

THE FIRST CASUALTY

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

SUPER: "On July 18, 1936, the military leaders of Spain launched a *coup d'état* to overthrow the newly-elected Popular Front government."

From a dimly-lit vault, small but heavy crates with rope handles pass along a human chain of Spanish Sailors (20s).

The Sailors grunt and sweat. With great effort they maintain a steady rhythm.

SUPER: "The Nationalist Junta's uprising, led by Generalísimo Francisco Franco, received massive support from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany."

At the mouth of the cave, rain POURS in. One Sailor slips, drops his crate. Everyone behind him stops and stares.

The embarrassed Sailor regains his footing, picks up the box, nods that he's okay.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Beneath an umbrella, a distinguished Spanish Captain (30s) smokes as Sailors load the crates on a lorry. Two Guards with submachine-guns observe.

SUPER: "CARTAGENA, SPAIN - 25 OCTOBER 1936"

The Guards leap into the lorry. It drives down a muddy winding road. SLOSHES through deep puddles.

SUPER: "To keep the Spanish Civil War from escalating, the Western powers adopted a nonintervention policy and imposed an embargo on arms shipments to Spain."

At the cave entrance, an empty lorry arrives. The Sailors resume the loading process.

EXT. NAVAL BASE - NIGHT

At two adjacent piers, four Soviet freighters are docked. Guards stand watch at each gangway.

SUPER: "The besieged Republic of Spain turned in desperation to the sole military power willing to break the blockade: the Soviet Union."

A crane lowers a pallet bearing dozens of crates into the dark hold of a freighter.

ALEXANDER ORLOV (41), an imposing Russian with short dark hair, high forehead, and thick moustache, watches from the pier. Beside him stand several thuggish Soviet Agents.

Several Spanish Bankers and Accountants (40s-60s) emerge from two limousines.

Four Accountants with suitcases bid farewell to the Bankers, then split up.

Each Accountant heads for one of the freighters and is joined en route by a Soviet Agent.

GUSTAVO RUIZ (50), a short, wiry banker with a handlebar moustache and pomaded hair, observes Orlov chatting and shaking hands with the frail Bank Director (60).

Orlov salutes in the Popular Front style, with a raised fist. The Bank Director returns the gesture without conviction.

Eyes narrowed in disdain, Ruiz watches Orlov board the nearest freighter, followed by the rest of his goons.

At the ship's stern, the dark water CHURNS.

FADE TO:

EXT. MADRID - UNIVERSITY CITY - DAY

SUPER: "23 APRIL 1937"

A battlefield littered with corpses under a pall of smoke. Fortified trenches connect the gutted campus buildings.

Reporter PAUL ARCHER (32), a rugged, down to earth Brummie, dashes along a trench in a worn tweed suit.

Ahead of him, grimy bearded Soldiers (20s) tote ammo boxes. Beyond the trench, an artillery shell EXPLODES, showering them with dirt.

PAUL (V.O.)

Dateline: Madrid. The Popular Army has fought the Nationalists to a standstill on the edge of the city.

Amid sporadic GUNFIRE, Paul and the Soldiers race into a pockmarked college building.

INT. SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY - DAY

Paul enters a former classroom, now a makeshift army outpost. American Soldiers of the Lincoln Battalion aim rifles and machine guns through barricades made of books and sandbags.

PAUL (V.O.)

The International Brigades have set up their field headquarters at the University's School of Philosophy.
(more)

In relative safety, other Soldiers eat rations, smoke, chat, and reload ammo clips. Paul smiles, holds his Leica camera. They nod. He snaps a photo.

PAUL (V.O.)

The IB's are volunteers from all over the world, here to defend the Republic of Spain. Idealists.

GUNSHOTS from outside startle Paul. He ducks as bullets RIP through the walls. Soldiers at the barricades return fire.

MARCEL REMY (38), a charming closeted French journalist, peeks through the doorway. Catches Paul in mid-shudder.

MARCEL

Hello! You're the English reporter?

PAUL

Paul Archer. *Manchester Guardian*.

MARCEL

Marcel Remy. *Havas Agency*.

PAUL

(shakes his hand)
How do you do?

MARCEL

Pleased to meet you. Your first time in Madrid?

PAUL

Yeah. Haven't seen this much action since Iraq.

Marcel regards him with practised sympathy.

MARCEL

Which unit?

PAUL
 Number Three Armoured Car Company.
 I was a gunner.

His countenance darkens. Marcel takes the hint.

MARCEL
Alors...
 (more)

He offers Paul a cigarette. Marcel lights it, then his own.

A shell WHISTLES and EXPLODES on a floor above. Plaster dust sprinkles on everyone. Marcel exhales smoke sharply.

MARCEL (CONT'D)
 (whispers)
 Tell me, please, in your
 "professional opinion"...

He subtly gestures to the Soldiers, too preoccupied with the gunfight to notice.

PAUL
 (in French)
 [Obsolete weapons. Inadequate
 training. But plenty of spirit.]

MARCEL
 [Brutally honest. I like that.]

A bullet KNOCKS one Soldier back. He YELPS, clutches his shoulder, slumps to the floor.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY (37) ENTERS, clad in a field jacket, dirty corduroys and a beret. The literary man of action.

Paul and Marcel watch Ernest open a first-aid kit and attend to the Soldier's wound. The gore makes Marcel cringe.

PAUL
 Is that who I think it is?

Marcel spots a hint of jealousy in Paul, which he shares.

MARCEL
 Hemingway.

PAUL
 (approaches Ernest)
 Can I help?

Ernest covers the wound with a wad of rolled gauze.

ERNEST
Hold this down.

Paul presses the bandage firmly as Ernest winds more gauze around it.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
OW!! SHIT!!

ERNEST
Easy, son. You'll be all right.
(to Paul)
Thanks...

PAUL
(shakes his hand)
Paul.

An awkward moment. Ernest knows he's been recognised.

ERNEST
Ernie.
(to the Soldier)
Can you walk?

WOUNDED SOLDIER
I think so.

Paul helps Ernest lift the Soldier to his feet.

ERNEST
Hold the fort, Marcel.

MARCEL
Of course, Ernie.

His look is one of cunning admiration for Paul's seizure of an opportunity.

EXT. HOTEL FLORIDA - EVENING

Off the *Gran Via* in the *Plaza del Callao* stands an eight-storey hotel, fortified with sandbags. Windows are taped. SHELLING echoes in the debris-filled streets.

INT. ERNEST'S SUITES

In the sitting room, a party is in full swing. A gramophone PLAYS Django Reinhardt. Journalists and Soldiers graze at a table littered with crackers, sardine tins, and bottles of wine and liquor.

Paul and Marcel, with drinks and cigarettes, investigate the adjoining suite. In the teeming, chatty crowd:

Ernest pours a whisky for MARTHA GELLHORN (28), a sharp-witted blonde. Their mood is casual, as if "just friends".

Basking in the attention of her peers, Martha holds forth with a patrician Bryn Mawr accent.

MARTHA

Clearly not all the appeasers are cowards. Some of those fat-cats stand to get filthy rich with their Fascist buddies!

MARCEL

(confidential, to Paul)
Martha Gellhorn. Very smart. She sleeps with Hemingway.

PAUL

When the cat's away...

ROBERT CAPA (23) and GERDA TARO (25) discuss their stark war photos, arrayed on a bed surrounded by onlookers.

MARCEL

Recognise the photos?

PAUL

Of course. Robert Capa.

MARCEL

Gerda Taro. Robert's business partner. She sleeps with him, too.

PAUL

How nice.

KAJSA ROTHMANN (34), a tall Swedish redhead in a leather jacket and militia trousers, passes by with a drink.

Grinning, Marcel reaches out and pulls her close.

MARCEL

And this is Kajsa Rothmann. She sleeps with everyone!

KAJSA

Marcel, you're terrible!

MARCEL

Correct me, and I'll retract! This is Paul Archer. We met at the Uni.

PAUL
 (shakes Kajsa's hand)
 How do you do?

KAJSA
 Hello, Paul. I'm with *Karlstads-Tidningen*. And you?

PAUL
 Freelance. *Manchester Guardian*.

KAJSA
 Ah. You'll be right at home, then.

Paul gives a slight smile. He has them fooled.

MARCEL
 Are you in love again? Who's the lucky fellow?

KAJSA
 Don't be absurd! There's a war on!

MARCEL
 (to Paul)
 She's a translator as well as a journalist. And, she may be a spy.

KAJSA
 Not funny, Marcel!
 (to Paul)
 Be careful what you say. *Seguridad* nearly deported me!
 (raises her glass)
Salud!

Paul and Marcel raise their glasses.

PAUL
Salud!
 (they drink)
 There are real spies, though. It's not just paranoia.

Kajsa regards Paul anew, as a potential risk.

KAJSA
 Of course... I haven't met any.

MARCEL
 But what about me??

They laugh. Paul resumes his investigative tone, smiling.

PAUL
Some Nationalists must still live
in Madrid. Keeping a low profile.

KAJSA
Fascists, you mean? Absolutely.

PAUL
I call people whatever they call
themselves. Unless I want to
insult them.

Marcel senses friction, tries diplomacy.

MARCEL
So you don't call the Republicans
"Reds". That's only fair, no?

PAUL
Exactly.

KAJSA
When you've been here long enough,
you'll understand. The freedom of
all Europe is at stake.

Paul gives her the clenched-fist salute.

PAUL
Viva la República. Comrade.

Flustered, Kajsa turns, vanishes into the crowd.

MARCEL
Paul, really! How could you?

PAUL
Not my type.
(drinks, muses)
A Nationalist in Madrid... "Behind
Enemy Lines."

MARCEL
Are you mad?? If you want to
interview a Nationalist, visit the
other side! That's safer!

PAUL
On the other side, they'd only tell
me second-hand atrocity tales.
Nuns raped, babies eaten. Useless!

Marcel takes a swig to calm his nerves.

MARCEL

Alors, if you must...
 (in French)
 [I know the right people.]

PAUL

[You mean the "wrong people".]

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Paul's scuffed shoes CLOMP on the sidewalk. He steps around fallen masonry and other debris.

Distant shelling RUMBLES. Behind an old church, Paul stops, looks around.

The alley is deserted but for a battle-damaged saloon car with blackout headlights.

At the open boot stands ELENA MORELL (24) in a dark dress and overcoat. With piercing, sceptical eyes, she projects an air of danger and decadence.

Paul watches her receive payment from a lanky Male Customer (30s) clad in a militia jumpsuit.

With wary glances, the Customer departs with a burlap sack bulging with groceries.

Elena takes a drag on a cigarette. Spots Paul.

The Customer vanishes at the far end of the alley.

Elena signals Paul with her eyes. He approaches.

PAUL

Buenas noches. I heard about you
 from Marcel. A French reporter.

Poker-faced, Elena sizes him up. She steps aside to let him view the merchandise in the boot, illuminated by white Christmas lights:

Tinned food, cigarette cartons, a rack of wine bottles, assorted pistols. Dry sausages and loaves of bread hang in net sacks from the boot lid.

Paul admires the display. Checks the tins.

Elena produces a net bag. Paul hands her three tins, which she stows in the bag.

He selects a sausage. She adds it to the bag.

He takes a bottle from the rack, checks the label.

ELENA
Amontillado sherry. Hard to get.

PAUL
On this side, anyway.
(more)

He smiles, puts it back. He drops a packet of cigarettes in the bag. Inspects a sleek semi-automatic pistol.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I've not seen this one before.

ELENA
Astra Modelo Four Hundred. A good Spanish gun.

PAUL
I have a Webley.

ELENA
The Four-Fifty-Five?

PAUL
Yes.

ELENA
The bullets are hard to find here.
If you need more firepower, I know an arms dealer.

Paul returns the Astra to the boot.

PAUL
It's all right. I'm not joining the militia.

Elena flinches slightly. A bit close to the bone.

ELENA
I was in the militia. Last year.

PAUL
Which unit?

ELENA
The Durruti Column. Anarchist.
From Barcelona.

PAUL
What happened?

ELENA
I accept pounds, dollars, and
francs.

PAUL
How about rubles? Reichsmarks?

ELENA
What is it you really want??

PAUL
My name's Paul.

He offers his hand. She ignores it.

ELENA
Ten shillings, Paul.

PAUL
Highway robbery.

ELENA
The free market.

Paul pays her. She hands him the bag of groceries.

PAUL
You must know a lot of people.

ELENA
So?

PAUL
Maybe you know someone who wants to
talk. About the Republic.

ELENA
My customers are discreet.
(shuts the boot)
So am I.

She climbs in the driver's seat, starts the engine.

PAUL
There must be someone who wants to
get out of Madrid, but can't, for
whatever reason.

Elena's fingers drum on the steering wheel.

ELENA
It's dangerous enough already.