

## DOLORIS AND MARVIN

Quickly she undresses, pulls down the sheet and gets into bed. "Jump in, sweetheart, jump right in," she calls while smoothing the sheet with her hand.

Ever so slowly, he loosens his belt, unsnaps his trousers, lowers the zipper and empties his pockets of wallet, handkerchief, two quarters and a few pennies before he shakes his pelvis gently to allow his pants to slip down to the floor.

She slides her naked body across the sheets while watching his dance.

After matching one pant leg to the other, he folds the trousers and places them on the chair across the room. With studied, calculated steps, he approaches the bed, positioning himself on the edge where he begins to undo his shirt, first the right sleeve, then the left. Then he raises his hands to his collar to push the top button through the buttonhole and works his way down, one round white plastic fastener at a time. When done, he carries his folded shirt to the chair across the room.

Doloris turns from her side to her back to her stomach, massaging her silky body with the many cool fibers of the sheet. Occasionally, a strand of her hair leaves its moist pore for the bed. "I'm ready for ya, Marv."

"Me, too, dear. Me, too."

He lowers himself onto the bed beside her and guides his naked feet beneath the covers to the end of the mattress. Before setting the rest of his body down, he grabs the remote for the tv and fingers the proper button: "On." With this accomplished, he rolls over and goes to sleep.

## ON SECOND THOUGHT

Now you are here although unsure where here is. You feel confused and try to order the confusion into something definable. The metal and human debris falling several feet away, you don't recognize as such. This your mind will not process. Then you hear screams and, in looking for the source, you discover several people with their arms and legs spread wide apart, their hair and clothing in what seems to be an ironed, uniform direction. You're not sure why they look the way they do. Their position and expression, you conclude, is highly unusual.

Then, fortunately or unfortunately, it begins to come back to you. You were on an airplane. And, fortunately or unfortunately, you define the present situation. You are falling. You are falling to the earth. You are going to be dead.



You've never gone through a series of thoughts like this before. What do you do? What choices do you have? You look at others falling with you. One woman's mouth is locked open in a perpetual scream. She looks pained. A man upside down is vomiting. He turns your stomach. Another woman appears to be praying and yet another is clinging onto what appears to be a blanket.

You need to go to the bathroom and realize you'll have to hold it in. You're not sure if you're successful or not.

Your mouth is dry. You have mint Life Savers in your pocket and with difficulty pull them out, but before you get one into your mouth, the wind grabs it away.

Your blouse has become untucked and you try to tuck it in. This feat proves to be impossible. Every time you push the material inside your pants, the wind pulls it out. You soon give up.

You want to talk to someone and the first few attempts to formulate words don't work. Or maybe the sound of the wind drowns out your voice. You try again and feel your lips to make sure they're moving. As your hands near your eyes, you see they're full of blood. This makes you recall that something's amiss. You've almost forgotten. You'd like to forget. You are forgetting. You've forgotten where you just were—on a plane. You've forgotten that you were waiting impatiently for the steward to bring a Bloody Mary, your husband asleep beside you. You're beginning to forget every thought you ever identified with yourself.

Then, for the first time, you look down. You are approaching a green and brown marble something—you're not sure what. Then you figure it out. You know exactly. You're going to be dying soon. By tomorrow, you will be dead. The reality of the situation finally hits you: these are your last living moments.

Suddenly, you begin to sing. You've always envied Liza Minnelli and you bellow the lyrics from *Cabaret* as loud as possible. You begin to kick your legs. You've always wanted to be a Broadway star. Only your girlfriend from sixth grade knew and because she laughed when you told her, you've told no one about it since. Now you feel great. You think you are really talented. Your voice resonates beautifully. You believe, in fact, that you may be more talented than Liza Minnelli. Your open arms invite in the audience. The movement comes to you naturally. Yes, you *are* talented. For the first time in your life, you are happy. You hope to land on Broadway.

—Cheryl Pallant

Richmond, VA