

Strands of Suffering and Survival:

Lieutenant C. Douglas Johnston's Story

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Authors Note: In this work, I wanted to write from a perspective that was somewhat detached from the events, but very knowledgeable about them. I decided to write from the point of view of a servant for the Fates, who is watching as they weave the story of Lieutenant C. Douglas Johnston's life. I thought that this way I could have an omniscient view, but still present an empathetic voice who could express the emotions involved in his struggle.

I look at you now, an innocent, new life with your only possession the name C. Douglas Johnston. My three mistresses take their turns at weaving and I look on in reverence at their lovely work. Your thread caught my eye in the glistening tapestry and I follow your story as it begins to unfold. However, the story they're making is one full of sorrow and it hurts when I think of the future they've made.

Your childhood is to be happy, simple but joyful. You'll laugh and you'll play like all children should. You'll hear about war, but it will be so distant, your only experience will be as a cadet in Bishop's College School Cadet Corps. However, events will unfold across the great ocean, and those who don't know you will begin to affect your fate. From where I'm standing I see all the patterns, how they will unfold the way they were placed. No one else but my mistresses see the whole picture, the magnificence of time, each life but a thread in the creation of this never-ending fabric.

When finally your destiny reaches your ears you'll be well established in a new law firm in Quebec. Your fiancé beside you, the world will seem free, until the news of the war comes, and sweeps away your dreams. But you will see logic and take an officers course, knowing that you'll go to support your country in need. I wonder myself, completely detached from it all, how you'll be willing to die just to "do (your) own little bit". You must acquire such a love for your country and life itself too, or how else could you stand in the way of Hitler, and those who would take it all away from you.

As I know you will, you'll enlist in the Royal Rifles, but for over a year you'll be just a guard against the unknown. When finally you return, to Valcartier Camp, you'll surely wonder at the future set out for you. I laugh to myself, for how could you know? Only I and the Fates could possibly tell. You have such a destiny, a farrago of horror, joy, and overpowering emotion. You will go to do your bit and succeed in that aim, and though you're still but a child, I have gained great respect for you.

When you arrive in Hong Kong, you'll surely enjoy yourself, but remember forever the date November 16, 1941. From the Jubilee in Sham Shui Po to the edges of town, the Hong Kong residents will welcome you with open arms. As messing officer you'll be in charge of rations, and the humor that comes when you escape overspending by a Japanese invasion I can see oh so clearly in my mistresses' work. Though you'll not be present when hostilities start, you'll join soon enough, and your twenty-five men will be cut down to two, but surrender will save you, if just for a short time and Stanley Fort will become a brief, but surely welcome home. It's undeniable that you'll think the worst is over, the fighting has stopped, but in actual fact, the killing is but half done. The place that you'll be going, I shudder to think, is not where anyone should have to spend any number of years.

Alienated, on unfamiliar ground, the only radio will be taken, as you'll know it eventually will be. Now all that you'll hear will be rumors and whispers for from where could you possibly get reliable tales? However, instead of despair, you show only innovation, and from biased reports you gleam hidden truth. The losses, indeed are staggering, but they grow ever nearer to the enemies' lines. You surely used this fullness of mind to distract you from the emptiness of stomach as all too soon even familiar food is taken away. Now you only have rice, tea, or maybe fish, and the lack of vitamins begins to take its toll. Your sight starts to dim, and beriberi sets in, but you persevere and your spirit never seems to fade. I see in the future, you'll mostly get

better, and speak as though it was but a waste of your time. Again I do wonder, how many could be so strong, to suffer as you will, but never lose their way.

Your story continues, through diphtheria and bedbugs. You trade at the risk of your life for things you desire, like duck eggs and the cigarettes you have been forced to go without. A package will come though, with 8000 cigarettes, but you'll share them around with less than a quarter for yourself. My admiration still grows as I gaze at glittering strands, shining as though showing the inside of your heart.

You'll live still, through starvation and the tapeworm that will live in your gut. Standing out in the rain for twelve hours straight, your life will surely be so miserable, I could never relate. You'll try in vain to play softball, but succeed at cards and the chess that you'll all come to love so much. I'll even watch you in the garden, trying to grow tomatoes, and nearly cry when I witness your failed attempt. Through all of your trials, I follow the thread, the mingling of triumphs and tragedies too.

Over all, through your experience, as you'll say yourself, you'll stay relaxed and in good humor as you suffer the worst. You won't blame a soul, and object to those who do. I see you harbor absolutely no resentment inside yourself, all the way through. I'm sorrowful now as the strand nears its end, I've seen so many years of your happier times, but forever you'll be changed by the times come before, and the suffering you saw was more than enough. The world should want to know how it could happen, even from where I stand, watching the weaving, sometimes I fail to see any logic behind it at all.

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