

Never Observed

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By : **Sambelini**

Follow me as I lead you behind the pilot's cock-pit door to witness a hijacking. This was just a writing assignment I found from my Grade 11 English class...



Published on  
**Booksie**

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Normal 0 Perhaps you are on a bus bench listening to happy birds sing, or huddling under a blanket by the fire as rain pours down your windows. Perhaps all your friends had homework and you were caught on a rainy day with nothing to do. But now and then we all need to pass the time, so let me take you somewhere more interesting.

We presently sit on thick padded chairs, there being enough to seat about 200 people. Despite their thickness, the chairs do not promise a lot of comfort for the next hour or so. Flight lists are posted on a nearby screen and the itinerary item to which the people around us frequently gaze flashes from English to Spanish, neither language offering freedom to board for quite a while. Our eyes begin to drift, and rest only a moment on each person and object surrounding us. Suddenly called to our attention is the disrepair of the place. It seems old and shabby to our inquisitive eyes. We note the worn seats of our chairs and the well-trodden paths dug into the once thick carpet, like straight-cut trails through forest undergrowth. A large chip in the wall offers mystery of how an obscure airport terminal would acquire such a wound. You've begun to wonder why I took you here. From the comfort of your fireplace or the sweet chirp of the birds by the park bench, you now feel an oppressive humidity and deathly silence. All is quiet but the agitating tick of a five-dollar clock on the wall. But may I remind you, we are only observers, never observed, and I might suggest we begin by observing the man to our left.

Some say people-watching is a rude invasion of other's lives. Not rude as in gum-chewing or picking the nose but rather because the subjects do not know they are being monitored. They say you may see something you were never meant to, but if everyone lived by this rule no one would ever have pet fish. Being a traveller, I say, when in an airport or train station hours pass faster than a jet plane if one keeps his or her eyes open.

In any case, the man to our left is now hunching over in a large raincoat. The sky seems clear today, but the weather has been anything but consistent lately. Still, the room seems too warm for a long, even thin, windbreaker as his in dark grey. He leans forward, a heavy stomach obstructing most flexibility. His hands are clasped and shake ever so slightly, and even from here, four seats away, we can guess they are clammy. You begin to feel sorry for him, imagining he is flying to a funeral or to say his last words to a dying parent in the hospital.

ACHOO!

He sneezes nervously.

His jacket flicks open as a camera's shutter and some metal object winks at us.

Don't be so nervous! It could be a cell phone or a set of keys peeking out of an inside pocket. But you look as if you'll soon be sick, so we should probably watch someone else for now. The man across the aisle is checking the time on the clock and comparing it to his own watch. This is odd, of course, but there must be something more worthy of our attention.

Ah, here comes a young couple, sitting just on our right. The man is tall with dark hair and pale steel-coloured eyes, giving him a ghost-like appearance when combined with his pale complexion. The woman on his arm looks strong and serious, her firm mouth unsmiling. She is very beautiful, but unnaturally so. Her fanciful clothing could be of French fashion and her heavily made-up face could be hiding any number of flaws.

You maintain a natural front as you examine them discretely, but must I remind you? We are only observers, never observed. Don't be afraid to look them in the eye. As the girl looks up at the flight lists you peer deep into her eyes. Within the light brown drops of honey you see threads of rippling gold weave horizontally through her left iris and vertically through her right.

You push yourself back, away from her, and I understand that this subtle peculiarity has disturbed you. Would it be the wrong time to mention that the man beside her has twin lines running through his eyes, only silver? These are just interesting observations, and that's precisely what we are here for.

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The beauty of being an invisible entity, just searching for adventure, is that we are no longer bound by the tick of the clock, nor by the "Delayed" noticed posted by our flight. If you wish we may skip ahead to board the plane or, really, we could skip off to any time or place you wish, but for now we should stick to one adventure. Yes, so the future it is, just 73 minutes ahead is all we need in order to hear the announcer call flight 4791 to board. As the other passengers seated around us begin to form a line in front of the two airport personnel, I lead you on ahead of them into the plane. We are going to the cockpit, and this part may bother you because we will have to pass through the closed door. It's really not as bad as it sounds, though your natural instincts will likely ask you to stop before you walk through the closed aperture. You stop halfway to see what the inside of the door looks like, but there is nothing to see because there is no light on the inside of doors.

Now, in the cockpit, we see the pilot and his co-worker have finished their pre-flight safety checks and are presently relaxing in their chairs. We listen to their idle chatter, but do not pay close attention. Since you have never been in this part of a plane before, we seize this opportunity to look it over. It seems snug, both because this isn't a large plane and because the myriad of buttons gives the small room a cluttered feel. The pilots adjust their headsets onto their ears and call in some codes to the airport base.

We hear the "All clear" return from the radio and the pilot begins circling over to the ramp. We faintly hear the flight attendants on the other side of the heavy door, delivering emergency instructions in both English and Spanish. The pilots chatter over this to each other. The superior here seems to have heard the directions enough times to relay them back in either language, but his assistant seems new to the experience.

"It's no trouble, Matthews," says the pilot, "If you've made it through the training, you'll find this like a walk in the park." He pauses, "Or rather a flight over a park, I suppose."

"Well, thanks Jameson," Matthews responds weakly, still seeming unsure of the encouragement, "I guess I'm being a little silly to worry. It's just... I just squeaked by on the exams. Not the written ones, those were fine, but I was never strong on the in-flight tests."

"Like I said: Don't worry about it," the pilot reiterates, "Those tests make it all seem worse anyhow. You know they specifically cause problems just so you will have to deal with them? Besides, I'll be here all the way. It's only a two-hour flight. This is a good starting route." Jameson turns, smiling at him, and Matthews puts on a more relaxed face. But as soon as the other man turns back to the controls, the co-pilot resumes his worrying.

The ramp is nearing and the plane gains speed, rushing toward the angled ground ahead. Faster than either of us expected, the incline is reached and we are in the air. Looking from the large window, your face reflects the queasy feeling in your stomach. Don't be afraid, we are only observers and never observed. We are unreachable to this situation, though it seems so reachable to us. Your muscles calm down and your eyes show a more excited appreciation for the view. Ahead you see mountains and under us you see the outskirts of a large city.

After a few minutes of watching us rise higher, we level off, still with a clear view of our planet since the day has remained cloudless. We hear some muffled sounds from behind the door before a knock. Just three clear staccato beats ringing through the small compartment.

"What would that mean?" asks the nervous co-pilot, adding an extra forte to the note of anxiety in his voice.

"I don't know," answers his coach, his perplexed look not calming Matthews in the least, "I've never had anyone knock on the door before."

Knock knock knock

The call is repeated, a perfect echo of the first, like a signature of the unnamed caller.

"Hello? What is it?" inquires the navigator.

"It's Jane Brown," answers a young girl's voice, "Could you open the door? We need some help."

As the pilot continues to ask the girl the nature of her intrusion, I take your hand and lead you back through the door. The pilot has good reason to be suspicious, since there is no reason for a stewardess to call on him. And now, on this side of the wall we see his suspicions are perfectly well founded.

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Jane stands with her hands held behind her back by the beautiful young woman we saw before, her husband discretely holding a knife to the girl's ribs. She tries in vain to answer the pilot's questions, strongly depending on the practiced liars surrounding her for responses. But even so, her excuses don't sound credible. The man's grip tightens around his knife, he forces more pressure on it and the girl winces, more in terror than in pain. The young woman whispers threats into her captive's ear and digs her long, varnished nails into Miss Brown's arms.

Your face morphs from horror to confusion, and back and forth between until your features rest somewhere in the middle. You step backward and then forward, cower away and then bravely face it. You try to push the criminals away. Though you seem to pass through them as the door, the man does react by uncomfortably rolling his shoulders, as if he senses us watching him. But it is ultimately futile and the reaction weakens at your second try. You give up this struggle and look to me with pleading eyes.

“Why can't we help?” you beg me, though you know the answer.

Only observers, never observed. But there is still hope, and that lies in the pilot's judgment of the situation. Follow me back through the door, but only half way this time. Stand like this, do you see? With the right side of your body on one side of the door, your right eye seeing the criminals and their hostage, but your left side in the cockpit with the pilot and his subordinate.

From your left we hear, all in a whisper, “Well, what should we do then, do you think?” from the co-pilot, “If you think they are criminals, I guess we shouldn't open the door?”

“Well, why do we not want the plane to get hijacked, Matthews?” Jameson cleverly whispers his answer, a question for a question.

“Obviously if they hijack the plane we'll be killed!” the other not so quietly retorts, without catching the tone in Jameson's voice which betrayed his question was a test.

“So, it has nothing to do with the passengers,” he says simply, then his tone changes to a more serious pitch. This question is life or death, “Are you willing to sacrifice the innocent lives of our passengers to save ourselves?”

His voice beginning to slip out of its whisper, Matthews says, “No, I guess not. So then what do we do? If we don't let them in, we're leaving them to rampage the rest of the plane and if we do let them in we're basically handing over the steering wheel.” The co-pilot is quite frustrated with Jameson, now feeling very belittled and yet realizing he truly has less experience.

“I have a plan!” announces the pilot quietly but emphatically before picking up his radio. He clicks it on, introduces himself, his plane, and his flight number, and relates their situation, “Me and my co-pilot, Matthews, have good reason so suspect we are about to be hijacked. I suggest sending rescue planes out ASAP, since I am hoping for survivors. The plane will be on auto-pilot for a while but we'll try to land it in the Gulf of Mexico.”

As he continues to relate details, we'll switch our attention to the other side, where new movement is occurring. The heavyset man in the dark grey raincoat is coming up the aisle towards the huddle by the cockpit door. A cart has been wheeled in between the married couple with Jane and the rest of the plane, probably to further restrict the flyers view of their actions. The man begins to wheel the cart away but catches a glimpse of the woman's hands clamped around the stewardess's wrists. He coolly sidles back to his seat, not showing any recognition of what the husband and wife are doing.

We hear a brief, “Alright, now no matter WHAT anyone says into this radio, DON'T stop the rescue planes and DON'T stop monitoring this flight, alright? All right. Over and out.” The pilot relaxes. He presses the button to initiate the seatbelt light and turns to his assistant, giving him a nod. The lower ranking pilot presses a button to open the door.

Jane is pushed in first and the woman is close behind. She takes one hand from the girl's arms to pull a gun from her belt. Her husband is right beside them, all cramped in this little space, he relocates the knife to Jane's throat and slides the door closed with his foot. There is still a small crack between the door and its frame but the passengers outside can't see enough through it for anyone to worry. We follow the group in, both our eyes in the cockpit now.

The woman makes her demands to the pilots as her husband begins skilfully tying up the stewardess with one hand. After her arms are tied, his wife takes his weapon and holds it to the girl's throat again as

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he ties her legs and gags her. They throw her to the corner and continue. The man takes back his knife and places it at Matthew's neck.

The pilot remains calm but his co-worker seems shocked and is presently gaping at the two invaders. Only now that the woman has finished instructing Mr. Jameson where his new destination is can Matthews speak.

"Who are you?" he blurts. It's a completely ridiculous question, but I suppose he's quite shaken up.

"There's no sense in asking something like that. Who cares? They have a gun, so whoever they are we'd best listen to them," answers Jameson before the law-breakers.

He seems happy to do whatever they ask, to the point where the woman is very suspicious. But her husband tells her to stop worrying.

"You've got a gun to his head! Of course he's glad to do anything you say!" Though seeming unconvinced and keeping an ever-watching eye on both navigators, the woman relaxes slightly. Just as she begins to think their task is as good as complete, the door slides open again and in walks the grey rain-coated man from the terminal, he himself holding a gun also. He closes the door again, this time all the way.

In this new confusion, the married man points the knife toward the newcomer and his wife alternates aiming the gun at each pilot. But her attention is soon absorbed by the new addition to their party and the gunpoint rests on Matthews. At this moment, the pilot discreetly adds his own handgun to the weapons, and without warning points it at the woman and shoots. Her husband mumbles something about his sister. She falls dead and Jameson quickly takes the weapon from her hand and tosses it to his assistant who points it to the man with the knife. He, in turn, points his knife to the other man with the gun and all the while poor Jane is whimpering in the corner.

The man whose wife or sister was just killed suddenly jumps back to tackle the gun from Matthews, now realizing his weapon has been outranked. His sudden movement triggers the rain-coated man's finger and he fires at the other criminal without properly aiming. Matthews falls dead, blood dripping from his head. Tears stream down the stewardess's face as she tries her best to hide her head. Matthews' killer gasps in horror seeing he shot the wrong man and the second criminal stands up from the co-pilot's body, holding his late accomplice's gun. He points it to Jameson's head and says simply,

"Drop the gun, pilot!" knowing the other gunman will likely favour this move. Still with his original plan up his sleeve, Jameson drops the gun, and at this moment the heavyset man shoots a deadly blow at the other criminal. He picks up the last two guns from the floor and the dead man's hand, places one in his belt, and trains the other two on the pilot.

He states his demands and again Jameson willingly obliges. He takes the controls and begins turning around. We are just turning up from the south of Mexico and are near the centre of the Gulf. Without warning Jameson jerks heavily on the controls pulling the nose of the plane up and up, higher and higher.

The plane stalls. It begins spinning downward, and in the confusion the gunman loses his target and shoots aimlessly, hitting the metal box of a first-aid kit. The bullet ricochets, hitting the shooter himself in the thigh. He falls over, cursing himself for shooting his partner. The plane crashes into the water at Earth-shattering speed. The water is like cement, but the front of the plane takes the greatest part of the crash.

And now we are back by your fire as it crackles with warmth and comfort, or sitting again on your park bench. The birds are chirping lively, as if nothing in the world could go wrong and you listen to their coaxing song, trying to believe them. But you'd best hurry up because the bus has just arrived.

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