

# “On a Jet Plane”

(Untitled)

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“Ladies and gentlemen, we’ve now reached our ceiling height of thirty-two thousand feet. The sky is clear and we should be in Salt Lake City on schedule in about two hours. The seatbelt signs are off; just ask a stewardess for anything you need, enjoy the flight and thanks for flying Delta.”

Matt looked up from the book he was reading, not really needing to hear the announcement. Looking out his window, he saw the tiny patchwork quilt that was the world below. In some ways it was beautiful, but in many it was depressing, seeing how the land was forever changed by human hands. Near-perfect squares of fenced-in human territory, long scars of road connecting everything like a haphazard spider’s web, and the saddening lack of natural forest and plains that had no human intervention. It was a confusing world and a difficult life, trying to riddle meanings from things and understand the impossible, and trying to understand his position on the earth’s and life’s purpose only guaranteed constant mental turmoil.

He sighed and leaned back in the chair, taking a deep breath and remembering something vastly important and endlessly fulfilling. He half-smiled, looking across the sky at the pale blue haze. Roaring through the sky on metal wings and jet engines: At one time it was almost a normal consideration. Then it was a gross example of humans’ insatiable need to do everything, to leave nothing untouched or outside their boundaries. Now, he almost laughed, it was funny. Now, he was utilizing the speed and efficiency it provided to get from one place to another. But he grinned inside: “What do *they* know about flying?”

Now he looked at things differently. It was unexpected, but a more tolerant view came of his recent change in outlook. He knew he was unable to change things. It was how it was. But one thing was different, and that was how he lived. Now he knew all about living for the moment, and being part of the truly wild—or what was left of it. Now he lived in the ...

“Pretty nice weather, huh?”

It broke his mental serenity: A loud, penetrating voice. He turned to look back into the comparatively dim plane, and all the humans sitting in their padded seats, some trying to look important by staring at laptop computer screens, some reading books like he had been, but most just staring straight ahead at nothing.

Sitting next to him was an older man, probably in his sixties, who lacked any of the warm grandfather-like attributes. There was no warm smile, just a lonely somebody wanting attention. There was nothing else special about him, just a pinstripe white shirt and black slacks, narrow glasses and wispy hair.

“Yep,” Matt replied quietly, wanting to get back to his thoughts.

It almost worked, too. For a while he thought about visiting his friend and the boundless reserve of new options available to them for learning and exploring. He found it ironic that he was travelling the way he was. Everything in his life had been sets of contradictions before, why stop now? But just as he settled into a peaceful stare out the window at the faraway ground, he heard the abrupt voice again.

“What you reading?”

Matt held the book so the man could read its title on the cover. *In Search of the Red-tailed Hawk*. The man raised an eyebrow and was quiet, but he didn't turn his attention elsewhere.

He hated that. People trying to make idle, pointless conversation. It was as bad as always greeting people with “How are you?” and simply returning the question, where nobody ever really answers. Or worse, giving the acknowledgement, not the answer, of “fine.”

There was nothing he would value more right now than a few moments alone to his thoughts. A good deal had changed in his life since his friend visited him last — indeed both their lives. All he knew was that he wanted to consider things; the way they were before and the way they were now. If at one time he thought there was a great deal to discuss and talk about with Jared, he now realized that all that had been mere surface reflection.

He closed his eyes, keeping a finger in the book on the page he was at.

“You visiting family?”

He ignored it. *Maybe the human will think I am asleep*. His thoughts drifted from events in his life to ideas and philosophies he had on things. In a way there was a tremendous amount of consideration, much of which he had not yet discovered his viewpoint on. But something he had finally come to understand — to know beyond trust or feeling — was not to even think about it. To accept things and live, but to live a certain way...

He didn't quite know how to put it into words.

“A little homesick?”

Definitely. He was completely out of his element... A new element. That was an interesting concept. It was as if he was not really here; not really himself. But ironically, he was himself and he was here - and even more so, he *was* in his element. The sky. He admired the sky and the wind and birds' mastery of it all. But riding in a machine was different.

The flight dragged on for an hour, the old man finally stopped asking questions. Matt couldn't seem to get his mind into a passive thinking mode. It was so annoying to have so many things to think about. Plus he kept wondering stupid things like what programs were running on the laptops across the aisle, everytime he heard them beep or click. Distractions caused by the kids in the seats in front of him moving around and asking questions of their mom. The constant droning sound of

the engines and the hissing air from the passenger cooling nozzles. Everything was adding up and he was finding himself very claustrophobic and almost scared.

He didn't belong here anymore. This was so foreign and scary... The thing was that he now *knew* how to feel about it. It wasn't a prediction or a self-delusion. He felt and knew the fear he had once only thought he could understand. He relaxed and let his mind slip more into the simplicity of it all.

That was the key - feeling simpleminded and unconcerned.

The droning and hissing began to fade and passed into silence. He let himself daydream of being in a tree... of being alone and feathered. On a windy night somewhere in the mountains, with the sun below the earth and the sky a dark blue.

"Do you want these?"

Matt hesitated when he heard the sound. Dare he try and return to normal to answer or just stay in the sublime memories that were his present, his past and future? He cracked an eye open long enough to see a tiny bag of airline snacks. Barely comprehending, he waved a hand away at it, lethargically, almost as if he were sick.

The man next to him didn't seem to care as long as he got permission. He took the bag and began noisily tearing into it, just as he had before with his.

*So much shit*, he told himself, *plastic bags and huge machines, people and words...* He sighed and looked out his window again, feeling the plane banking in a slow turn. The ground seemed to never move below, but it had changed drastically from when he'd first left. There were more fields and open plains now, fewer roads and towns. But still, far too much of the land had been shaped and sculpted to humans' demanding needs.

He watched the silvery reflection off some feature of the land below, only dimly aware that the banking turn hadn't yet stopped. It was a few moments later when the seats started to bounce around and the whole jet was in turbulence.

*Reaffirmation!* He thought. *Technology and all it's faults... Humans should stay where they belong.* He watched the wing of the plane out the window, trying to reason where the problem was coming from, but had no idea on something that was so huge and inorganic.

A minute later, when the banking and the vibrating should have stopped, it had only gotten worse.

"What the hell is going on?" the man next to him demanded.

Matt ignored him, wondering whether there was a problem for real or not. He looked around to study some of the people's reactions. Basically everyone was looking around frantically trying to extract some explanation from their surroundings.

The captain came over the intercom just then, "Folks, we are having some problems with instrumentation, but don't be alarmed, we expect to have things under control in a moment."

That was it. The whole 'calm-down' speech.

Matt gritted his teeth against the annoying vibration and peered out the oval window again. Something was different, though - and in a second he knew what it was. The wing was bowed. Somehow the plane's flaps and controls had gone haywire and the thing was tearing itself apart. Before he could open his mouth to say anything, he watched as the wing literally tore itself in half.

Quite suddenly the vibrating and the joggling got worse.

Matt felt a pressure drop, and a loud hissing sound. Without even thinking about it, he knew that the stress had caused the plane hull to breach. It was as though his life had suddenly slowed down and he watched one of the greatest horrors play itself out in front of him. A plane crash in progress. *This is how it all starts.*

But he wasn't worried. Not this time...

He took a deep breath, anticipating the cabin pressure to drastically change any second. Any second when a hole ripped up in the side of the fuselage. The half-wing was spewing fuel and twisting. It would only be a moment before it twisted off completely, taking a section of the passenger wall with it.

And then it happened. A sickening creaking of metal, the sucking of pressure, and the roar of the outside air all at once. Matt felt his lungs fight against the sudden change, but he held his breath.

At an accelerating rate, the plane began to spiral downwards and to the left, in a fall that would end in its death. There were muted screams from all around him, and he watched as papers and wrappers and luggage all got sucked away. The hole was growing, and the jet was about to break in half. But still it was as if he were at some theatre and this was an interactive movie. It wasn't quite real for him.

His thought was, *how annoying, all these wrappers and things being scattered all over Nebraska. Just like humans littering even in the end.*

The sound was tremendous and the scene before him grew out of control. People were fighting for the oxygen masks, none of which had fully dropped. Nobody could breathe. Matt was beginning to notice as well, and he realized that he had to make his move.

He sucked in as much air as he could, which was only a small amount. But the pressure had almost equalized and now there was only the thin air of high altitude and the incredible roar of engines and velocity.

No sooner had he noticed this than the engines quit, whether the captain or the lack of fuel was responsible, he didn't know nor care.

He undid his seatbelt and grasped the seats in front of him, pulling his way over them. The old man next to him was motionless, apparently knocked out by the lack of oxygen. A few others were feebly trying to do something — anything — to save their lives. But the truth was that flight 4295 was destined to collide with the ground after a spinning descent.

Matt pulled his way to the fragmented hole, and pushed with all his strength to leap from it. He had managed to push his way clear of the path of the spinning jet, but was overwhelmed by the velocity of the wind. But still in a state of control and calm, he managed to concentrate.

Back to simplicity - back into that single purpose.

He became a Red-tailed Hawk. The clothes blew off in the force of the wind at the same time that feathers took hold and allowed him some degree of control.

Wings and tail, feathers and muscle; organic and light and strong. Everything a bird simply was, he was.

The air was still far too thin to breathe easily, but it was enough for him.

He locked his concentration on keeping control and holding altitude, while slowing down and trying not to hurt himself in the cauldron of turbulent air.

A minute passed, and the plane had spun downwards halfway to its doom. The air had become still with its departure and Matt settled into a long downward glide.

A very long downward glide indeed; with this much altitude he should be able to reach his friend's house before dark.

But dimly he thought, *maybe I'll just never return.*

