

You're sitting in a red plastic chair. Uncomfortable - hell yes, it's uncomfortable. It's straight hard back digs into your spine. You bend over placing your elbows on your knees and rest your chin in your cupped hands. It's too bad you've gotta wait here another 50 minutes. Next to you, a man in a red shirt and Bermuda shorts sits and stares. His heavy breathing gives you the creeps. Perhaps he's smoked one too many cigarettes. You've already distinguished the odor. Smoke oozes out of every pore in his body. You'd get up and move, but you can't. The section is filled. There are people everywhere. Tall people, short people, skinny and fat, old and young - you couldn't find another seat if you wanted to. Like fingernails on a chalkboard, his breathing scrapes at your hard white skull.

You try to ignore his presence. Out the window - that's a good place to look. It's dark outside, but you wouldn't know from looking. Thousands of lights give the impression of fake day - light and time created by man. In the distance, rows of little lights . . . blue, red, and white flicker - blink, blink, blink. Lining the runways, these lights guide pilots safely back to the ports of glaring white light. You wonder how on earth they can see. How do they actually steer those planes into the terminals? The wings are really long. In the dark, it'd be almost impossible to see. They have such teeny windows. If you had to fly one of those fuckers, you'd hit something for sure.

Your flight leaves in 45 minutes now. Forty-five minutes. God, if it wasn't for him you wouldn't be sitting here right now. He had to move to Boulder which, of course, means you have to go visit. Driving takes two whole days, so there is really no other option. Until now, flying wasn't an option either. Your focus changes from the lights outside to the planes. Huge aluminum cans - that's why they really look like. Big coke cans with wings on each side. It's hard to believe they actually fly. You've seen what they look like when they crash. Millions of tiny pieces clutter the earth like a jigsaw puzzle waiting to be reassembled. Why did he have to move so far away?

Once you board the plane, you know you're going to have to deal with some moron sitting next to you. If it's not "Bermuda shorts man," it will be some kid. You can see him now. Sitting there, smiling away, some blonde-haired little boy with plastic wings pinned to his shirt. This is his first flight too, but he's excited. You may feel smaller, but at least you're stronger. You'd be the first one out if you have to escape. You could reach the emergency door first. That kid wouldn't stand a chance, and you'd know exactly what to do. They taught you during class. Grab the red handle, pull up to the right, and push out. There are inflatable yellow slides at the two middle exits, and emergency windows in front. Two months ago, you couldn't set foot on a plane without having an attack. Two hundred dollars and a couple of pills later you are sitting in an airport. Thirty minutes left!

You've been planning this trip for months. You told him to wait by the phone. If for some reason you couldn't get on the plane if you couldn't make it, you'd give him a call. You'd call and tell him not to wait. Scanning the room, your eyes drift and change focus. "People-watching" - that's what your best friend calls it. It would entertain you for hours at the mall, but it's not working now. You are annoyed by their presence. Their actions irritate you, and you're not sure why. They heighten your sensation of fear. Yet, you also find yourself humming the old Billy Joel tune "But we will all go down together." This really doesn't comfort you much.

Twenty-five minutes! They're boarding the plane now. First class then coach. Rows 1 through 6. That's you! You wait in the crowded line. "Bermuda shorts man" is behind you this time. Thank god! Slowly, you make your way up to the plastic airline attendant. Clutching your ticket, you watch the passengers in front of you disappear - one by one. In such moments of observance, all sound seems to disappear. You wonder quietly to yourself who they too are going to visit. Is it really worth it? Who will grieve for them when they too disappear? Relying solely upon your feet to keep moving, you somehow manage to keep up with the line's pace.

Looking up, you finally hear her. "Miss, may I have your ticket please?" Caught completely off guard, you hand it over obligingly. As she tears your ticket in half, you stare blindly down the endless hallway. Two more steps, and . . .

-Kristen Frank