

## Airport Musings

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A trickle of saliva formed at the corner of his mouth. His head bobbed forward and snapped back. The saliva now dripped down his chin.

“Delta Airlines now boarding Flight 1682 to Chicago at Gate No. 32. Flight 1682, now boarding,” a woman’s voiced announced.

Robert jerked his head forward and opened his eyes. He wiped his chin and looked around. His neck hurt. He spun it around slowly to get the kinks out. He checked his watch. It was 10:45 a.m. He couldn’t remember when he’d arrived at the airport. He couldn’t remember why he was there.

He looked at the woman sitting opposite him and admired her legs. She was wearing a tasteful black business suit with high heels - sling-back style. Nice calves, he thought, then moved on toward her chest. She was wearing a soft blue silk blouse buttoned part way up the swell. Nice rack, he mused, wondering if they were real. He looked around, mindful that a man his age shouldn’t be staring at a young woman for long. Nobody seemed to notice him. He returned his gaze to the woman. She was feverishly punching the keys of her Blackberry. She shifted in her seat and looked up, but not at him. People rarely looked at him

anymore. He wondered when that happened; when had he become invisible.

The woman shifted in her seat again and her boobs swayed. They're definitely real, he thought, a smiling creeping up on his face. The fake ones didn't jiggle like the real ones, he reasoned. He looked away, lest anyone figure out what was on his mind. He stood up, turned around and smiled at the kids playing Uno behind him. They were cute, he thought, and so well- behaved.

He thought of his three grandkids. They were cute too but they were never this quiet. They seemed to always be hollering, like if they could just speak a little louder than everyone else, they would be heard.

He returned his focus to the kids playing Uno. They even giggled quietly, he marveled. He shifted his gaze and saw a young woman sitting opposite them, presumably their mother. He thought she was pretty, in a bedraggled housewife sort of way. She had light brown hair, pulled back loosely in a ponytail. He noted her slender face, pale skin, and nice cheekbones but was disappointed by her frumpy clothing. Jeans and a formless sweater top that didn't reveal any skin or curves. He wondered why so many young women let themselves go after they had kids. He didn't get that. He imagined her with her hair down, wearing a white sundress, with pearls around her neck.

She looked straight at him and smiled a little. He held her gaze but she quickly returned her attention to her magazine. He turned back around and sat down, feeling deflated. His head hurt. It throbbed at both temples. He took a deep breath and pondered his situation. He was at Boston's Logan Airport. He waited for his destination to become apparent; for that flicker of memory. But his mind was blank. He assumed he was heading to Atlanta, where his son Craig and grandchildren lived. He smiled at the thought. He enjoyed his visits there, particularly being with his vociferous grandchildren. He felt young in their presence, and hopeful.

He stood up to get a coffee, hoping it would ease his headache. His phone slipped from his pocket and fell behind the seat. He looked both ways for Dunkin Donuts but was disoriented. He couldn't recall where it was though he'd been in this terminal hundreds of times in his life. He grabbed his suitcase anyway and headed for the baggage claim area, admiring his roller-bag as he walked. It was a Louis Vuitton bag in caramel and dark brown squares that his daughter Katie had given him for his birthday. She always gave the best gifts, he thought, but this one was particularly special. It reminded him of all the things he wanted to do in life; of all the places that he wanted to see. And it reminded him of Katie. He smiled at the

thought of her pixie-cut blond hair and dimpled left cheek, and the way her smile would light up a room.

He was feeling better when he eyed the Dunkin Donuts sign up ahead. He stepped in line and considered a donut. He looked at the people in line and decided to skip it. He might be getting old, but he wasn't going to get fat, he assured himself. He ordered a small hazelnut with milk and sugar – a real girly coffee to his mind. Katie had introduced him to it. He was embarrassed to order it at first but once he did, he noticed lots of men ordered girly coffees. He sat down by a nearby gate and enjoyed the taste.

A little girl walked near him. She looked about five, and she was wearing a pink beret. He smiled, remembering Katie's plaid wool beret that she wore when she was little. She was so cute in that, he thought. She would wear it tilted to one side with her shiny black patent-leather shoes – “Mary Janes” they were called. She looked like an Irish angel, with sun-kissed freckles across her nose and cheeks. It felt good to remember those years. He rested contentedly.

After some time, his head slung forward and he opened his eyes. He looked around. Passengers were exiting from the gate by his seat. He looked at his watch. It was afternoon. He tried to think when the next flight to Atlanta was and wondered if he was at the

right gate. His stomach growled.

He heard some commotion and looked up to see a man running down the hall, waiving his arms and hollering. That guy's either really late or really crazy, he thought, chuckling to himself. The man kept coming and seemed to be headed directly for him. Robert noticed another person running just behind him – a younger boy. They looked familiar but he couldn't quite place them. Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. The man and boy were locked in on him now. Everyone was watching the scene unfold.

"Dad!" the man was saying as he reached him, wrapping his arms around Robert. Then the boy was there too, grabbing Robert, calling out to him. They were his family. Robert hugged them back. This was Craig and his grandson Ben, and they were here, he thought. He wondered why and noticed they were crying. He couldn't tell if they were happy or sad. He didn't know what to do. He just stood there with his son and grandson draped over him.

"Did you miss your flight?" Craig asked urgently. "What happened? We've been so worried. You didn't answer your phone."

Robert checked his pocket. The phone was gone. He stared at Craig, not knowing what to say. Craig waited, expectantly. "I don't know," he tepidly responded. "I've been confused today. The time raced by and I haven't had any

lunch. Are you hungry?"

"Dad, we don't have time for food," Craig said impatiently. "We have to go. We have to get on a plane right now. We had to switch flights so now we're going to New York first and the flight's leaving soon." He paused, waiting for Robert to acknowledge that he understood.

Robert was flummoxed. Why would they be going to New York, he wondered. His mouth went completely dry. He stared at

Craig and Ben, and they stared back, waiting for him to say or do something.

"I don't understand," Robert complained.

"Why are you in Boston? And why are we going to New York?" he added, trying to mask the panic he felt rising in him. He looked at Craig, then at Ben. They all just looked at one another. Nobody said anything for a moment. Robert's questions hung in the air.

"Don't you remember what happened?" Craig asked imploringly. Robert was silent. "You were supposed to meet us in Atlanta, and then we were all flying together to see Katie, in Hong Kong, don't you remember?" he gasped.

"Katie?" Robert responded eagerly. "We're going to see Katie?"

Piercing pain ripped through his head. He couldn't focus. He sat down and grabbed his head and pulled it down between his legs. The questions raced through his mind – why was he here, why were Craig and Ben here, why

were they crying, and what did Katie have to do with all of this.

Craig sat on the floor in front of his dad and put his hand on Robert's head. He stroked it gently, carefully considering his next words.

"We have to go take care of Katie," he said softly, so softly Robert could barely hear him. His voice quavered as he spoke.

"We're the only ones who can do it," Craig went on. "We have to bring her back."

Robert looked up, fearing the pain he could hear in Craig's voice. He stared at his son, looking for answers. He could not seem to form any questions.

Craig took a deep breath and steadied his gaze on his dad, now fully grasping the situation.

"Dad," he faltered, trying to steady his voice, "Katie died yesterday. In Hong Kong," he said, his body contorting with pain.

Robert gasped for air. The knowledge came crashing back. He could hardly breathe. He tried to focus on getting the air in and out. It was like he'd been sucker punched. Craig and Ben were a blur. He grabbed them and held on for fear that if he let go, they too would be gone. His body collapsed against them. He was depleted.

Time passed, and when their tears subsided, they gathered their strength - and Robert's roller-bag - and headed for their flight.