

As Time Goes By, John Mark Clubb and Jacqueline Audrean Robotham

AS TIME GOES BY

Prelude:

In 1942 I went to war on three fronts. The first was in the skies above Europe against the Germans in the final “war to end all wars”. The other two fronts were much more personal. I fought myself. One of the fronts was a battle against my attitudes and beliefs. The other one was in my heart. It was a war that weathered every part of me. It tested my very existence as a man, my courage, commitment and honor. I helped in the win against the Luftwaffe. Thankfully, I lost the personal battles. It was OK. Those losses enabled me to experience unconditional love for the very first time in my life.

It's August 2008. I'm 92 years old. It's a hot summer afternoon in Barbados and I smile as I watch my grandchildren play on the front lawn of my house. My children are around somewhere. I have two girls and two boys so there are quite a few voices to discern. My hearing isn't as good as it used to be but I still love the noisiness of a full house. I can hear their voices as they laugh and talk. It's a big house with enough rooms for all of our children and grandchildren. I'm very proud of how they have turned out. Compassionate and non-judgmental like their mothers and grandmother, I swell with pride as I tell my friends about their achievements. But it's the love that I feel that flows from all of them towards each other and the world that warms my old heart the most. I built the house when I moved here after World War II

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in the fall of 1945 with my wife Katherine. I enjoy providing for my family and spoiling them. Katherine laughs and calls me the benevolent king. She says she's the one that makes them eat their vegetables and do their lessons. I say it's a good division of duties. She knows how much I love them.

My name is Spencer Phipps III. My family and friends call me Spence. I'm one of the Virginia Phipps. My father made his fortune manufacturing everything from furniture to whiskey. Rumor has it that the family fortune began to grow when his father got started in the bootlegging and booze running business. I split it with my brother, Bradley, my sister, Victoria and my mother, Emily when he died. My share was more than enough to leave me in material comfort for the rest of my life. With some wise investments, I've made it grow to 10 times the size it was when I got it. I would rather have had his attention. When I was growing up he barely acknowledged me. It wasn't until I was an adult that I began to understand his emotional coldness and aloofness. I was afraid that I would be left in the cold when I told my parents that I was going to marry Katherine. It didn't matter. I knew I would figure out how to support us. My mother went ballistic when she found out that I was going to marry Katherine but my father intervened. My mother felt I was marrying beneath me. Katherine is from a working class family in Jamaica. She was black and poor. I am white and rich. Love doesn't care. I was never sure why my father took my side. I was surprised that he did until I was an adult and he chose to tell me the story of his own one true love.

Katherine and I moved here because we couldn't go back to Virginia. People would have made our lives miserable. My family didn't understand how I could fall in love with a black woman.

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At the time, neither did I. She's tall and still beautiful after all these years. Her dark expressive eyes light up when I walk into a room and I've jokingly told everyone that I want to see her million watt smile in my dimming vision as I leave this world. She still turns heads when she walks down the street. She has long dark hair and a lithe slender body. She has high cheekbones that women pay lots of money for. She has full lips that I have always enjoyed kissing. When she uses them on my body it drives me wild. She's small breasted with the fullness in her buttocks that only black women can pull off. Her hands have healed and held the dying. She knows exactly how to use them on me when she touches my body.

Men have always noticed her. She only sees me. She tells me I am her true north, her soul. She was a nurse during the war and I can't begin to imagine the horrors she has witnessed. She doesn't talk about her experiences while I was away fighting my part of the war. Every so often she will get a sad look on her face and a single tear will roll down her cheek. I know she is back there again, in the hospital slipping in blood on the floor and providing the last tender moments for a young man who will never see his sweetheart or parents again.

I'm tall and slim with strong features. I have a square jaw line and intense green eyes. Katherine says I'm the strongest and most stubborn yet gentlest man she's ever met. She tells me it's easy to love me and it's easy to hate me but I'm worth loving. I've been told more than once over the years what a handsome man I am. It only matters to me that I'm handsome to her. Life has come easy for me. I pride myself on being a southern gentleman at all times.

I have long piano fingers. I took lessons throughout my childhood and I used to entertain all of my friends whenever we were at a bar with a piano in the corner. Now my fingers are stiffer but

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I can still manage a tune once in awhile. Katherine's favorite song is "As Time Goes By". I play it more slowly these days but she still giggles like a school girl when I tap it out on our piano in the front room and sing it in my raspy voice. Katherine provides the beauty and the calmness for our marriage and relationship. It is in the act of giving that she has always made the world a more beautiful place for all of those around her. For a short time she toyed with the idea of becoming a nun. Luckily for all of us she decided against marrying the church and married me instead.

When I was growing up, my friends and I didn't talk about anything of substance in our conversations with each other. Arrogance was always commonplace. For people from my social status it's was all about achievements. It was about the chase; women, money, winning. I've had plenty of that in my life. Captain of my sports teams in high school and college, I've bedded the most desirable debutantes around. I was slated to marry one as soon as I returned home from the war. Her name was Laurel Ashley Whitmore. Laurel was the most desired debutante of them all but she had the emotional depth of a cocktail napkin. Her world was all about the next party and slashing her rivals to ribbons verbally. She was tall skinny, with dark hair and big blue eyes. Her incredible beauty was offset by her bottomless cruelty to those less fortunate than her. Laurel was from old money. She was the key to a social scene that I thought I wanted to belong to. It was widely assumed that we would end up together as man and wife. Laurel had no qualms about sex or who she had sex with. She was one of those passionless girls that just laid there and let me do whatever I wanted to her. I was expected to finish as soon as her desires were met. There was nothing else about sex she enjoyed. She knew about the black girls I visited and

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didn't care. I knew that when we were married the sex would stop and I could pursue my pleasures in other places as long as I gave her children and never embarrassed her in front of her old moneyed friends. Her demeanor in bed was the same as her attitude towards the world. She expected to receive and not give anything in return. Laurel and I hung out in the same crowd, went to dances and cotillions together and were regular bed partners.

I've succeeded at everything I've tried. Failure was never an option. I went to war because I was bored. My father did everything he could to keep me out of combat, but I insisted on volunteering. We had a terrible fight the night that I told him of my plans. Now that I'm a father I can understand why he was so angry. He was frightened out of his mind for my safety. It was the most emotion I'd ever seen him exhibit towards me and for me. The rest of my life he was cold and distant until I told him I was marrying Katherine. That's when the shell of emotional ice finally started to melt. I was expected to live up to the family name and social standing. I hated it and felt dead inside. War brought my emotions and feelings to life. Meeting Katherine brought me my love.

In 1921 I was born in the racist south to an extremely rich family. Our money was brought from ill gain. The old money people knew it so we always had a slight stench as far as they were concerned. The only black people we had around us were the servants that we barely acknowledged except when we were being waited on. That doesn't mean I didn't have my favorite. Ella was a cook in our house. Because of my parents' emotional coldness, she was a magnet to the metal of my hunger for warmth. Her skin was very dark. She was tall and had a regal air about her. She never forgot her place. I would sit in the kitchen as she cooked those

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delicious southern meals for my family. Fried chicken, biscuits and gravy would magically appear out her pots and pans as she told me stories of her family. First she would talk about them as slaves and then how they struggled to adapt to their freedom while fighting discrimination at every turn in their lives. I felt human when I was around her and would feel guilty about the way she was treated after anyone white would appear. Then I would revert to form. She would look at me with sad eyes and an even sadder smile and say, “now run along Mr. Spencer, I gots things to cook”. I spent most of my boyhood sitting with her in our kitchen talking about my hopes and dreams and asking her questions about life. Her simple ways of looking at the problems of life were refreshing to me. From the most complicated issues came one sentence solutions. In my immaturity and lack of emotional courage, I never realized how much I hurt my one true ally in my life.

Then suddenly one day she wasn't there. She disappeared without saying goodbye. I was crushed and withdrew into a shell I didn't come out of for many years. After I built the house in Barbados, my father came to visit. He finally explained Ella's abrupt disappearance to me. Out of each of my parents I always thought he was the bigger racist. He would describe our female servants in the coarsest of terms when I would listen to him talk to his rich friends in our library when he thought no one was listening. But then he showed me his human side. He told me he admired the courage I showed in following my own heart. He explained to me that Ella, our cook, was his own one true love. He could never muster the nerve to leave my emotionally cold mother to live with the woman he really loved. Ella left because she didn't want to break up our family. She knew that their love would mean the end to my father's life as he knew it and she

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didn't think he would be able to handle that kind of change. My father begged her to stay and paid for her house so that she could live comfortably for the rest of her life. He told me he regretted that choice and broke down and sobbed when he talked about it. It made more sense when my mother's over the top reaction came at me so suddenly and violently. I realized she knew about Ella and my father. I suppose she thought she was losing her son to another black woman too. She threatened to disown me from the family fortune if I didn't throw Katherine away. I threw her away once. I was determined to never make the same mistake again.

I wasn't born during the First World War. I heard stories from the old timers and listened to the friends of my father talk about the horrors of fighting. They told me about the smells of the dead and dying and the screams of the wounded as they were gassed by the Germans. They talked about the rats that appeared from seemingly out of nowhere and how they had to cover every piece of exposed flesh so that they wouldn't awaken being literally eaten alive. The rats brought the plague and made death even more horrible to watch as the sick turned black and the infected died in extreme pain. I listened with the ignorance of youth and didn't think it could be anywhere as bad as they made it seem.

Since I was bored with my life, my family and friends, I decided to join the fledgling Army Air Corp. I would seek my adventures over the lush green fields of England and Western Europe defending the bombers making their daily runs deep into German territory against the Luftwaffe and their Messerschmitts. Because of my family's pull I was accepted into flight school and because of my upbringing graduated number one in my class. Because of class standing I got to choose which type of airplane I wanted to fly. Naturally, I chose the newest and best fighter; the

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P-40 Thunderbolt. I found out I was to be based at Stansted Air Base just outside London. The other big base was Luton but Stansted was where all the fighters were located.

The P-40 Thunderbolt was the newest fighter in the Army Air Corps inventory and coveted by all of the pilots in my flight training class. The British pilots were flying the Spitfire. They were battling for their very existence and country. The aerial battle over Britain was among the greatest in the history of aviation. I admired the British pilots and the fierceness with which they fought. I wondered if I would defend my country in the same way if the fight ever came to the shores of my home. They appreciated my dry southern sense of humor and quickly adopted me as one of their “mates”. I knew I didn’t want to face the dangers the crews of the B-17’s dealt with on a daily basis. The casualty rates among those aircrews were horrendous. They were losing up to a quarter of their aircrews on every single mission. The Army Air Corps stupidly decided to conduct daytime bombing raids into Germany leaving those stately 4 engine plodding behemoths sitting ducks for the German Luftwaffe and anti-aircraft emplacements awaiting their arrival into hostile airspace above the enemy. I was comfortable only having to escort them so far. Our gas tanks wouldn’t allow us to follow them for their entire missions. We would drop them off and pick them up again when we knew they were coming home. I was amazed at the damage they could sustain and continue to fly. More than once we would have to shoot down an aggressive German pilot who had followed the bombers too far looking to pick off a crippled B-17 that was unable to keep up.

The trip over on the troop transport was the most bored I’ve ever been. It was day after day of tedium with moments of sheer terror if anyone thought they saw a periscope sticking out of the

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water. The Germans were decimating the shipping going between the US and England with their U-boats. I shudder to think of the terror the U boat crews must have been feeling. Their casualty rate was even higher than the aircrews. The war wasn't going well at all for us in the beginning. We were being pushed back on every front and the Germans were getting the upper hand. The English desperately needed all the help they could get and I thought I could singlehandedly help them win the war. Eventually our troop ship pulled into the port of Southampton and I got my first real look at England. It was the first time I had ever been out of my home state let alone my country and the sights and smells of a new exotic locale permeated all of my senses.

I wandered the streets of London in those first few days taking in the smell of fish and chips frying in the same grease that my Ella had cooked my country breakfasts in. I had my first taste of warm English beer and got drunk and threw up in a narrow alley along the byways of the quaint European streets. I made the mistake of accidently knocking over a bucket of water that a young girl, Tilla, was using to mop the floors of a bar that I frequented. My friends and I would give her a few coins to dance and sing for us. I could barely understand her cockney accent but I recognized "bloody" and "yank. It would have been funny if she hadn't been screaming at me for messing up her floor. I was surprised that such loud noises were coming out of such a small woman. England had a different smell to it than back home. It was gray and raining many days. It had the same lush countryside of the hills back home in Virginia. It reminded me of there when I would I travel by train from London to my base. There was a grittiness to London that I wasn't used to. Washington DC and New York were the only other places I'd been. I guess it

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made sense comparing the ages of the cities in America to the towns in England. There were farm fences in Britain older than the U.S.

King George IV, the King of England, at the time made sure that all of the American Officers had apartments in Kensington to live in when we weren't flying our missions. It was a nice reprieve from the war that our enlisted men didn't get a chance to experience. They lived in Quonset huts and in tents adjacent to the airfield itself. On one of the weekends I was in town, I headed towards the local USO in Picadilly Circus to see about dancing with some of the girls that hung around looking for their future husbands. I was new to the Tube system since we didn't have subways back home in Virginia. I got on it going in the wrong direction and when I realized my mistake, jumped off at the Willesden Greene stop. It was the luckiest mistake of my life. That's when I saw Katherine for the first time. She was standing on a street corner in her nursing student's uniform. She looked around 19, only a couple of years younger than me. I knew she didn't see me but I couldn't take my eyes off of her. Tall with straight brown hair, she was unlike the coarse black girls of my hometown. There was something exotic about her. All I could wonder when I saw her mouth is what it might taste and feel like. She turned as if she knew I was looking at her. I quickly looked away so she wouldn't see me staring. As she walked away I knew I couldn't let her go so I followed her to the Central Middlesex Hospital. The area looked completely unfamiliar to me. I stayed a respectful block and a half behind her so she wouldn't be afraid. Twice on her walk she turned around as if she knew she was being followed. I would quickly pretend to be window shopping.

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As I saw her approach the front entrance of the hospital I knew that unless I did something drastic I may not ever see her again. I felt like a school boy on a playground trying to get the cute girls attention by pulling on her pigtails. I hurried to close the gap between us and bumped gently into her. As she stumbled, I grabbed her arm and before I could apologize profusely for my clumsiness, she looked at me and in a soft British accent said, "Are you alright"?

I could only stand there open mouthed staring into her gentle brown eyes. I stammered, "I am and I apologize for bumping into you". I introduced myself in my most charming southern accent. I had to ask her for her name. She hesitated before telling me her name. "I'm Katherine Robotham. It's my pleasure to meet you sir". I asked her if she lived around the hospital. She said, "Yes". When I asked her if that was where her family lived too, she got tears in her eyes. She said, "No sir I'm one of the Jamaican immigrants who came to England to work". I apologized again and she said, "No worries love". She could tell I wanted to say something else so she lingered and waited. I blurted out, "I'm new in town and would you like to get a cup of coffee"? She laughed and said, "I'd rather have a nice cup of tea if you don't mind but that would be lovely". I asked her what time she was available and we made plans to meet at the same spot when she was finished with her work for the day.

I was infatuated and walked around on a cloud for the rest of the day but after awhile, the niggling thoughts started to creep into my head. My friends and I would go across the tracks late on Friday and Saturday nights after drinking to partake in the forbidden fruits of the dark skinned girls we would find waiting for us. We thought it was dangerous and exciting to go to the black part of town. We would have sex with the long limbed girls with their eager pink tongues and the

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passion that our proper white girlfriends wouldn't give us. We would pay them visits at the "Red Garter", where blues riffs and jazz notes were straining to be free in the hot summer air and there were rooms upstairs. After we finished using them we would pretend that they didn't even exist when we passed them on the sidewalks of the town where we lived.

But as I walked back to my apartment, I argued "this was different". It wasn't the same as my town in the south where everyone knew their place and stayed there. But my own prejudices started to intrude more and more on my thoughts and I went back to my apartment to think for the rest of the day. I knew I couldn't tell any of my friends what I was doing. They wouldn't understand and I would have to face their ridicule. I would have to make sure I was never seen by anyone who mattered if I was with Katherine.

I spent the rest of the afternoon struggling with my thoughts and emotions about meeting Katherine again. I almost stood her up but something told me I had to go regardless of what the voices were telling me. I was standing outside the hospital at the appointed time when she walked out of the door. I was once again taken with her presence and the soft spoken gentleness in the way she treated everyone around her from the flower girls selling their wares on the streets to the beggars asking for spare change. She had a kind word and a smile for everyone. As we walked and talked, she told me of her family on the island of Jamaica and how much she missed them but how important she felt her work was as part of the war effort. I asked her so many questions about her schooling and her experiences with Yanks that she laughed and said, "You certainly are a curious lot, aren't you"? I was already beginning to have feelings that I didn't want to admit to myself.

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I put on all of my southern charm for her not sure what I was wanting but knowing I wanted to be around her. As the afternoon stretched into night, I continued to ask her questions. After a few hours of this, she put her hand on my arm and said, “You’re quite an inquisitive fellow aren’t you”? I brushed it off as just the way we southerners get to know each other. But that touch sent an electric current straight to my heart. I was completely smitten. I wanted to see her again. I was getting combat training from the “old hands” during the week and coming to my apartment on the weekends. I practically begged her to see me again the following weekend. She thought for a moment and with some reluctance told me she would. We would have the whole day together since she was off from her nursing student duties.

As I fell asleep that night, I thought about her dark skin and brilliant smile. My passions were aroused along with my body and as I lay there slowly touching myself, I imagined her naked in bed underneath me with my body on hers bringing her to ecstasy. The other girls I used purely for physical purposes. With Katherine my imaginings were different. I could see her in her entirety as a person. As I wondered what her body looked like under her nursing uniform I also thought of her kindness and compassion. It was a new experience for me. The following week I could barely contain my excitement over seeing her again. I halfway heard the lessons that were being imparted to me in hopes of keeping me alive when I finally met the enemy over France. The following Saturday I met her in her neighborhood. I told her it would be easier if I came to her instead of her coming to me.

The day finally came when I could see her again and as we walked London we ignored the stares of people who saw us together. I opened up more about where I was from and glossed over the

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reality of my world. We talked about everything but as we walked I kept watch for any of my fellow officers that might see me. We began to meet on a weekly basis. I finally talked her into showing me where she lived with her flat mate who was also a nursing student. It was safe because Willesden Greene was a mixed neighborhood of working Irish and blacks and I felt more accepted there with Katherine. I knew none of my friends would be interested in going to that part of town. My life consisted of training, lying to my fellow officers about where I was going on the weekends and spending time with Katherine. I was conflicted every minute of the day. I was having the time of my life. The time came for me to start flying combat missions. The first flight was an early morning brief and departure. For my first time in combat, the veterans were doing their best to make me feel better by joking around but I was still petrified of finding death on a cloud somewhere out there. As I manned up to go meet our lambs to the slaughter, I was scared out of my mind. My initial false bravado was laughing at me now. As we took off in our flights, and I could concentrate on the task at hand, my mind cleared. I heard Katherine's voice in my head saying, "today you will be alright". It helped to calm me and we flew to the rendezvous point for our escort. Radio chatter was at a minimum. The German's knew we were coming. It was no big secret to anyone the direction the bombers would fly and my stomach was in my throat. We sat on our perch waiting for the Germans to come up like wolves into a herd of sheep. They were angry hornets with steel for stingers. I watched the first wave of Messerschmitts rise up to meet the B-17's. Death was almost instantaneous as the first bomber took machine gun bullets along its entire fuselage. I watched with detached fascination as the cockpit turned red as the bodies of the pilots exploded with the violence that only machine

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gun fire can bring. The airplane looked as if it was flying in slow motion as it unhurriedly turned upside down and started the slow descent to its final resting place in the French countryside. At that point fury overtook my fear and I began looking for enemy airplanes. I did a “split S” flipping my airplane upside down and dove into the killing air. With great satisfaction I watched as my own machine guns removed half the wing of a German fighter and it exploded in flight. I had just scored my first kill. As I moved through the German attackers, I became a killing machine, as if I was born to it. I felt invincible and free. When we finally ran out of bullets and gas, I flew back to the field and landed. Upon exiting the cockpit and jumping off the wing is when my legs gave out. The shaking started and I threw up next to the main gear wheel. The enormity of what I had just done hit me hard. I had taken lives. My squadron commanding officer gave me the afternoon off and later that night I got drunker than I had ever been before. It felt dark and oppressive and I began to understand what my father’s friends were getting at as they tried to warn me off from my great adventure.

The following weekend Katherine noticed that I was much more serious and quiet. She commented on it. I told her about my experiences. She simply took my hand in hers. She was thoughtful and I saw a decision flicker across her face. After our dinner, she took me back to her flat. She told me her roommate was working that night in the hospital. The implications were obvious. As she unlocked the door her hands were shaking. We entered her small flat with its two twin beds and stood in the dark with the moonlight streaming through the windows. Her skin glowed in the reflected light and I could barely see her face. I kissed her for the first time and as we kissed, the passion started to build.

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She slowly began to undress me. After I was completely naked she gently pushed me onto my back so that I could watch her take her clothes off. When she lay down next to me I could feel her body trembling. I turned her onto her stomach and ran my tongue up and down her spine. She shivered. I then turned her over so that she was lying on her back and I began to lick and kiss her womanhood which was clean shaven and bright pink. As her breathing became more and more ragged, her thighs became completely relaxed. I had been given full access without fear or hesitation. I knew that I could never be rough or impatient with her. I wanted to provide her with as much pleasure as I knew that she wanted to give me. I maintained an even pressure and rhythm and entered her deeper and deeper with my tongue. I brought her to orgasm and her screams were so wild and loud with pleasure, I was sure my old friend Bubba back home could hear them. At this point I wanted to be inside her so I covered her body with mine and rubbed myself against her so I would be nice and wet. As I entered her, she cried out in pain. That's when I realized that this was the first time for her. As her comfort level rose with me being inside her body she began to move faster and faster against me. She cried out once again in pleasure this time as my own passion was spent. She held me tighter wanting to feel every inch of my body.

We lay in each other's arms, me still inside of her until we fell asleep. I knew this is where I always wanted to be. Katherine knew it as well. We were complete. I felt like I was home. The next morning as she made me coffee and herself tea, we shyly talked to each other about our feelings. She laughed and told me I was the perfect size for her when I asked her if I had hurt her. She told me I was amazingly strong and gentle at the same time. Neither of us spoke of the

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future. After breakfast I returned to the base. I was beginning to work almost every day as the bombing runs increased. We were losing more and more of our aircrew and very rarely did any of them make it to the magic mission number of 25 when they could go home. I was already an ace and my number of enemy fighters shot down was steadily increasing. As the intensity of my life rose my desire for Katherine heated up. On some of the weekends that her flat mate was home I would rent a hotel room claiming my apartment wasn't available. I would be waiting for her when she got to my room and I would make her get undressed in front of me and be completely naked while I stayed dressed. Then I would wait for her to kneel in front of me and remove only my maleness from my pants and sit on top of me like that. I would need the release that the terror of combat produced in me before I could make love to her. Sometimes I wouldn't even wait for her to cross the room before I had her bent over a chair and was inside her. She understood what I needed as man. But always after, our lovemaking was gentle and passionate. One afternoon, as I was relaxing and getting ready for my next day's mission, one of my fellow pilots came to me and said, "Spence there's a black girl at the gate who says she knows you and would like to say hello before you go flying". I didn't hesitate before replying, "She's just some whore looking for money. Give her a few shillings and send her away". The realization of what I'd just done hit me like a sledgehammer between the eyes. All of the laughter, the conversations I'd had with Katherine came rushing back. I could see her big sad eyes and I wanted to throw up in my shame. When my friend came back he told me something that made me feel even worse. He said, "Spence, when I tried to give her the money she refused it. She looked like I had just slapped her and called her a nigger. You sure you didn't know her? I

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denied it again". Once again he pushed it, "She seemed like you two knew each other". At that point I exploded and screamed, "I don't know her"! The reality of the world I came from hit me full on like a freight train and I decided in that moment to die. My buddy told me that as she turned away she said one sentence, "Spence, I will always love you".

I told the duty officer I wanted to take the next escort flight out that I could. He looked at me and saw the wild look in my eyes. He told me to man up. There was a flight going out in the next wave. As my airplane left the earth I felt an impending sense of dread. I didn't know if what I had done was making me feel that way or if it was what I was about to face. I shook it off and started to focus on the mission at hand. We met wave after wave of Messerschmitts and I knew it would be bad. As I mixed it up with the enemy, I began to chase an airplane that looked like it had already suffered battle damage. Suddenly I felt pain from every part of my body. I was chasing a decoy and stupidly hadn't looked at my 6 o'clock position. I left myself open to attack. The other pilot's shells ripped into my airplane tearing holes into it and me. It took everything I had not to scream from the pain and the fury of being attacked. I expected the other pilot to return for the kill but it never happened. My vision began to blur and I knew I was going to lose consciousness at any minute, then crash and die. At that point I would have welcomed death as a break from the pain my body was feeling because it hurt so badly. Then I heard Katherine's voice, "Spencer, wake up and fly home". It was as if I was on autopilot and she was at the controls. I turned my trusty air steed towards the coast of France and then on to England. I had no illusions about making it there but I was following her voice and her orders to me. Each time I began to nod off her voice would speak in my head, "Spencer wake up darling,

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wake up”. As I struggled to stay conscious and airborne, my flight controls were sluggish. I was having difficulty keeping my airplane from flipping upside down and in level flight. I could feel blood pooling in my flight boots and running down the side of my head. I wondered just how many holes I had in me. Each time I would get distracted, Katherine would say, “Spencer, pay attention to what you are doing.” My concentration would return to the task at hand and I would start flying my plane again. After what seemed like hours, I finally saw the white cliffs of Dover in my windshield and flew the prescribed course to where I knew my airfield was. As I got closer, I called the airfield on my radio and used the code word for seriously wounded airman so that the ambulances would be waiting for me.

As I approached my airfield I was hoping my landing gear and flaps would extend so that I could touch down normally. A crash landing was dangerous. I’d seen other’s try it and have their airplanes explode before they could get out. As I prepared for landing, I heard Katherine’s voice continually coaching me through what I needed to do. “Spencer, watch your airspeed now, keep your nose attitude a little higher. You’re starting to lose altitude. It’s time to lower your landing gear and flaps. Get ready to flare.” The funny thing was that Katherine had no idea about what I did or how I did it.

As I touched down and rolled to a stop I could see the ambulances racing to meet me. When the crews ran to get me out of my airplane I noticed their mouths hanging open. They were nudging each other and pointing in my direction. My airplane was almost destroyed. Most of the tail was gone and there was gas leaking out of the wings where hot shells had made holes as big as

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my fist. One of the ailerons was missing off the trailing edge of the wing which meant I should not have been able to turn the airplane.

That's the last thing I remember before waking up in the hospital. They tell me I drifted in and out of consciousness for weeks. They said I almost died from blood loss and shock. While I was out, I remember wandering around in the darkness and emptiness. In my coma, I saw Katherine standing there. She was in a simple dress with her hair tied behind her head. She looked radiant and beautiful. She had a light around her that looked ethereal. I asked her what she was doing there. I told her I was tired and wanted to die. She looked at me and with that soft British accent said, "I came to make sure you go back. You have to return my darling, you have work to do. It's not time yet". I continued to drift in and out of the world for three more weeks. Each time that I would wake for the few minutes that I was back, I could see someone in a nurses' uniform sitting next to my bed. She had dark skin but I couldn't see well enough to see her features. I wondered if it was Katherine but couldn't stay long enough to find out.

Then finally I woke up. They told me I was in the same hospital that Katherine worked in. I was hoping to see her standing there even though I didn't want to admit it. I was surprised when I saw Laurel sitting there instead. When I asked her what she was doing in England, she told me news of my injuries had made it back to Virginia and at great cost and even more string pulling, my father had gotten her a plane ticket. It shocked me since airplane seats were hard to come by and the government had declared England off limits for normal civilians. My father must have called in some serious favors in order to make it happen. Laurel was more concerned with my

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money potential than with me. Before the war I was OK with a marriage to Laurel. But then I met Katherine.

Laurel feigned concern for me and continually made a fuss. I was miserable. She would arrive as early as she could in the morning and stay until the last possible minute at night hovering over me and watching everyone like a hawk who had any interaction with me. In my previous life, I would not even have noticed. Now it seemed shallow, fake and distasteful to me.

I would watch in the hallway to see if Katherine walked by. I never saw her. After a few days, Laurel began to get bored with her duties as my personal guard and nurse. She began to make noises about returning to Virginia and her life there.

And then one morning as I lay there thinking about my future, I heard a soft voice say, “Are you alright”? I looked up and saw Katherine. All the shame and embarrassment in my denial of her the day that I sent her away came rushing back in an instant. My face became enflamed and I blurted out, “I’m OK. Nothing major”. And then I realized how stupid I sounded. I looked at her for a long time and saw the hurt reflected back even though the smile never left her face.

Then all the thinking I’d been doing about what I really wanted out of life suddenly jelled for me. Tears began to flow and I could barely get out an apology. I said, “please forgive me, I will never deny you again”. As soon as I spoke the words, the door to my room flew open and Laurel came in like a southern tornado almost pushing Katherine aside in her haste to make her way to my bed. But then she stopped and looked at me looking at Katherine before she slowly turned and finally saw her too. Reality flashed across her face.

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I looked at Laurel and said, “I’d like to introduce you to the love of my life”. Her mouth dropped open. Her face turned red. I swear I could see smoke coming out of her ears. She looked like she was about to blow a gasket or her head was going to begin to spin. She immediately turned vicious with racial slurs and venom pouring from her mouth. Katherine stood there and quietly listened as she was called a whore, a maid and worse. Her dignity and grace under that kind of attack was impressive to watch. After Laurel stormed out of the room, she looked at me and said, “Well I guess that pretty much is that”. There was nothing else I could do but laugh and even though it hurt like hell I laughed until tears of joy began to stream down my face.

When I was finally finished, Katherine looked at me and said, “We have to have a serious talk you and I. You don’t know what you are getting yourself into and what the world will do to us. I love you but I can’t see your happiness compromised with the hate you will receive for loving me. You have a chance to make things right with Laurel. I will go away so you can be happy”. She told me that she was crushed by my actions that day when I sent her away in embarrassment but then she said something quite remarkable to me. She looked at me and said, “I know why you did that and I forgave you for it that day”. The tears of shame began to fall again and she walked to my bed so she could kiss them off my face.

After looking at me for quite awhile she asked me what happened the day I was wounded. As I told her exactly what I remembered, her mouth fell open and I asked her, “why”? Her mouth moved up and down without any sounds coming out for a minute and then she told me that the moment I got hurt she could feel it. She was terrified without good reason and felt actual

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physical pain in the same places that I was shot and torn by shrapnel. She said, “I kept saying, Spencer, wake up wake up not knowing why I was doing it. When they told me you were here, I spent every moment of free time next to your bed until they made me go home. When Laurel showed up I wanted to give you the opportunity to love each other”.

I was dumbfounded by the generosity and the unconditional love in those words. I looked at her and said, “I’ve denied you in too many ways”. I will never do it again. We will work it out. I love you”.

Postscript

My name is Giovanni. I am a writer like my father. He told me this story but never got a chance to write it down. The night after he told it to me he went to sleep and never woke up. He was next to his beloved Katherine until the end. She died of a broken heart shortly after. The doctors say there is no such thing. I know better. When she woke up and realized he was gone, she came downstairs to let us know. She moved through the process of burying him with no emotion. She barely ate or drank anything despite our urgings to keep her health up. She would just look at us with dead eyes. Her face held a depth of despair that had no bottom. We understood. After the war my father became a writer. She was his muse. He wrote great love stories for the rest of his life based on their interactions with the world and their many adventures. Their love story he never got a chance to complete. He was too busy living it every day. They were “gemelo del alma”. It means “soul twins”. She was the soft to his harsh. She was the tender underbelly to his prickly spines. She was the smoothing sandpaper to his hard edges. Without each other they were half of who they could be. There was no way she could exist in a world without him in it.

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I know they are together again, both young, walking the streets of London holding hands, talking and laughing about the love they share for each other and the ones they love. I read once that the only pain you take to the other side is the love you don't share. They spent a lifetime loving each other and sharing it with everyone around them.

You must remember this, a kiss is still a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh.

The fundamental things apply, as time goes by.

And when two lovers rule, they still say I love you on that you can rely.

No matter what the future brings, as time goes by.

Old fashioned love songs, never out of date, hearts full of passion jealousy and hate.

Woman needs man and man must have his mate that no one can deny.

It's still the same old story, the fight for love and glory, a case of do or die.

The world will always welcome lovers as time goes by.

As time goes by.....