent for his newspapers in 1931 after I broke a major story in Los Angeles. Based in Paris, the overwhelming news of the time was the growing popularity of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, the NSDAP. Specifically its charismatic leader, Adolf Hitler.

"Just months after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Hearst arranged a personal interview. The old man had real pull. The day after the Hitler interview, I was having a drink at the Adlon Hotel bar. Dulles walks in with Hamilton Armstrong, the editor of the prestigious American journal *Foreign Affairs* who I recognized. In terrible German, Dulles asked if I was at the Reich Chancellery the previous day. Said he was also there as part of disarmament conference.

"Anyway, I impressed Dulles and his friend Armstrong when I explained. Not only did I interview Hitler, but Göring also. I also obtained Göring's authorization to visit the Nazis' first actual concentration camp outside of Oranienburg. Internment of political opponents mostly. Since not specifically prohibited, I took photographs."

Disembarking the train at the Bern station, Fiona said, "That was ten years ago. How is it you know Dulles is in Bern and head of the American OSS?"

"You recall what I told you happened in Spain?"

She looked at him. "Of course. Your adventures as you called them. Eventually connected to events in France that now brings us to Switzerland as refugees."

"What I mean, what happened in Spain started with Allen Dulles. You might say he introduced me to espionage. Somehow, he knew of my reporting assignment to Spain just before the onset of the Spanish Civil War. Persuaded me to see the U.S. assistant military attaché in Paris. I learned to develop my own microdots. Real spy stuff. That is how I transmitted sensitive information from inside Franco's Nationalist Army. Concealed the microdots under postage stamps. Fake letters mailed to *my lawyer* in New York.

"Let me guess. The esteemed international lawyer Allen Dulles."

Fraser smiled and nodded.

"*Mon Dieu*. I fear we have escaped from the frying pan into the fire. What exactly does your Machiavellian Mr. Dulles have in mind for us?"