

First Flight

Marie Hammontree

Two passengers were waiting in the airline office for the first morning flight to Chicago. The limousine for the airport had not yet arrived. Outside it was just daylight. The streets were quiet except for the scurrying steps of an early worker and the clatter of an occasional trolley.

"Going to Chicago?" asked the old man.

"Yes," replied the girl.

"So am I. Ever been up before?"

"Yes."

"This is my first time." He paced up and down the office, stopping to finger a timetable on the counter. "Say," he said to the clerk, "how much longer before we leave?"

"About ten minutes," answered the clerk courteously. "Two of the passengers aren't here."

He sauntered outside. A policeman was standing on the corner. The old man approached him. "Just getting off or starting to work?" he inquired.

"Another hour, and I'll be finished," the cop answered. "What you doing up so early, dad?"

"I'm on my way to Chicago."

"Getting an early start, eh?" said the policeman.

"Got some business up there. I'm taking the first plane."

The cop edged away slowly. "Well, have a nice trip, dad!"

The limousine drew up, so the old man walked over to the driver. "About ready to leave?" he inquired.

"Not yet. I have to check the passenger list inside," said the driver. The old man followed him into the office and seated himself beside the girl again.

"Ever hear of the Moody Bible Institute?" he asked.

"I think so."

"That's where I'm going. Got an appointment at ten o'clock this morning."

The girl remained silent, but he continued undaunted. "You going up on business or pleasure?"

"Business."

He looked at her inquiringly. "Make the trip often?"

"About once a week," she answered.

"What kind of business you in?"

"I have a dress shop."

"This your home?" the old man continued.

"Yes."

"Mine, too. Lived here for sixty-three years."

The girl looked again at the magazine on her lap, but the old man went on. "My wife died a couple of years ago. She never would let me fly. Thought it was too dangerous."

"I think you'll like flying." She glanced again at the magazine.

"I just got a one-way ticket. Got plenty of time tomorrow, so I'm taking the bus back. When you coming home?"

"This evening."

"He's ready now. Come on. They don't give you much time to get out there."

"We'll make it," said the girl.

They accompanied the driver out to the car. Another couple was waiting by the limousine. All four climbed in, and the old man turned to the newcomers. "You going to Chicago, too?"

"Yes," said the newcomers.

"This is my first time up. Sarah, that's my wife, never would let me fly," said the old man. "She's dead now though. I always said, 'Sarah, the Lord'll take care of me. When my work is finished, He'll call me. And when He takes me, I'll be ready.'"

"That's right," agreed the newcomer.

"Live a good, clean life and you've got nothing to worry about, I always say," continued the old man.

Nobody answered. It was too early in the morning for philosophizing.

The driver pulled out a cigarette and lighted it as he settled back in his seat. The old man turned to him, tapping him on the shoulder. "I don't smoke, and I don't permit smoking in my presence," he said imperiously. "Please put out that cigarette."

An almost audible gasp emerged from his fellow passengers. The driver hesitated, took a final puff and silently tossed his cigarette out the window. The old man went on, "Smoking is a sin. The Bible says so."

The trip to the airport was finished without further discourse, the old man apparently deeming it wise to allow time for his words of wisdom to sink in.

He was the first to weigh in at the airport. "Do you care for any insurance?" asked the clerk at the desk.

"No, don't have anybody to leave it to. No use in me taking insurance," he answered. He walked back and forth, however, beside

the desk as the other passengers talked with the clerk. "Plane on time?" he interrupted.

"It's here now . . . Do you wish insurance, madam?"

"Yes, \$10,000," replied the girl.

"How's the weather for flying today?" asked the old man.

"Fine, fine. . . . And you, sir, do you and your wife wish insurance?"

"Not many people going up this early in the morning, are there?" interjected the old man.

"Listen, pop, would you please go over there and sit down? I'm finished with you. You'll be leaving from Gate 7 in five minutes . . . Yes, sir, did you say you wanted insurance?"

Subdued, the old man walked over to a row of empty seats and sat down. When the others had finished, he followed them out to Gate 7. They stepped aside so that the old man might get on the plane first. He located a single seat on the right toward the nose. A double seat in the back was taken by the man and his wife. The only place left for the girl was a seat opposite the old man. The light flashed for safety belts, and the girl helped the old man with his so that when the steward checked, the old man was settled back like a seasoned traveler, his safety belt so tight he could scarcely breathe.

He gazed intently from the window as the plane taxied across the field in preparation for the take-off and gripped his seat as it gathered momentum for the lifting. He chewed his gum which the steward had given him vigorously and turned to the girl as they left the ground. "We made it," he said. But a few moments later he whispered, "Do you think it's all right? Seems like it's standing still up here."

"It's O.K. It always feels that way," she answered. "Look below, you'll see we're moving."

The morning was clear and the riding smooth. The old man was engrossed with watching below. In a short while the steward passed around a paper saying they were over Lafayette and giving the altitude and speed. The old man read it with interest. "Good flying weather," he commented as he handed the message back to the steward.

Next they were over Chicago, and the warning lights flashed orders to fasten safety belts. The old man had never loosened his, but he tightened it another notch. The plane circled and descended. As it slithered across the runway, the wings rocked and the passengers were swayed and jolted. The girl glanced at the old man. His face was white and set. "Nice trip," he said as they came to a stop.

"Yes," she answered, "if you like, I'll show you where to get your bag."

"You know," he swaggered as he undid his safety belt, "flying's all right. Think I'll turn in my bus ticket and take a plane home."

A Little Knowledge

Bill McCann

"... the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace."
Genesis 19:29.

Martha found it hard to realize that they had finally made it. But there could be no doubt; directly ahead, Saint Peter was checking the people into Heaven.

Without George she could have arrived centuries sooner. The big lummoX had been stopped at nearly every Atonement Station to report some past misdeed. She marveled that he could have crowded so many small violations into a short life.

She was jolted from her reverie by Saint Peter's voice: "Name?"

"Mr. and Mrs. George Abbot," her husband answered, "of the planet Earth."

"And you left there when?"

"Why, we left there when everybody else did, when the atomic bomb wiped out all life. We were victims of our own intelligence." George said it almost proudly.

The amused look on Saint Peter's face made Martha uncomfortable. George always talked too much and said the wrong things. He was still talking now:

"... science, transportation, communication, any field you can think of. Right at the top, the peak, the zenith. Why, we had planes faster than sound, energy taken from harnessed sunlight, transmission of—"

"You still haven't answered my question, Mr. Abbot. Just when did you leave this planet of perfection?"

George was perplexed. "Why, I just told you. After thousands of years building and improving, our civilization destroyed itself."

Martha was positive that Saint Peter winked at her. "Yes, Mr. Abbot, but which time?"