

Three pictures, from my mind's eye. Three, like in a fairy-tale, but *hélas*, this is not, *vraiment*, a fairy tale.

First, we see a young woman, in a big, roofless house outside Albacete, south of Madrid. She nearly disappears in a vast great-coat. She is sorting medical supplies for the brave volunteers of the International Brigades, fighting for Republican Spain. I am freezing, but full of joy, inspired like my comrades by the ideals of communism: freedom, equality and brotherhood.

I was born in Paris in 1913. My mother was Catholic, right-wing; my father helped found the French Communist Party. I chose his house, and sat at the feet of passionate revolutionaries. I married Vitali, much older, and followed him to Spain, interrupting my studies in Pharmacy. In Spain we were hardly together – our short marriage was more politics than love – and I had a passionate affair with a beautiful Spanish doctor, whom I never saw again. Love and War. The International Brigades left Spain in 1938, betrayed from without and within. Franco's friends the Germans destroyed Guernica, and the Republic. Such hopes, such sacrifice.

In the second picture, the same young woman, around 30 now, is climbing through dark pine trees, guided by moonlight. Suddenly she dives into a hiding place, one of three she has prepared up here in the *Pyrénées*. Night after night she will climb with food for the beautiful young man, 18 years old, whose arms now enfold her. Love and War. I am the young woman, running my small pharmacy in Font Remeu, tiny mountain resort, and he is Pierre Tenenbaum. The Gestapo had arrested his father, who was never seen again. But I help 'mon Peter' (as I call him) to survive, the Nazis are beaten, and for us begins *le grand amour*. The fairy tale. I vow always to keep young, and beautiful, for Peter.

We marry. Our daughter Clarisse is born in 1947. Life is good in the small community. Peter studies and becomes a lawyer. We remain true to our beliefs, in a better world still. Paris beckons, for Peter's work, and Clarisse's schooling. It is 1956.

In the third picture, an elegant middle-aged woman, blond now, chic white cocktail dress, is laughing as she is chased around a table by portly Councillor Evans from Birkenhead! French hosts and English guests laugh too: 'These English, and our French wine!' I am a Municipal Councillor in our suburb of Gennevilliers, where I also run my pharmacy; we live opposite. An old revolutionary comrade, now the Mayor, persuaded me to serve, and put me in charge of our twinning with small towns in England, Italy, Poland ... It is a job that fits me like a glove: international friendship, languages, travel, food and wine. Peter helps me. I am heart-broken when I am 'voted out' after 20 years. *La politique*. I feel betrayed. I have known betrayal – in Spain, in Font Remeu with its spies, but this is subtle, and they were friends ...

I draw a line. But I am older. The world is not as I hoped. But I can work on my body, and my face, to stay young. I know he loves me ... still. Clarisse takes over the pharmacy. I don the white coat to help, but I can tell she does not want me. I continue my languages: English, Italian, Russian; we travel, see films, see friends – often vibrant younger women from abroad who give me life. I see myself in them. Not in Clarisse. She and Peter are close. I know I have not been a mother. At her 50<sup>th</sup> party, I think 'I shall be 85'.

The mist gathers. I feel Peter does not want me. I despair at the state of the world. I try to take my life ... and then ... the last five years in our sunny flat by the sea Peter cares for me, feeds me, as I fed him, oh so long ago. He says that is why. *C'était le grand amour*. He will not put me in a home, even though I am often *pénible*. Clarisse visits. We have nothing to say. Then ... she begins to hum ... (hums) and we sing together, the *Internationale*. *Camarades*, at last. *L'amour*. Oh mon Peter. I accept.

**Jacqueline Tenenbaum 1913 – 2005**

**Alison Skilbeck**