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I am awakened abruptly by the airplane window pushing hard against me. Was there an explosion? Loud noises shake me from slumber. Screams of similarly shocked people. Outside of the window, flames struggle on the wing. The otherwise docile aircraft slides through the sky. It seems to me that the flames are dangerously close to the engines...and...wouldn't there be fuel or something flammable in those engines? I sit entranced by the light show. It glows against the window glass.

A rough hand pulls me back into the commotion. I find myself on the cabin aisle floor. All around me passengers are out of their seats and being herded forward. Looking up, I see flight attendants, and those who look like pilots, pushing with pistols. No more smiles and niceties. Their voices are promises of safety and order, but under it all, deep in their eyes there is something happening in them. Earthquakes of hate.

Women clutch their children as the emergency exits are opened in an explosion of air. That's where we are being led. Are we going to evacuate the plane? Can they have enough parachutes? I don't...see any. Passengers grab whatever they can to remain among the living and plane-bound. Ears become rivulets of blood from air pressure that wasn't meant for mere mortals.

A lone elderly woman catches my attention as she mouths some words to herself. Nothing that is happening concerns her. I wonder what she is thinking as I take a place one row away from the exit. At first she was hugging the chair she stood next to...now her grip is becoming loose and her arms are extending. It happened slowly. I watched her old frame forget the pain and let the air current carry her away. Before I knew what I was doing, my

left arm had reached out and around the waist of this woman I didn't know from Eve. My right kept steady hold on a chair in the last row before the open door. I pulled this woman between my arms on either side of the chair.

Once I had a steady grip and a good foothold, I began to truly grasp the situation. I was five feet from the open exit over the wing. All around me people pushed back as far as they could, crushing those behind them. In reaching out for the woman who was now quivering within my grasp, I came ever closer to imminent danger. The danger of being thrown to the wind. She, meanwhile, was mumbling to who, I gathered, was her late husband, and then to her God.

In the corner of my eye, I caught something out of place in the chaos. A face in the short distance down the aisle, uncovered by the winds effect on the curtain that separates First Class from coach. This motionless face peered at us, although most were too petrified to notice him. There was no commotion in his section. No gale force winds blowing from opened emergency exits. Judging from row upon row of hands gripping arm rests, it became clear that those in that section were strapped in with no plans of going anywhere. Didn't they know about the danger of the plane becoming one big fireball? The image came into my head of a comet falling to earth. Hard! A sight to be seen! Nevermind the mass of people that were trapped inside. Did the people in the forward cabin believe that we could make it safely to an airport. Something about the middle-aged, big-business face watching us, taking in our every movement, made me uneasy.

One after another, people were flung from the plane by the flight staff. These poor passengers fell on and clung to

anyone in their path, thus dislodging others with the weight of their bodies. Those whose fingers could find nothing fell into the suction of air and were whisked out of the plane. Their screams trailed off quickly and were replaced by the angry wind. I tried to break through the old woman's mumbling to convince her to take a hold of the chair in front of us for herself. She didn't respond but shook her head slowly with a look that seemed to say "What's the use?!"

All at once, the plane veered to the right and a large man crashed into me heavily. I bounced off the seating separation wall and was pulled out the exit. I tumbled and turned in the air and watched the woman I sheltered in my arms follow soon after me. She fell loosely, calmly, with so much grace that it seemed she was meant to fly.

Watching her convinced me to enjoy the freedom of floating in the deep blue sky. The ground was a dark shadow of prickly trees and rolling hills. And I was flying...not falling. Joyfull, would be the best way to describe it. A secret experience that felt holy. It brought me closer to God, if only in one minutely significant way. Command over the sky. The earth below me...at my fingertips. I thought about my family. About the holidays, and the pain my death would cause. I thought about my Grandmother, who didn't need one more worry, and my brother who would have to watch after the family on his own. A pigeon...or raven (it's hard to tell in the night) flew by without even noticing me. I turned to look for it, and...

I was on the ground. Or rather in the ground. The force of my landing had created a crater the size of me. I sat up with my arms behind me for support. No pain. Nothing broken. Just a slight headache from coming to such a

complete stop. In the distance, I could hear the cold, dry staccato of other passengers falling around me. Then an ear-piercing scream! I climbed out of my hovel to see where it came from. Nothing above me but stars and a clear white moon.

Craters filled the landscape. As I explored, I noticed that not everybody fared as well as I did. In fact, only a few. I followed a second scream, just like the first, as it trailed off into an intake of air. Looking down into a hole, I found the same woman I had tried to help on the plane! She seemed a bit dazed. I called out to her and offered my hand to pull her out of the ditch. Slowly she caught onto the fact that she was still alive and she climbed to her feet easier than I had seen her move before. She grabbed my hand in a tight grip and I pulled her up. I asked if she had any idea why we were still alive. She scrunched her face to show she was thinking hard but gave in to shaking her head. She told me her name was Ruth and that she had wanted to die. After she lost her husband last winter, she didn't know what to live for, but here she stood.

"The Lord must have work for me still!" she said. I wondered if that was enough. "My son was sending me to an old folks home in Florida," she rambled, "for fear that I wouldn't be able to take care of myself" Not sure what else to do, we walked together away from the moon, towards the sunrise. We talked as we went. The more I learned of her only made me wonder how her son could ever think that this lady needed someone to watch over her. She seemed to know exactly what she was doing.

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