

**PHOBOPHOBIA:
SEVEN MUNDANE TALES OF TERROR**

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"If there is a Christ, a God, an anything out there, I think he is doing a shitty job."

- Drew Stepek, *Godless*

Aerophobia: Sometimes Resulting In Death

If I could, I would ask you why we never had any children. I remember how we used to *talk* about it. The answer is simple, though. Time slipped by, and then we ran out of it.

I was only twenty-six. You were twenty-five. We thought that we had our whole lives in front of us, but we were wrong.

We were taking the honeymoon that we had been unable to take seven years earlier; the one that we had talked about ever since then. I watched you reading beside me. You used to like reading those Tom Clancy novels, the ones where the good guys always won, and the bad guys always got what they deserved.

I rubbed the side of your leg and you smiled. I wanted to interrupt your reading, but I decided not to. You had a contented faraway look on your face, and I know how you hated to be bothered mid-sentence.

"Tonight's in-flight movie will be *Four Weddings and a Funeral*," the stewardess called over the speakers. "We will be coming around shortly with headphones."

Fuck off, I thought. I could see you thinking the same thing. The film was a fan favorite, but not the kind of flick that most people wanted to watch during their first leg of an eight-hour service. You looked at me questioningly and I shrugged as if to say, 'Why not?'

Then, for the next couple of hours I watched the movie as you read. Occasionally you would let your book down. You would yawn and rub your eyes. Our hands would meet, and we would smile.

We were on our way!

The movie ended and I decided to take a nap. It has been over twenty years, and it is amazing how clear my memory of this is. Most days I can't remember what I had for breakfast, but I remember that brief period of restlessness as a drink trolley passed. It knocked into my arm, and I dreamt that I was back home. I was gardening and God was

speaking to me through the clouds. He was saying, "If you want to live to be an old man, then you are going to have to learn to live through this."

"Live through what?" I demanded, sensing somehow that I did not want to know. I shook my fist in impotent rage. *What did He know?* – I wondered. He was just a fairy tale for adults – *Wasn't he? WASN'T HE?!?!*

I could hear Yoko Ono shrieking that John Lennon classic – *and we ALL SHINE ON, like the MOON and the SUN and the STARS* – and there was a McDonald's drive-through smell in the air, like dirty deep fryers. It made the food in my stomach turn a bit, and it woke me up.

Your book was in your lap, and you were watching out the window. I closed my eyes again and I allowed myself to drift into an even deeper sleep.

I remember a hard jolt. It snapped me awake. There was a lot of noise. An air mask had slapped rudely against my ear. When I turned to you, outraged, I noticed how your face had drained of color. You were in shock. Your breath was shallow, and your skin was clammy and white.

You were speaking but I couldn't understand you. It was like you were talking through a mouthful of ice chips. "Blook!" You pointed outside. "*Blook! Blook! Outslided! Drier!*"

I followed your gaze, and your words were translated in my mind - *Look! Look! Outside! Fire!*

I could feel my own scream begin to creep and crawl its way from out of my throat. "It's going to be alright!" I shrieked.

You gripped my arm, and you began to panic. You were afraid and the terror in your eyes reflected my own fears. "*Is it going to be all right?*" You asked, and you calmed me, and I was able to nod my head.

But will we be alright? I wondered, or was I just telling you what you needed to hear? And did it matter either way?

You released your seatbelt to snuggle up closer to me.

"Yes," I replied, confident now. "We will be alright."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

I remember how you trusted me. I wrapped my arms around you, and we took comfort in each other's closeness. You were strong in that moment, because I was strong, and I was strong because you needed me to be strong.

"I love you," you told me.

"I love you too."

The noises came from all around us, but the sound from the intercom was the loudest of all: "This is your captain speaking. Please stay calm. Please remain seated..." etc. There was a lot more screaming and crying. The desperate noises were unbearable.

I do not remember much after that, and for a while after that too. It is like my brain turned off. I cannot help but wonder what your last moments with me were like, and I am deeply ashamed of myself.

By the time I came to, the plane had nearly reached the water. How long I was out – minutes or only seconds – is something I will never know, but by then we had pulled ourselves into a cocoon so secure that it was silent, and all that I could hear was your shallow breathing.

"There, there," I said, for what seemed the millionth time. "Everything will be alright." I could feel your breath, steady and slow. We were both crying, but we were somewhere else, and none of this mattered.

I remember how the plane hit the water, hard, and I remember how those last few bumps, ripped you from my grip and sent you flying three feet out of your seat. I can only imagine how much further you would have gone if your head had not hit the ceiling. There was a barely audible crunch. I might have been the only one that heard it, but it seemed to echo in my mind.

I remember how you slid across the ceiling and fell into the seat two rows behind us. Then you rolled onto the floor. After that, gravity began to slowly suck you towards the back of the aircraft.

I tried to get to where you were. I tried to reach you as the plane skipped across the water, but there were so many people, and they all seemed intent on inhibiting my progress.

"*Help...*" I cried as I tried to push them aside. To no avail. Most barely budged and some pushed back, but eventually I reached your still, broken body.

I dropped to my knees, and I began to cry. Who knows if things would have been different if I could have reached you sooner?

Did you die waiting for me?

The plane eventually came to a stop, but I for one did not notice. I was too busy crying. I thought I might vomit, and then I did vomit, all over the man in the seat next to me. He cursed me out pretty good, but then his wife gave him a nudge, whispered in his ear, and he stopped right quick.

I could not think straight, and I was making a scene. You would have hated it. But what could I do? How had I let this happen?

I wanted to go back in time and strap your seatbelt back around your waist.

The flight attendants were beginning to assess the situation and take control. They said, "Stay calm," and, "Please, make an orderly line," and, "Don't worry about your luggage, folks." and, "Everything will be alright."

But the service crew were lying. So, I ignored them. Everything was not alright, and it never would be. I held you and cradled you in my arms. You looked like an angel, and you looked like you were sleeping, but there were those small lines of blood that trickled from your eyes and ears. Brain trauma. Shaken Baby Syndrome, or SIS for short. *Sometimes resulting in death.*

They say that the risk of being killed in a plane accident is one in eleven million, and that seems about right. You were my one in a million. You scoffed when I said it, but here is your proof.

I wiped the blood away with the sleeve of my jacket. I tried to lift you up into one of the chairs, but I couldn't manage it, so I combed your hair with my fingers instead.

You were always so beautiful, but people were heading toward the exits, and it was time to go.

"I love you," I whispered. I glanced around the plane. We were almost alone. The remaining stewardess was giving me the evil eye. I could practically read her mind. She was thinking – *Oh, God! On top of everything, this one is going to give us trouble.*

But I didn't intend to give her trouble. I could not tell if time had sped up or slowed down. It had been strange for a time, but now things were coming back around.

I kissed your lips one last time, then your cheeks, and then your eyes, and then I stood up.

I remember that I was still holding your hand –

And then I wasn't.