

Carolyn Kirsch

## SO THERE YOU ARE

You're sitting on the tarmac for over an hour and a half now. No beverages. No air conditioning. You're in the middle seat. A sleeping male mouth on your right, wide open, has denture breath. The obese rolls from the woman on your left are draping themselves under the armrest as if they were a croissant. Security confiscated your water bottle. You feel slightly hung over from your solitary Valentine's Day celebration last night. Who cares if James didn't call? Who cares if you never see him again? You do. But you don't allow this thought to interrupt your rancor about sitting on the tarmac.

You close your eyes; try to disassociate yourself. You do guided imagery...a glowing ball of light flowing through your limbs, one at a time, finally resting gently in the center of your chest. Your eyes snap open. You feel as if you're having a heart attack. Pressure high, racing pulse, you're sweating. You talk yourself down, assuring yourself that this is anxiety; perhaps you chose the wrong imagery for a claustrophobic stuck in a motionless 747 on the tarmac.

Concentrate on something pleasant. Sheep, martinis, massage. James. He could have had the decency to call. Just to say:

'I can't talk but am thinking of you.'" And you'd say:

"Thank you, James... that means so much to me."

Classy. And hang up. Don't hold him there too long. Don't take a big chunk out of his life. Just let him throw you that all-important wee crumb. He's a crummy bastard, that's what he is. You knew it going into this.

Ding-ding. Okay, something's happening. The well-modulated, deliberately scripted voice of the pilot comes over the PA system:

"We'd like to thank you for flying with us today." You wonder who is flying with them today. You want to fly up to the microphone and rewrite the script:

"We'd like to thank you for sitting on the tarmac with us today."

The disembodied voice continues with his loop.

"And we thank you for your patience. We should be out of here before too long."

Operative words are 'should' and 'before too long.' These are the words of a politician avoiding the particulars of a policy. These are the words of an ob-gyn nurse as a woman in labor is screaming her bloody head off, threatening to see her husband in hell before she'll ever let him touch her again. You want someone to quantify 'before... too... long' for you. Before. Earlier in time. Too. In addition to. Long. Extending a relatively great distance. This is what they've reduced you to. You're an intelligent person sitting with your knees almost touching your chest, jiggling an iPad, looking up definitions. You feel like bursting into the lyrics of "*Seasons of Love*," screaming out "*five hundred, twenty five thousand, six hundred minutes, how do you measure the life of a woman or a man?*" You want these people to know how they are making you waste your life in tiny increments of tarmac.

Why do you smell bacon? Who brought bacon on board? Isn't that illegal? A bomb could be wrapped in a corn dog these days. Get off this subject.

Why can't cocktails be served in the "before too long?" James is a martini drinker. Gets amorous after two. Maybe there'll be a message on your home phone. Using a landline can be sexy these days. Get off this subject, too.

You feel a little "*hello*" in your bladder area. Hello what? Not now while you and your seatmates are impersonating a Reuben's sandwich. You haven't had anything liquid in over two hours. Why can't the urinary tract shut down during tarmac crises? You don't need

any more pressure from your nether region. You have enough on your plate for now. Why are you thinking about food?

James always wakes up about 3 am to stumble to the bathroom, then back to bed throwing his arm around your ribs and slipping back into sleep, sweet breath on your neck as you slip away with him. That was only a couple of weeks ago. Two long weeks ago. Interminable weeks ago.

Sex is like food. You need it, you want it, you have it and for a while you're satisfied. And then you get hungry again. What if the deli is no longer open? Closed for repairs? Or worse yet, relocated? You never knew his middle name. Now he's gone. Probably forever. He and his Hermes cologne.

Ding-ding. Ding-ding. Denture Dude startles and looks out the window expecting to see the Rockies. Baggage carts trundling around below perplex him.

"We're still on the effing ground?"

"Yep."

"What time is it?"

"In LA or in NY?"

"Now."

You give him LA time. "2:23."

"Son of a bitch."

This guy's got a scintillating vocabulary. You liked him better asleep.

A high, nasal New York-accented female voice pierces the PA system. Admonitions abound regarding imminent take-off and having all seatbelts in place. Your bladder perks up at this news. You practically crawl over Croissant Lady. Stepping smartly, you hope,

into the aisle. Losing your balance with this spritely maneuver you practically sit in a button-up type's lap, which delights him no end.

"Scuse, huh, me."

"Oh, no problem." He smiles a big toothy grin as his sweaty palm lands on your arm. "Have a nice trip. See you on the return."

What a jerk. You hope he's gone by the time you return.

You sprint to the loo with a stewardess making clucking noises in your wake. Mission accomplished. Returning, the sweaty palm guy is craning his neck out the aisle happily awaiting your return. What did you do to deserve this? Was it that maybe-married man you had a brief tryst with in San Francisco last year? Is that why you're in airplane hell?

"So, I hope everything came out all right?"

"You're in insurance, right?"

"How did you know?"

"Just a hunch."

Why does he look pleased about this? You meant to insult him; get him off your radar. You slam yourself back into pretzel position number four; throw in ear buds. Insurance-Man tries to cut through but you have the cast recording of 'Hamilton' cranked and ain't nothing cutting through that. You once met Lin-Manuel in person. Why can't he be sitting next to you now, the two of you talking over future genius level projects, catching up on the ins and outs of show biz? Or James. You'd let James have the window seat; you'd share cocktails, hold hands.

Taking off almost 3 hours late. Two stiff vodka tonics later you're feeling a little more benevolent about everything. Your Chicken a la Francesca arrives. Francesca must have

had a thing for corrugated cardboard but you don't care. You're on your way home. To your empty apartment. Get off this subject.

You try to watch "The Big Short" but nothing makes any sense. You don't even reconcile your checkbook much less care about Wall Street's shenanigans. To sleep, perhaps to dream.

Ding-Ding. Ding-ding. Landing, struggling through everyone standing in the aisle at the same time, grabbing at overhead bags, clocking one another with their elbows. Is it your imagination or did Insurance-Man intentionally touch your waist? A little below your waist? Who cares at this point? Straggling through the tube, exhausted, missing anything meaningful in your life, you arrive at Kennedy's Gate number 47. Anxious family members waving at their loved ones. It's almost midnight and you'll need a cab. Somewhere you spy a tall, dark head of hair, arm up waving red roses. Sweet and unbelievably depressing. Until you see James' face coming towards you. Stunned, you wish you'd brushed your teeth.

"I fell asleep last night and with the time difference I forgot to call. Happy Valentine's Day"

Red roses, petals a little droopy, wrapped in crumpled cellophane and wilted purple ribbon.

You tentatively take them and sniff one. The smell of his Hermes permeates the inside of your brain, firing your neurons, releasing firecrackers of neurotransmitters. How did this happen?

He pulls you to him; the rose cellophane crinkles, your sweater falls. He kisses you full on the mouth. Tourists flood around the two of you, shoving, pushing. It's New York. Nobody cares about two men kissing. The next gaggle of passengers just want to get closer

to their destination, trip the light fantastic to the tarmac, perhaps even make an eventual departure.

And you have arrived.