

## Flying Home

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"I can go for miles in my airplane  
Have a lotta smiles in my airplane  
I can go up, I can get down  
But I can't get to you if you don' want me around  
In my airplane..."  
~ [The Royal Guardsmen](#)

John Kell turned his head to look at Mary Morris. He said, "What do you mean, we can never go home?"

Mary smiled at John, then looked away to the view out her side of the plane. She replied, "Oh, it's a saying from Heraclitus. He was fascinated by the ever-changing nature of reality. He said that you can never step twice into the same river. You cannot be the same person you were the last time you stepped into it, because you change. The river cannot be the same river it was the last time you visited it, because it also changes."

John nodded. Just then Mary turned her head to look at him. She smiled at him. He smiled at her. They were on their way.

Glancing past John for a moment, Mary's eyes widened. Her smile disappeared. She pointed out John's window and said, "Look at that convoy!"

John's smile faded as he turned his head to the left to look in the indicated direction. There below them on Interstate 85 were hundreds of trucks, some painted in woodlands camo and many in desert colours. At least a division of combat troops were moving.

Up in a cloudy sky at 11,000 feet, the Cessna 400 was unlikely to be seen, or considered a threat. Even so, John was briefly happy that their route was not going to parallel the convoy below them. It looked like all those troops were headed to Greenville.

Craning her neck a bit and looking past John's shoulder, Mary exclaimed, "Those are tank transporters down there!"

Dipping his left wing briefly, John took a good long look of his own. Sure enough, there were M1A1 Abrams tanks en route. They were mounted on low-boy trailers being hauled by the army's version of the semi-tractor.

John said, "Mary? Can you reach into the back and get my binoculars, please? I've got a bad feeling

about this stuff."

Mary unbelted and fairly climbed into the cramped space behind their seats. Twisting the pack, she found a convenient outer pocket just the right size, and came up with the Vortex Razor binoculars. She handed these forward to John, then climbed back into her seat and put her belt and shoulder harness back on.

Looking over the convoy, John found insignia he recognised on every vehicle he scanned. It was an army division loyal to one of the owners. He shook his head. Setting the binoculars in the space between his seat and the pilot's door, he focused on the instrument panel.

He was familiar with the Garmin G1000 glass cockpit having learned in one. It showed him their cruising speed, about 265 mph. Their heading was right on track, and the righthand panel map showed their progress. The "steam" instruments at the top of the dashboard showed the same information in older formats.

For a few moments, John pondered whether to reconnoitre more closely. Looking to his left, he imagined the difficulties. A convoy that size would either have crewed air support or drones. Anything he radioed would be intercepted. Even an encrypted signal would be detected, and the fact of that signal would be meaningful. Better to get home, get connected, get the word out. Besides, Mary was precious cargo. He glanced right, and saw her staring at him.

Mary said, "You're thinking about going down there to get a closer look, and whether that's going to be dangerous." She raised her eyebrows and continued, "I can see you've decided against the idea. They'll have drone patrols and maybe combat aircraft. Besides, any signal we send is going to be a problem, so we have to get connected."

John widened his eyes a bit, and smiled. He nodded. "Those were my very thoughts. We're just ordinary travellers on a flight from the coast up into the hills. No bother to them unless we get close or look like we care about them."

Mary looked aside out her window. She nodded. "First rule is, don't get caught," she said. She turned her head toward him and grinned.

Moving his right hand off the control yoke, John reached over and gripped Mary's left hand. He nodded and smiled at her. "It isn't much further. I'm glad you're here."

Squeezing his hand briefly, Mary said, "I'm glad I'm here, too."

### **Homecoming**

John guided the Cessna down onto the grass airstrip. It was a calm day, and the windsock atop the barn hung somewhat limp. John had landed many aircraft at his family's ranch in the last fourteen years. His dad had taught him when he was only fifteen. Today the landing was perfect.

John let the plane roll along for a while as he eased the brakes on, got stopped, and then taxied back to the barn which doubled as a hangar. Next to it was a broad concrete apron with tie downs for visiting aircraft. Deftly, John stopped at one of these.

The ninety minute flight had not been tiring for either of them. John had flown many longer flights

over the years, and had slept on board the *Flying Nell*. Mary had also slept, and the virus-specific antigen she'd been given had worked wonders. Like many of the freedom community developed biopharmaceuticals it actually worked, unlike nearly everything touched by the evil mass-murdering cartels. Physically, Mary felt great. Spiritually, she was still very troubled.

John went through his post-flight check list from memory. With Mary's able help, he tied down the plane. Then he hefted his backpack and put it back on, hooking the ends of belly band together. Mary was wearing the vest Karen Runningwolf had given her. Smiling at her, John held out his rifle. She smiled too, and slung it over her shoulder. The two of them held hands and walked toward his family home.

Slam! The screen door always swung fully open and into the wall next to it whenever Melissa Kell came running outside. Today was no exception. Having heard the plane land and taxi, Melissa had finished in the kitchen on the other side of the house where she was taking some freshly baked biscuits from an oven. Walking swiftly across the house, she fairly leapt off the porch without pausing to use the three steps, and was several paces down the walkway, shedding her apron when she saw that her brother was bringing company.

Fifty feet apart the two siblings stopped, and Mary did as well. Directly in front of her was an imperfect mirror, sharing her height and weight almost exactly, Melissa was as pale and blonde as Mary was dark and brunette. Mary smiled. Melissa smiled. Something about her ... each woman had the same sense of familiarity to the other.

Melissa raised an eyebrow and glanced at her brother, which brought Mary back down to Earth. Mary also glanced over at John. John was grinning broadly at his sister. Releasing Mary's hand, he brought his arm up to gesture that here was someone new.

"Sis," he said, "Please meet the princess we rescued from the enemy's castle this morning, Mary Morris."

Using his same right hand to gesture at his sister he continued, "Mary, please meet my sister the spiritual healer, Melissa Kell."

Gathering her skirts, Melissa executed a perfect curtsy, saying, "Pleased to meet you, your highness." With these words, a frisson passed down her spine, and Melissa realised that she had a spiritual connexion with Mary that transcended their current lives.

Having felt a similar frisson of energy, Mary smiled and giggled. Making her own curtsy, and said, "John has elevated me to princess without my prior knowledge. I'm very pleased to meet you as well, Melissa."

Melissa looked at Mary with a quizzical expression and said, "John, you're going to want to put your pack in your room and talk to mom and dad in the kitchen. Help yourself to the biscuits. Mary and I have a bunch of things to discuss, and we'll be in my room."

Mary turned to John, hugged him quickly, kissed his cheek, and ran over to Melissa. The two women hugged, and ran hand in hand back to the house, up the steps onto the porch, and inside. John looked at them go, glanced up at the windsock over the barn which was suddenly standing straight out as a gust of wind came out of the north. He felt it as coolness on his face. Smiling to himself, John stepped

lightly down the path and leapt up the three steps onto the porch in a bound. He was very happy.

As he came into the parlour, John smelled the biscuits all the way from the kitchen. Those smelled great! Past the living room, he could see the brightly lit kitchen, and his parents sitting at one of the kitchen tables. John waved and smiled, then gestured upstairs.

He said, "I'm running my gear up to my room. Be down in a minute. Don't eat all the biscuits!"

His mom replied, "Don't be silly dear, your sister made fifty of these little delights. There'll be plenty when you get here."

Smiling broadly, John took the steps two at a time, passing the landing for his parents' master suite and going on up to the top floor of the house. Pausing for just a moment in the stairwell to look out the window at the familiar view spread below, his smile widened. Weeks of training and hours of the mission had left him eager for familiar sights.

With a start, he realised that his ankle no longer hurt. Whatever Lisa Angeleno had done while he slept aboard the *Flying Nell* it was fully healed. Even the dramatic hop onto the porch and stair climb had not brought so much as a twinge of pain. Counting his blessings, he walked past the closed door to his sister's room, punched his privacy code into the door lock for his room, and watched it chase a small green light around a circle, then display the words "now open."

Going in and turning on the overhead light, John quickly shed his pack. Then he went for a moment into his bathroom, ran warm water in the sink, splashed some on his face, rubbed some onto the back of his neck, and towelled off. Regarding his own familiar visage in the mirror for a moment, John smiled again.

Having paused for his ablutions, John went to his desk, booted his computer, and entered a series of passwords to mount the encrypted drives. Waiting for the boot cycle to complete, he reached into the mini-fridge and pulled out a nearly empty bottle of pomegranate juice which he poured into one of the glass tumblers on top of the fridge. After entering a very long password to access his Linux debian desktop, he launched an open source email client and composed a few messages regarding the things he and Mary had seen moving up Interstate 85. He encrypted these messages to various people up his chain of command and several others in his network of cadres, applied his digital signature, and sent them out.

A few minutes later, sitting at the kitchen table with his parents, John attended to buttering a couple of his sister's highly acclaimed biscuits. Everyone in the family all around the country who had occasion to sample them spoke well of these buttermilk blessings. Fresh from the oven, with butter and a bit of red raspberry preserves from his mom's canning operation, they were a blissful joy.

His mom brought over a glass of iced tea. She set it beside him, leaned over and kissed her son's cheek. Then she tousled his hair briefly and returned to sit by her husband.

Alfred Kell looked at his son. Waiting for a few bites to be swallowed, he asked, "Who was that young woman your sister rushed upstairs with just now? It seemed like they are fast friends, but in all my born years, I've never seen her before."

Cassandra Caine Kell looked at her husband and then at their son. From the blush coming over John's

face, she surmised part of the truth, and said, "She's someone you brought home from your adventure today, isn't she? We read about it on the 'net this afternoon, that you'd opened that terrible slave camp in New Jersey, then got away with all kinds of people, scattering to the four winds as the hoaxer reports claim. The owners are claiming to be very distressed by all the damage to their camps up and down the two long coasts. You'd think they were talking about brigands breaking into a factory or something."

John drank quite a bit of tea, then wiped his mouth on a cloth napkin that was at his place. He nodded. "That young woman is Mary Morris. I think she may be the most amazing person ever."

For the next twenty minutes, he told the story of his descent into the camp, the death of their pilot, the minor injury to his ankle, his part in the rescue operation, the trip by Hydro Lance to Savannah, and their recognition by the crew, the gifts from the rental car company and the fixed base operation, as well as their flight over the military convoy. He mentioned in a general way that he had sent messages out when he visited his room upstairs.

Cassandra said, "We're very proud of you, John. It went well for your team. Some of the other teams met more organised resistance. All of them were successful at rescuing most of those in the camps. We've seen some of the photos and videos. There have been a great many atrocities."

Her eyes shifted to the right, as she recalled the things she had seen earlier that day. Scenes of carnage and brutality inflicted by those with power over those without. She sighed.

Alfred reached over and took his wife's hand. She looked up. She smiled a brave smile. Her husband smiled back. He said, "We've begun. We knew it wouldn't be easy, and we knew it had to be done, and so we've made a beginning."

Clattering down the stairs came the sound of two sets of feet. Moments later Mary and Melissa came striding across the living room. John's face lit up. He leapt to his feet and held out the empty chair next to his. Mary smiled and nodded and took that seat. Melissa grabbed a chair from another table and brought it up. Then she set a plate with two biscuits in front of Mary, rifled a silverware drawer for utensils, and came back with them. Grabbing some biscuits for herself, Melissa sat.

During these activities, John said, "Mom, dad, please allow me to present Mary Morris. Mary, my mom, Cassandra Kell and my dad, Alfred Kell."

Cassandra said, "Welcome to our home. We're very glad you're here."

Alfred added, "Yes, you are welcome here."

Mary smiled at each of them. "I'm very pleased to meet you. Melissa has told me a great deal about you. You've a very nice home." She glanced down and saw the biscuits, so she attended to buttering these and adding some jam to her plate.

Melissa said, "Mom, dad, I want Mary to stay in the room across the hall from me. She's been in that camp for months and the trauma was terrible. Torture, rape, seeing people beaten down, people she worked with at the camp beaten and disappeared. She and I have a lot of work to do together to get her beyond what she's been through."

Cassandra looked briefly at Alfred, who was already nodding. She said, "Well of course, dear, that's

exactly right. We want Mary in our home for as long as she wishes."

John grinned on hearing this point. He looked at Mary and saw that she was smiling and crying at the same time.

Melissa reached over and put her left hand on Mary's right shoulder and used her right hand to take hold of Mary's right hand. John reached across the table to put his hand atop both of theirs.

Mary smiled at John, then at Melissa. Then, turning to their parents said, "Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Kell. Your generosity of spirit is very touching. My parents died when I was little and my grandparents raised me, but they passed away two years ago. And when I was caught, all my things were destroyed or stolen. Your welcome is a great blessing to me."

Alfred smiled, nodding, and said, "You are welcome as long as you care to stay. We have a lot of animals here, and several gardens, so there's no shortage of beauty and harmony. I hope these can be a balm to your spirit."

Looking down, he attended to the last piece of a biscuit on his plate. With his mouth full, he looked carefully at his son. Swallowing, he glanced at his wife, whose beaming smile made clear that she could see the signs of love as well. Not wanting to there be any doubt, he continued, "Welcome to the family."

[End part thirty-one, continues in part thirty-two]

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