

Opening extract from
Paper Dreams

Written by
Phyllis Burton

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PAPER DREAMS



THE PROLOGUE

September 1952

*What is life? A frenzy.
What is life? An illusion, a shadow, a fiction
And the greatest good is of slight worth
As all life is a dream
And dreams are dreams...*
(Pedro Calderon de la Barca – 1600-1681)

* * *

Gerald Hapsworth-Cole's heart lurched as the huge ship's siren reminded him that Amy's departure was imminent. 'How can I let her go?' he asked himself. But deep down, he knew that there was nothing he could do or say that would make her change her mind, but he had to try. Feeling frantic, he reached out to embrace the woman standing by his side.

'Amy, my dearest Amy, what am I going to do now? I love you so much and I just can't envisage a life without you.'

'Gerald honey, it's no use, can't you see? I have to go home to Vancouver. We've been over everything again and again. What choice do we have?'

He looked blankly at her, momentarily lost for words. The inevitability of it all made him feel impotent. He searched her face for hope, but there was none, except for the gathering of tears in the corners of her eyes that threatened to engulf her.

Amy Butler was making the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of his family.

A lump appeared in his throat making it difficult for him to speak. 'My darling Amy,' he said in sheer desperation, 'I can't...I just can't believe what I've...I've done to you and how can I possibly let you go now?' He hadn't felt quite so emotional since the day his father had died and coupled with the fact that she now looked more beautiful than ever, made the moment of her departure even more poignant. She looked pale and fragile, just like a porcelain doll and he tightened his grip on her.

'My dearest, you must know that we really have no choice,' she said as unrestrained tears now rolled down her cheeks. 'Just think what would happen if your wife and sons found out about us: it would destroy them all. You must see that it is all...so impossible. I will def...'

A loudspeaker cruelly interrupted their final moments together and obliterated what she was saying. The preparations for the huge liner to get under way had been completed. There was an air of excited tension as people began to walk up the ramp and on to the ship that would be taking them across the Atlantic and away from their families and friends.

'Honey, I'll be waving my yellow handkerchief so look out for it and I promise that I will write to you as soon as I reach home.'

'But Amy, it's not too late to work something out.'

'No Gerald, there really is nothing else we can do, can't you see? I have to go. Goodbye my dearest,' she said kissing him on the lips. 'Always remember, even in your deepest and darkest moments, that I love you and that will be the link between us.'

She broke away from him...and was gone.

Gerald was left with an empty void between his arms, loving Amy, wanting her, his whole being crying out for her. He had to stop himself from running after her, but even as his heart cried out in pain, he knew that he had to let her go. He watched her in sorrowful silence as she ran up the gangway before disappearing from his view. After what seemed an age, the huge liner pulled away from the quayside. Panic began to overtake him as he frantically searched for Amy amongst the passengers leaning over the ship's railings. Then he saw her. She was waving her yellow handkerchief and he waved back putting on a brave face, but inside his heart was breaking. He watched the vessel as it gradually pointed itself in the direction of the open sea. "Come back...come back...please come back," he wailed inwardly but he knew it was useless: his beloved Amy had gone.

He continued to watch as the ship grew smaller and smaller until finally he saw a faint plume of smoke drifting into the sky, before the ship disappeared over the horizon.

He looked upwards. The sky was leaden and everything and everyone around him seemed as miserable as he was. The puddles under his feet were a testament to the fact that it had been raining hard for some time and he hadn't even noticed. He pulled up his coat collar and shoved his hands into his pockets. His heart sank. Lying at the bottom of one of them was a small box containing his farewell present for her. It was a diamond solitaire ring and a symbol of his enduring love for her. How could he have forgotten to give it to her, he asked himself? With a huge sigh, he pulled his sodden grey trilby hat further down on to his head, turned and walked sadly back to his car.

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February 2009

The following extract appeared in the obituary column of THE EPTON HERALD on the 29th February 2009:

“MARJORIE ANN HAPSWORTH-COLE (nee Bettisford) died recently, aged 95. She was the widow of **Captain Gerald James Hapsworth-Cole, RN**, who, along with his two young sons, died in 1953 under mysterious circumstances. Their bodies were never found. Captain Hapsworth-Cole had been a distinguished sailor who fought in the Second World War, was decorated for outstanding bravery and mentioned in despatches on two separate occasions.

Marjorie Bettisford, a well known debutante and an heiress in her own right, was the only daughter of a wealthy industrialist and following her marriage to Captain Hapsworth-Cole, had lived in Epton Hall, the family’s large ancestral home in Sussex. There has been a Hapsworth-Cole family member living in Epton Hall for many generations.

Because Mrs. Hapsworth-Cole died intestate, a search is being carried out for any surviving family members who, it is understood, will probably inherit the house and the estate.”

* * *

EPTON HALL (2009)

A tall dark stranger entered the old house in silence, not quite believing how easy it was to gain entry. He looked around with quiet satisfaction, and a smile gradually suffused his severe features. He had waited so many years for this moment.

His father, Stanley, had been quite happy to forget his origins, but he had not...

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PART I

Chapter One

Katie

March 2009

‘Simon, speak to me please.’ Katie Nicholson walked out of the Brighton cinema complex on the arm of her fiancé, Simon Brand. She looked up at him. His face seemed to be set in stone and she shivered. It was a cold, clear, frosty night and she drew closer to him, but he immediately pulled away again. A feeling of fear passed through her.

Katie had noticed that Simon’s behaviour towards her had been decidedly odd. What was happening to them? He’d practically ignored her throughout the whole evening. What had she done? What had she said?

‘Wow, that film was great wasn’t it?’ she said, trying to elicit some sort of a reaction. ‘I nearly jumped out of my skin when that lorry exploded.’ Simon didn’t answer and looked the other way. A worried frown spread over her face, because even though it had been an enjoyable and absorbing film, a little worm of worry and doubt had begun to wriggle in the darker recesses of her mind. She’d spent the evening snuggled up against him, but he’d seemed to be distant, distracted and had fidgeted throughout the two-hour long film. ‘Simon, didn’t you enjoy the film? After all you were the one who wanted to come to see it.’

Simon’s reply was non-committal. ‘It was OK.’

Katie was an attractive, fun-loving, vivacious 25 year old, but this evening any thoughts of frivolity had been completely blown away. They drove the 20 miles to her home in Anston in complete and devastating silence. The air felt thick and heavy in

the confines of Simon's small car, despite the fact that the temperature outside was extremely cold even for a March evening and frost glistened on every surface. At any other time, she would have commented on how beautiful everything looked.

Simon pulled up outside Lilac Cottage and switched off the car's engine. His whole body seemed tense. It was now late evening, but there was enough light from a nearby street light for Katie to see the look on his face when he turned towards her. He looked scared, terrified even. What on earth was going on, she wondered? Was he ill, or had he lost his job? Or was he...?

A sudden thought had made her heart thump. Was he going off her? Had he found someone else? Had he...? Katie's fears tumbled over one another in an effort to be aired. She'd noticed that he'd been breathing heavily and that now he seemed a little out of breath.

'Katie?' he at last managed to say.

'Yes?'

'I...Oh shit. I don't know how to say this.'

'Come on out with it, Simon' she prompted. 'Something's on your mind, you've hardly said a word this evening. What's up? We don't have any secrets from one another, do we?'

'I...I er...'

'Well, do we?' she replied feeling irritated. 'There's something bothering you that's for sure.'

'But...'

'Simon, please tell me what's wrong: you're worrying me.'

'You won't like it.'

'Let me be the judge of that. It can't be that bad surely?'

'Can't it?'

Katie was beginning to lose patience. 'Oh for god's sake, Simon, get to the point will you. We haven't got all night.'

'Katie...I'm...I'm sorry, but there's only one way of telling you this. Sally Longman and I have been seeing one another for some time,' he finally blurted out.

She wasn't quite sure whether she'd heard Simon properly. 'What did you just say?'

Simon groaned and sighed heavily. 'Sally Longman and I have been seeing one another for some time,' he repeated.

'You and Sally have what?' For a moment, Katie was rendered speechless. She felt a huge black cloud beginning to hover ominously over her head. Finally, she managed to speak: 'Simon, how could you...I...' Despite her shock and rising anger, she couldn't help noticing that her fiancé seemed relieved that the words had at last been said.

'Sally and I love one another you see and...'

'But I don't understand.' She felt her whole world crumbling around her. She closed her eyes in the hope that what was happening was not real and that it would go away. 'Surely you can't be...'

'Katie, I'm sorry to be so brutal.'

'You...you love one another? Great.' A feeling of utter devastation took control of her and it felt like a knife had just pierced her insides, as intense angry pain shot throughout her body. 'You and Sally? You bastard.'

'I...I moved in with her yesterday.' He grimaced and looked away.

'Yesterday, but you told me that you were going ...' Katie felt strangely light-headed and sat in her seat quite unable to think of anything more to say. Eventually, her pain reached boiling point. She could feel her hands beginning to tingle as she gripped the sides of her seat. She couldn't believe what she was hearing: she wanted to hit him. 'What about me Simon? You...you,' she screamed. 'You bastard,' she repeated almost choking on the words. The angry, bitter words seemed to echo around the car and Simon flinched as the tirade continued. 'How dare you? How dare you just sit there and tell me what you and Sally, who...who is supposed to be my best friend, have been doing

behind my back? How could you? Didn't you even consider my feelings?'

'I'm sorry, Katie. I...we...we're both really sorry.'

'You're both sorry? Is that all you can say?' she scoffed, her face contorted with a mixture of disappointment, anger and grief - grief for the love she'd thought that Simon had for her and grief for what the future would hold without him.

There was now a yawning black hole in her life.

'I knew how you would take it, but there was no other way of telling you.' Simon looked downwards.

'You can say that again,' Katie retorted. 'I can't believe what I'm hearing. You and my so-called friend Sally, have been...have been...'

'I'm afraid it just sort of happened. We didn't mean to hurt you. I don't know what else I can say, except...'

'What?' she snapped.

'Sally is pregnant,' he replied in a quiet ashamed voice. Simon's courage began to lose momentum and then appeared to desert him altogether. His long, lean features looked even more lugubrious than usual. He sat next to her looking small, silent and crestfallen.

Katie didn't respond again for several panic-stricken moments, whilst her bruised mind tried to work out the implications of what Simon had just told her. Her heart, which had been beating wildly, now seemed to have turned to stone. The silence around them seemed to go on forever. She couldn't think straight, but finally, managed to utter a few strangled words.

'So, Sally is going to have...a baby?'

'Yes.'

'How long has this been going on?' she demanded to know. Simon didn't answer. 'Am I not allowed to know then? After all you owe me that much.' There was still no answer. 'Simon, I

thought that **we** were going to get married and I...’ Her body seemed to crumple and she continued to whisper in a quiet and strained voice. ‘I thought you loved me, Simon. How wrong could I be?’ Katie’s world was crashing all around her and once again she closed her eyes in an effort to make it all go away. She wanted to scream, but fierce pride prevented her from doing so. She only knew that she had to make a dignified exit and so she opened the car door and with her legs trembling uncontrollably, she turned towards him.

‘Cheers Simon. Sally is welcome to you and I hope that you’ll both be very happy in your own misery.’ She knew that what she’d just said didn’t make any sense, but somehow with angry distraught tears streaming down her face, Katie climbed out of the car. She stood on the narrow stone pathway, not quite sure what to do next. Finally with her head held high, she walked through the open gates of Lilac Cottage.

She didn’t look back.

Simon sighed, before driving away and out of her life.

Katie was surprised to see that her landlady, Brenda Bellingham, was waiting in the hall to greet her.

‘Hello love. I heard the car. Did you enjoy the film?’ Brenda stopped in her tracks when she noticed her distress. ‘Whatever’s wrong? You look dreadful. Look, let me get you a cup of tea or something.’

‘No thank you Brenda, it would probably choke me.’ Katie stood in front of her feeling confused and helpless, her shoulders heaving with pent-up emotion. Brenda put her arms round her.

‘Oh Katie love. Come on, tell me what’s happened.’

‘It’s Simon.’

‘What about Simon?’ Alarm sprang into Brenda’s eyes. ‘You haven’t had an accident or anything, have you?’

‘No, nothing like that.’

‘He hasn’t hurt you, has he?’

‘No, not physically, but he...he...,’ she hesitated and then answered vehemently. ‘Yes, he has hurt me, Brenda.’ Katie stared into the distance for a while and then finally burst into tears. ‘He’s just told me that he’s moved in with Sally Longman, an old friend of mine,’ she managed to say between shuddering sobs. ‘And he’s been seeing her for some time.’

‘He’s actually gone to live with her?’

‘Yes, he said that he’d moved into her flat yesterday.’

‘Yesterday! Oh Katie.’ Brenda was clearly shaken and her soft brown eyes showed deep concern.

‘Yes and there’s something else too. Sally is going to have a baby.’

‘A baby! Oh my goodness, it gets worse. I don’t quite know what to say to make you feel any better love.’

‘There’s nothing to say is there. What am I going to do, Brenda? I can’t believe that they could have done such a thing to me, or that I didn’t realise what was going on right underneath my nose,’ she said with a loud sniff.

Brenda cuddled her again. ‘I’m so sorry, Katie. Look come on into my sitting room and you can tell me all about it, but...only if you want to of course. I will get you that drink you look as though you need one.’

Later that night, she found it impossible to get to sleep. Constant visions of Simon’s face swam before her closed eyes and jumbled thoughts tortured her as she remembered the happy times that they’d spent together. She remembered too her long and happy friendship with Sally. Why, they had even started school together! They had shared all the things that little girls are supposed to share, like dressing dolls and attending birthday parties. And later, side by side they had taken their first exciting steps as teenagers and had been able to swap the most intimate details of their first fumbling kisses with two young and spotty boys. She sighed as she recalled the endless

excited discussions about what clothes and make-up they should both wear. And now, her best friend Sally had chosen the ultimate insult and had stolen Simon from her. What had made Sally behave in such a way? This surely meant that you never really knew a person at all and when were the words “loyalty” and “trustworthiness” thrown so casually out of the window?

What was she going to do now? Why had this all happened? She had felt secure in his love for her and had mentally started preparing for their future together, but now her life was in ruins. When had it all started to go wrong?

Even though it was painful, Katie’s mind took her back to her friend Claire Banham’s birthday party two years’ earlier. It was there that she had first met Simon Brand. Even though they had little in common it hadn’t seemed to matter much, because Simon was fun to be with. He’d introduced her to a new crowd and they all enjoyed going to concerts and parties. She had felt a little out of her depth at times, but her life was at least exciting and happy and as the weeks and months had passed by, her feelings for him had deepened. They would often spend weekends together in his flat. It was small, but warm and cosy and Katie had never felt more loved and happy.

During one such weekend, he had taken her out for a meal in Brighton. She remembered that it had been a warm, balmy evening. They had been completely absorbed with one another as they’d sauntered hand in hand to their favourite restaurant. Simon had chosen a table well away from the other diners and the candlelight had flickered and danced between them, creating an ambience of timeless romance. She remembered that he’d grabbed hold of her hand and given her that certain half smile which always made her feel all tingly inside.

‘Katie?’ he’d whispered.

‘Yes Simon?’

‘Why don’t we get married next year? I’ll be earning more money then. What do you think?’

‘Yes, yes, Simon,’ she’d replied, her eyes twinkling with love and happiness.

Now as she lay curled up in her bed, she wondered how it could all be over. But she knew that it was and the word “traitor” suddenly screamed into her mind as she recalled how she’d been taken in by his words of love. Even the engagement ring that Simon had promised to give her had never materialised. He’s probably given it to Sally by now, she thought as she sobbed into her pillow.

Katie found it impossible to stop thinking and close her mind. What was she to do? She’d even told friends that she was going to marry Simon. What would she say to them? She was on a roller coaster ride from which there was no escape. Her over-active imagination began to play cruel games with her, as first Sally’s happy face and then Simon’s taunted her as she pictured them living together in their new home with a new baby. She tried to stop these pictures, but instead cruel and soul-wrenching snippets of conversations took over as she rehearsed what she was going to say to all her friends. She had even thought about asking her cousin Helen to be a bridesmaid at her wedding. A cry of anguish escaped from her lips and she pounded her pillow in anger. All Katie could think about was this great big black hole into which she was now plunging and she had absolutely no idea how she could extricate herself.

Life ahead seemed bleaker than ever.

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