

Spitfire



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Spitfire was the name of a World War II British fighter plane: streamlined, dainty as hell, but packing four 50-caliber machine guns and a cannon. Spitfire was also the name of a beautiful 20-year-old British woman test pilot, also streamlined, dainty as all hell, but packing flaming red hair and a body to match.

The time: May 1944

The place: Aldermaston Air Base, England

The occasion: World War II

I was a green Second Lieutenant, training with the Paratroops, who would land behind enemy lines in Normandy, France. D-Day, June 6, 1944, was but a month away. Across the field was a factory which built Spitfire fighters. Each day I would see a Spitfire being tested or “wrung-out,” 25, 000 feet up. Loops, rolls, chandelles, and lazy-eights were performed, followed by a full power, straight down dive, then a pull out and a swooping dip to a gentle landing.

One morning I could not stand it any longer. I commandeered a Jeep and drove across the tarmac as the Spit taxied in and came to a stop. I wanted to meet the test pilot. The pilot cut the engine and the prop stopped whirling. I was not prepared for what happened next.

The pilot slid back the canopy, pulled off the helmet and a waterfall of flaming red hair fell to her shoulders. The *he* was a *she*.

“Hello,” I said. She nodded and smiled. I immediately stepped into the batter’s box. “Will you join me for a drink?” She looked me up and down, sizing me up. She must have liked what she saw, because she said: “I’d be delighted.”

So began a torrid love affair that took us to London and Scotland for out-of-this world weekends—and a lot more. Suffice it to say that we spent every minute, and I mean every available minute together. We went to London. We had high tea at the Hampshire House, cocktails at the Regent Palace. We kissed at every opportunity, especially during the blackouts when enemy bombers grumbled overhead.

She kidded me about our respective ranks. I was nothing but a Second Lieutenant, while she was Royal Air Force Flying Officer. She definitely out-ranked me. She would lean across the table over a martini, eyes slightly closed in that quiet but super-charged sexuality that women get when they *want* you, and she’d say: “Win, I’m giving you a direct order. Let’s go to bed.”

You would be surprised at the alacrity with which I responded, for she was a natural red head.

We were both in another zone, where there was no war, only pure delight.

One day she said to me: “Let’s fly to Scotland.”

“But your Spit can’t take two people.”

“Oh yes it can, darling.”

“How?”

“I had the armor plating behind the pilots seat removed, and a small jump seat installed.”

And so it came to pass that we flew to Edinburgh, Scotland, me jammed into the jump-seat behind her, barely able to move. But I could move a little, and when I leaned over and kissed her neck, she would waggle the wings.

We stayed in a Medieval Castle in Scotland, and after our lovemaking, we would lie in bed in the twilight listening to the skirl of the bagpipes as the castle guard changed shifts.

Then one lazy May afternoon, she took off to test a new Spitfire. I ambled across the field to wait for her. She did several loops, tight turns, spins and lazy eights; then came the finale, the power dive from 25,000 feet, straight down. And down...and down...and down. At 5,000 feet she was still in a steep dive. I jumped to my feet. At 2000 feet the wings tore off. “Bail out! Bail out! Bail out!” I screamed. The Spitfire smashed into the ground and exploded. There was no parachute.....only a funeral pyre of thick black smoke.

Epilogue

I could say to you that I somehow managed to move on with my life. And, I'd be right. And, I'd be wrong. Because recently, I went to an air show of World War II aircraft at Long Beach, California; there, high up, doing stalls, spins, chandelles, and lazy-eights was a 1944 Spitfire. The Spitfire touched down daintily, taxied up to the tarmac, and stopped. A hand slid the canopy back. And in my mind's eye, I saw again, amid the smoldering embers of my long-lost youth, *my* Spitfire.



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