



Aeronausiphobia
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To Diana for providing the greatest joy and instilling the greatest fear. All of my love.

Aeronausiphobia

The problem with unassigned seating is the first-day-of-school factor. If you're late on the first day of school, you sit in the shitty desk that has one leg shorter than the other three or chewing gum stuck under the desktop. If you're late to the airport due to, say, a friend that can't go without a cigarette for five minutes, you end up in the C seating group. Thus, you end up choosing from the broken seats, seats next to undesirables or seats next to children. Similar to the beginning of every kickball game that ends with, "Okay, we'll take Phillip." Slow is no way to go through life, and it's definitely no way to fly.

The week leading up to my fantasy vacation was planned carefully. My projects at work would be finished the Friday before for two reasons. One, so I couldn't be blamed for anything that went astray while I was gone, and two, so the week leading up to my departure would be nothing but unadulterated daydreaming. There was also the long-shot hope that if all the stars aligned in my favor, I would never have to return to my miserable cubicle.

By Thursday night, the only thing left to do was pack. Sally and I had two completely different ways of accomplishing the task at hand. She would try on everything she owned looking for the perfect combination of outfits that would attract the proper amount of attention or garner the most praise from our friends. She routinely dressed in more comfortable attire, but for this trip comfort was out and a cute ass or accentuated tits was in. I really didn't mind. It was a nice change of pace. Luckily for me, this was the way most women packed when traveling to Las Vegas. Needless to say, I was excited by the prospect of eye-candy wherever I looked in addition to my wife's newfound slutty form of self-expression. The lingering thoughts of long legs, well-endowed chests and round asses dressed to seduce helped me through my packing process. Of course, this consisted of my favorite game of *Is This Clean?* coupled with *What Will the Weather Be Like?* My look for Vegas quickly became what we are referring to now as *Suburban Barbecue*. All I needed was a Kiss the Chef apron and I could have been mistaken for Ward Cleaver on any summer Sunday.

* * *

It was ever so faint, but I could hear the cracking metal as the wind slammed against the body of flight #9776. The steel tube pulsed and rolled slightly. It was too dark for anyone inside to see the first rivet wiggling loose from the right wing. Just below the "NOT A STEP" decal, the

wing exposed its first fracture. No bigger than an eyelash, it slithered across the wing matching the river that passed some 35,000 feet below to almost every twist and curve. The brief flash of lightning exposed the danger just long enough for me to wonder what it was. The second rivet came loose and hit the window, waking Janet briefly. She snorted, rolled over and went right back to sleep. However, I saw the crack in the window and began to get nervous. I scanned the plane anxiously looking for the flight crew. They were huddled in the service area whispering. I traveled quite a bit for business and I knew this wasn't a good sign. I couldn't read lips, but I swear I saw one of them say, "What do we tell the passengers?"

* * *

After clothes, there came the in-flight entertainment decisions. I always started with the most difficult. Do I take the laptop, undoubtedly making myself the über-geek, or leave the laptop? This trip was only going to be a week, but that's exactly how long it takes for email to pile up in my inbox, only to be missed or misplaced upon my return.

"Honey, should I take the laptop?"

"No."

Sally equated the laptop with the hundreds of gadgets I didn't need but would go into a burning building to save.

"Your porn collection will be safe if you leave it at home, Phillip."

"The porn collection is on the desktop."

She let out a giggle. It wasn't as if she hadn't seen it or I tried to hide it deep on the hard drive. No password protection, it was even marked "Porn." Of course, in that directory there are multiple complex categories and file structures immensely more detailed than anything the National Security Council could devise. Names, positions, genre, it was as if I were the porn archivist for every perverted middle-aged man that trolled the Internet for the perfect masturbatory inspiration.

My final decision was a journal and ballpoint pen that I rarely use given to me by close friends that would be joining us on our trip. I was going to regret this decision, of that I was sure, but Sally would have made it impossible to write had I taken the computer.

"Should I take the video camera? Sal, are you listening?"

I turned. She had on a tight black dress that put the porn collection to shame. Her long muscular legs begged to be wrapped around me. Her chest heaved underneath the stretched fabric. The hem of the skirt

danced as she turned, exposing the tops of her legs and barely leaving her ass a mystery. I completely forgot my question. Thousands of dirty thoughts fucked each other in my head.

"When did you get that," I tried not to let on that I was poised to attack.

"You think it's cute?"

"Cute? Not really. Why don't you dress like that more often?"

She had finally caught on to where I was going.

"That's what I thought," she said coyly staring at my crotch.

* * *

The Captain came on the loudspeaker.

"We may encounter a little bit of turbulence ahead. So, I'm going to turn back on the 'fasten seat belts' sign and ask everyone to head back to their seats."

I watched the flight attendants continue their conference. None of them looked scared, but their looks scared me. Janet began to stir, but settled back into sleep again. Finally, the flight attendants adjourned and headed to their respective sections. I was tempted to ask, but a passenger three rows ahead stopped our attendant before she could get to me.

"Excuse me, is there a problem?"

"No ma'am. We're just experiencing some minor technical problems."

The crack in the right wing was widening ever so slightly. The wind, like a small boy and his first scab, picked at the crack. More rivets twisted and wiggled loose from the wing. A horrible scream came from the right side of the plane. And then the cabin began to bounce. The flight attendants scrambled to stay on their feet. Some fell onto passengers in the aisle seats. A wall of confusion and questions rippled through the plane and bombarded the flight attendants. I watched as they danced down the aisle trying to make everyone comfortable. Trying a little too hard to make everyone comfortable.

* * *

It never seemed strange to me that Sally fell asleep right after sex. Some men may have found it a little too masculine. She never wanted to be held, just a quick peck and "I love you," then straight to sleep. I rolled over and turned on the TV. But before the set could flicker on, I heard a distant whine. It was mixed with the rumble of jets. The TV quickly grabbed my interest, and I was lost in a documentary about Bigfoot

being sighted in the remote forests of Oklahoma, which, to be quite honest, were as much a mystery to me as Bigfoot himself. A local Oklahoma news reporter was narrating the story. Her evidence was circumstantial, but easily convincing to those willing to believe of which I was one. Much like all Bigfoot evidence, there were plaster casts and hair samples, a bit of video and eyewitness accounts. Two of the eyewitnesses were typical Oklahoma cops, or at least what I consider typical Oklahoma cops. Granted, my experience with Oklahoma is limited to the few people I know from the Midwest and the musical.

Anyway, the two cops were your average rugged, outdoorsman types. Their encounter with Bigfoot was during a camping trip. I immediately questioned why two grown men would go camping together... alone. It seemed a little gay to me, but to each his own. My second thought was that there had to be excessive amounts of alcohol involved. How else could two Midwestern cops engage in homosexual experimentation? The show quickly dispelled my theories by pointing out that both men do not drink. Moreover, they never have. I found it funny they never said anything about their sexual orientation. Regardless, I found myself believing what they were saying.

To increase the drama, the documentarian chose to take the two men back to the woods where they claim to have encountered the beast. It wasn't long before they started hearing noises in the woods and rocks were thrown mere feet from the film crew. As skeptical as I was of the story, one thing struck me. The two men were visibly afraid of something in the woods. One man even began to tear up slightly. Now, I'm no expert on Oklahoma cops. For all I know, maybe they are all crybabies. However, my image of the typical Oklahoma cop did not include being scared of a few rustling bushes. What happened next in the film was every bit of my image of the typical Oklahoma cop. The men started firing their handguns blindly into the woods. I laughed quietly so as not to wake Sally thinking of the poor production assistant that nearly took a bullet for this documentary.

As I finally began to fall asleep, I thought of what would make me as terrified as these men. I didn't like hospitals or airports, but these were common places of discomfort. By no means, were these fears that would bring me to tears. As soon as the thought of airports entered my head, my phobia reared its ugly head. I knew it was all in my head and I couldn't help but recognize exactly how silly my fear was. I was a diagnosed Aeronausiphobic. This was not a fear of planes or flying, it was a fear of getting sick on an airplane. Just thinking about it was crippling. A

cold bead of sweat ran across my hairline and settled on my pillow. I was so afraid of feeling nauseous on a plane that I didn't fly until I was twenty-five. I remember calling the airline to request that the airsickness bag be taken out of the seat pocket in front of my seat for fear that it would trigger my anxiety. I remember that flight as the most painful but liberating experience of my life. I spent the entire two hours with two Dramamine tablets in my clenched fist, sweating profusely and digging the fingers of my opposite hand so deeply in the arm of my seat that they hurt for three days afterward. And although it sounds horrid, I made the flight with no incidents. I've flown only for business since then and never flown with Sally.

Rekindling this fear quickly made my impending vacation more troublesome. Damn Bigfoot show! I had never told Sally. Was *she* in for a treat? I wish I could say that I wasn't feeling a bit guilty, but I was wrestling with more than my fear now. I knew deep down that Sally wouldn't care. But what if I freaked out on the plane, or, worse, what if I got sick? I spent the next few minutes convincing myself that this could never happen. And I turned off the TV. As soon as I did, I heard the airplane whine again.

* * *

The constant whine of the wing being ripped from the plane rang through the cabin. It was hard to hear anything else although there seemed to be mass hysteria going on all around me. I could feel my stomach start to churn. I reached for the airsickness bag and held it as if it was a life preserver. The flight crew continued their attempts to calm the other passengers. Janet was awake now. She clung to my left arm and was screaming at me to do something. But what could I do? I began to sweat and I clenched the bag in my hand. It was my weakness and I hated myself for it, but I couldn't get sick. This was a life-defining moment. A moment that separates the courageous from the cowards, but I was paralyzed. If I moved, I was sure to be sick. And being crouched over throwing up would have made me a coward. So, I sat... afraid.

"Walter, what's happening?" Janet broke through my temporary deafness.

"The plane is going down."

"Do something... "

This was all I heard before the deafness returned and the cramps in my stomach flared. I tried to listen to what she was saying. She was scared. That was obvious. But I was too crippled to do anything. At this

very moment, I was not the man she married. She needed someone who could protect her when death was imminent. All I could do is grip an airsickness bag and sit in terror that I may throw up and show my cowardice to the world in my final minutes.

"There's nothing I can do!" I shouted. "I'm going to be sick."

I think Janet stopped yelling. I was still deaf with fear. She looked at me for what seemed like an eternity, then put her arms around me and squeezed.

* * *

Sally pushed me twice and I jerked awake. There was a small pool of sweat that had collected on my pillow. Sally was trying to tell me something but I was still asleep. I rolled over. She quickly changed tactics and began to hit me.

"Okay, I'm awake!" I shouted.

"Do you hear that sound?"

"What sound?"

"That high-pitched screaming. It sounds like a plane but there's something wrong." She was growing impatient.

"I heard it earlier, it's nothing."

"What do you mean you 'heard it earlier?' What the hell is it, Phillip?"

"It's an airplane. You said so yourself." That was not the sentence I wanted to come out of my mouth, but I was tired. I'd had trouble getting to sleep, and, damn it, this was not what I needed now.

"Fuck you, Phillip! There's something going on. Get up!"

I knew I had a chance here to redeem myself or continue the fight. I chose the former and got out of bed to look out the window. Three or four of the neighbors stood in the street looking at the sky. There was no pointing so I assumed they hadn't spotted the source of the noise. A policeman came down the block and the four neighbors leaned into his window to ask him questions. I reported each of these movements to Sally as if I were the color commentator at the World Series. The whine got louder.

"What do you want to do, Sal? Stand outside with the rest of the neighbors waiting for little green men to land?"

"I'm not amused."

Sally got out of bed, and my thoughts immediately turned to her naked body. It was reflex. She put on her robe, snapping me back to the issue at hand.

"Are you *really* going out there?"

I knew the answer was "yes" and she simply stared at me for a moment to reinforce that I'd asked a stupid question.

When we stepped outside, the whine was so loud it was difficult to talk to one another. The blinking green and red lights of an airplane were easily visible to the west. The plane looked as if it were low, but not low enough to raise this kind of concern. By this time, the policeman was out of his car encouraging all of us to go back into our houses.

"But what about the noise? Is that plane going to be okay?" We asked in unison.

"You have nothing to worry about, folks. Everything is going to be fine."

* * *

The plane had stopped shaking. I looked out the window and could see the rooftops as they passed less than what looked like a few hundred feet below. I could finally hear again. The loudspeaker came on.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we will be making an emergency landing. Stay calm and we will be on the ground shortly. Everything is going to be fine." The Captain sounded very confident.

Janet was still holding on for dear life. I let go of the airsickness bag and put my hand on her arm. She looked up and I nodded for her to loosen her grip. She wasn't crying or hysterical. She looked at my hand on her arm and thought that everything may, in fact, be fine.

The plane was still screaming as it glided lower and lower. The other passengers had all gotten deathly quiet as we all held our breath and hoped to be back on the ground. Everyone stared straight ahead as if by sheer will we were going to get the plane landed. Each person took a turn glancing around the cabin, remembering the faces of their new-found family. We would all be bound by this experience, and no doubt some of us would stay in touch. Janet looked at none of the other passengers. Her stare was fixed on me. Our life together had changed.

The metallic scream exploded and the plane spun. Everyone was thrown as if we were discarded dolls. I felt my head bang against the overhead bin and my legs twist between another passenger and a seat. I saw Janet's eyes in my mind before everything went black.

* * *

Sally lay on the bed and stared at the ceiling. I did the same. The incessant whine was going to make sleep impossible. We just had to wait it out. The plane would fly over soon and we could try to get back to sleep. I turned to look at Sally.

"I was watching a show about Bigfoot in Oklahoma."

"Are you kidding?"

"No. It made me think about something." I began to get nervous.

"Oh, yeah. Don't tell me. You want to go Bigfoot hunting."

"No. It made me think about all the silly fears people have."

"Really?"

The scream of the airplane was getting louder and I was hoping it would pass over quickly.

"What *silly* fears do you have, then?" She knew.

"I'm Aeronausiphobic."

"What? You just made that up. That sounds made up."

"I'm deathly afraid of getting sick on an airplane."

She stared at me for a moment, trying to hold back her laughter. It took her only a second to realize I wasn't joking. The laughter immediately turned to concern and she smiled as she pulled herself closer to me.

"Well, you're *going* to Vegas."

We were locked in a kiss when the explosion ripped us apart. I opened my eyes just in time to see Sally's eyes one final time.

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