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## The Question

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Schoepe: The Question

# Essay

## The Question

by K.E. Schoepe

As I stand at the kitchen sink washing the breakfast dishes, I hear his shuffle on the stairs. His low heavy breathing becomes more audible as he descends the stairs and crosses the kitchen to seat himself at the table. He draws his Blue terrycloth bathrobe around his thin bare legs and stares at his hands.

This man is my husband's father. We seldom greet one another in the conventional way. There are no "good-mornings" between us; we merely co-exist with little warmth or communication. Yet, this morning, there is communication. He opens his rusty old mouth to speak. "Do you think there's an afterlife?" he asks. "Do you think there's a heaven?" He asked this same question yesterday morning but I avoided answering by simply walking away. I know I can't escape a second time because the tone of his voice is too insistent. He reaches for an orange, begins removing the peel and waits for my answer.

Why should I answer his question at all? Why should I respond to this old man who has caused me such grief in the six years since he came to live in my house? When he first came, following his wife's death, I felt sorry for him and tried to please him. But I learned my lesson hard and fast. He's not to be trusted. He's a betrayer of loyalties and love; a bitter old man who finds no joy in life and resents the joy of others. He feels he is entitled to all those things he never thinks of giving. What right does he have to ask me this question regarding his soul?

There exists an enormous gulf between us. We have nothing in common. He knows nothing of literature, philosophy, music or art. He is a caveman once removed, motivated by ancient fears and beliefs. Yet, his blood flows in my children's veins. Was he once as bright and new as they?

As I steal a glance at his blank face, it's incomprehensible that this man, who sits at my kitchen table, was created in God's image. I would never think to ask him the same question he has asked of me because I have no confidence in his answer. He, however, retains a child's faith that someone will know the truth of it. Does he value my opinion or is he testing me? I'll never know.

But wait, perhaps we do have something in common after all. This useless old man and I would both like to have an answer to the question of our final and eternal destiny. He asked me the same question a few years ago and I answered, "No." I told him I do not believe in an afterlife. I wanted to hurt him and tried to do it in this way. I don't want to hurt him now, therefore, I answer "Yes." This is not an answer from the heart. I turn to catch the look on his face and discern a slight smile. He seems satisfied with the affirmation of what I suddenly realize he always believed to be so.



## There's An Airplane In Our Yard

by Scott Tomkowiak

For some odd reason, the neighborhood was fairly silent that day; no auto engines racing down the small streets, no small kids screaming their lungs out. The pond, which was about a thousand yards from my house, did not contain any young fishermen attempting to capture a three pound prize. This is what the suburbs are all about.

Our habitat rests approximately three miles from the nearest and busiest airport, so noise from the gigantic flying machines are typical annoyances. At times, when one would pass by, you could almost see the profiles of the faces next to tiny windows.

Remembering the calamity isn't so difficult. At first, you feel the destruction through your entire body.

Coming out the rear door of my house and looking in a northerly direction, I spotted a jet just rising over the afternoon horizon. One could already tell something was amiss as the ship was barely clearing treetops about a mile away. Trailing behind, was thicker than usual black smoke; the kind that comes out of coal burning chimneys. It looked like a tremendous duststorm whirling about.

As the plane passed not quite directly overhead, the noise from the struggling engines made the windows of the nearby houses shake violently as they would during an earthquake. The jet then passed and slid through the air going south, still not rising enough to get out of danger.

Abruptly, it made a "U" shaped turn without losing any altitude. This occurred about two miles from where I was standing. It seemed as though the plane was coming back to the airport to make an emergency landing, though as it turned out, it missed the target by miles.

As the jet came toward me again, I could sense it losing a considerable amount of altitude, almost as if the plane were being lowered by a crane. It was about a half mile away from where I watched, when I prayed that it wouldn't crash in my backyard. When it passed above my head, the ship was about ten feet higher than the rooftops, the letters "TWA" looking bigger than life. The plane was then silent as it glided by, the engines had already given up and died. At this point, I stopped watching and immediately dashed into the house and ran down the stairs to the basement.

The sound of the crash, as it impacted the site of the pond, was a thunderous explosion, a mammoth sound that had the characteristics of the detonation of an H-bomb. As I peered out of the basement window, I could see the smoke billowing and embers rising above the crash site. I was afraid that some of the fiery embers would come to rest on rooftops and start more fires in the residential areas.

After some two minutes, although it seemed longer, I HEARD A STRANGE SOUND, NOT UNLIKE A FIRE ALARM. Waiting for a massive fleet of fire equipment to arrive, I suddenly realized that the sound was emitting from my alarm clock and the entire event was just a dream.

Just to be sure, however, I checked out the window to make certain there wasn't a 747 jet in my backyard.