

night flight



by

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(excerpt)

*Anything is possible.*

That's what David's face says in the photo, smiling with the promise of eternal mischief – there in his rumpled graduation robe, the tinsel cap long gone, flung into the air with a thousand others as the President bid them go forth into the world and...

"I was in love with him for years."

Her voice is like butter dreaming of melting.

It's around midnight, several summers later and I'm reclining on a battered green park bench next to Ellen. She opens David's battered journal – that had somehow fallen into her hands a while back – and takes out the photo of him. It's brittle and ragged around the edges. You can imagine the weird guy at the photo shop watching it glide out of the machine and into being. And you can imagine it breaking apart one day. Crumbling, returning to dust.

I haven't seen Ellen in seven or eight years. She's more beautiful than I remember and I have a pretty good memory for things like that. She has sky blue eyes and silky blonde hair that floats weightlessly around her shoulders.

Usually I'm a bit racist against blondes but there's a flicker of darkness emanating from somewhere inside her that speaks to me. If only I knew *what* it was saying.

"I saw him a few days before he left New York for Europe," she murmurs – maybe to me or maybe just into the night. "He was with this real doom and gloom woman who had gotten all born-again jew and had dragged him down into it with her. Or drugged him into it. But you could tell it was taking him the wrong way." Ellen gazes into the darkness, almost seeing him somewhere out there. "He was so thin and...faded."

And now *I* see him.

A receding emaciated saint with slowly extinguishing eyes.

Ellen picks up David's journal, opens it up and flips through it – dashed off sketches and manic bursts of writing that don't quite look English. They don't look quite *anything*.

"He was writing these crazy animated stories based on this recurring dream he kept having. A dream about being in an airplane crash."

She turns the page to this lurid crayon drawing that looks like it was done by a way too quiet seven year-old who – one day – would go quickly and quietly insane. There is a forest green 747 – blown in half and ablaze – falling out of the sky and releasing tiny black specks all the way down. The specks grab desperately at the air, but it just slips through their fingers.

"Apparently he had started to miss New York and decided to come back for Christmas," she says and for a second, her eyes light up at the prospect of seeing him again. "Bought a cheap ticket at the last minute, some incredible bargain."

Pan Am Flight 103.

As in the one that went up and never came down.

Well, that's not exactly true.

It went up in one piece and then came down in Lockerbie in more pieces than you could ever count. But they counted them all the same.

They found David in one of those pieces.

Imperfectly intact.

The plane had fallen for almost two minutes after the bomb detonated.

A lot of time to think about things.

It's getting late and Ellen and I lift ourselves up from the bench and stroll around the edge of the abandoned park. Languorously, nowhere else in the world we need to be.

Ever.

Again.

We stop and lean our weight into the iron fence.

Gaze into the park for a while, then turn and look at each other.

It's time to kiss.

And so we do.

For no good reason, other than it's 1:23 in the morning, late August 1996, almost eight years since David fell to earth.

(end of excerpt)