

THE WHITEFACE CAPER

Ted had always intended for it to end the way it did; his best buddy, Zack, never stood a chance.

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It was a beautiful day—perfect to explore the hamlets and forests and lakes around Whiteface Mountain. Sunny, peaceful, quiet.

Quiet, that is, until two guys on motorcycles roared up the road: one with a pretty young lady on the seat behind him, the other just waiting, biding his time.

It was the fall of 1941. The trees were turning color. Leaves that had been bright green only a week before were suddenly tinged with orange and yellow. A few had fallen to the ground, but most of them clung to life on the branches, waiting until later in autumn to loosen their grip. The sun shone through the canopy, dappling the road which seemed peopled with just these three.

It would have been four, but Ted's date, Roberta, couldn't make it. She had to work that particular Sunday.

The trio stopped for a late lunch at a small restaurant halfway down the mountain. It was a small place, with wooden tables and chairs crowding the interior. A stone fireplace dominated one end of the room, but because it was still early in the fall, there was no fire on the grate.

Ted excused himself and left the table for several minutes. While he was gone, Zack and Lettie talked about the view of the Adirondacks from the top of Whiteface, mutual friends from the area, and some of the places Zack and Ted liked to go on their motorcycles. The Second World War was raging across the ocean, but they avoided discussion of it.

Lettie was pretty. She had dark brown hair with just the right amount of curl. She always wore a wide smile and her eyes crinkled when she laughed. Her father was a pastor, so Zack knew that eternal damnation was a very likely consequence if he was anything but a perfect gentleman. He was determined to get Lettie back home safe, sound, and on time that afternoon. He kept looking at his watch, wondering if they would be able to explore a few other spots before heading home.

Shortly after Ted returned to the table, their lunch arrived. They joked and laughed as they ate. Lettie was glad to be out of the elements for a little while. It was cold riding on the back of Zack's bike, and the warmth of the restaurant provided a welcome respite from the stiffness of the motorcycle seat and the constant wind.

Lettie liked Zack. He was nice. And even though it wasn't always comfortable, she loved riding on the back of his motorcycle. She had only met Ted once, but he seemed like a good guy. Quite dashing, too. Just the type of person Zack would hang around with. The two of them were so alike in their leather riding jackets and denim jeans.

After lunch they hiked for a while in the area around the restaurant, but before long it was time to think about heading home. Zack didn't want to risk getting in trouble for keeping Lettie out too long.

The three retraced their steps. When they arrived at the small parking lot where they had left their motorcycles, Ted and Zack jumped on their bikes. Lettie climbed onto the back of Zack's bike.

Zack knew immediately that something was wrong. He set the kickstand, dismounted, and helped Lettie off the bike. He squatted down and stared at it.

Ted turned around. "What's the matter?"

"Tire's flat," Zack said, straightening up.

Because it was Sunday and there was a war going on overseas, gas was a precious commodity. That's why there wasn't a gas station open within fifty miles of where they stood. "You won't be able to get home on that tire. Want me to give you a lift somewhere?" Ted asked.

"We can't leave Lettie here by herself," Zack said.

"How about I take her home, then come back for you?" Ted suggested.

Zack nodded. "I guess so." He looked at his watch. "It's quarter to five. I promised I'd have her home by five fifteen." Visions of himself surrounded by the flames of hell danced before Zack's eyes.

"If we leave now, I can have her home by five fifteen," Ted said.

"Zat all right with you, Lettie?" Zack asked.

"That's okay with me."

Ted helped Lettie onto his bike, then hopped on in front of her. He looked at Zack. "You gonna be all right?"

"Oh, yeah. Thanks for making sure Lettie gets home on time. I'm going to try to find someone with an air pump I can use. If I don't swing by your house in the next couple hours, come back for me."

"No problem," Ted answered. He kickstarted his motorcycle.

He and Lettie waved to Zack, who grasped his handlebars and gave an almighty push to move the motorcycle forward on the shoulder of the road.

Ted and Lettie roared away; Ted would have to drive his bike a little harder than usual to get Lettie home on time. He didn't want anyone burning in hell.

"Poor Zack. I hope he doesn't need a new tire," Lettie fretted.

“He won’t,” Ted answered. He had to turn his head and shout so Lettie could hear him over the sound of the bike’s motor.

Lettie wrapped her arms around him so she could hang on better. She couldn’t see Ted smiling all the way back to her house.

Author’s Note

This is based on a true love story. Ted and Lettie were married for fifty years before Ted admitted to letting the air out of Zack’s back tire so he could take Lettie back to town himself that Sunday in 1941. They were married sixty-four years before Lettie passed in 2008. Until Ted’s death eight years later, this remained his favorite story to tell anyone who would listen. Ted and Lettie had four grandchildren, one of whom grew up to be a writer (but she could never tell the story as well as her grandfather did).

Zack was the best man at Ted and Lettie’s wedding, and Zack actually married Roberta, the woman who had had to work the day Ted and Lettie took off down Whiteface Mountain. The four of them remained the best of friends for the rest of their lives.