

Womr€nn Wcxitireg

by Conol Emshwiller

There goes the plane for Chicago. They're up safely. In here you can't hear any of their racket.

There they So, climbing in a trail of black smoke, engines screaming, but we can't hear it.

For us, they're silent as birds.

For them, we here below are diminishing in size. We are becoming doll-like and soon we will be like ants, soon no more than scunying gnats and, later still, bacteria perhaps and fungl, f, too, nothing but a microbic crea* ture. I might be the size of a camel or a mouse, it's all the same to them up there. Even if I were to stand in the center of the landing field (ur camel *or* mause) they couldn't see me at all.

There they go, swelling towards the sun. Only the sky will have room enough for them now. This landing field lwill seem infinitesimal. There will be no place on this whole planet, not a bit of land anywhere, unless some gigantic desert, that will seem to them large enough to land on. There, they have already swelled themselves up out of sight.

But now I see they have begun to board the plane for Rome. In a moment they will fly up as the others did, like a great expanding bird, starting out at our size, but growing too big for rrs. Behind this thick glass I hardly hear those Rome-bound engines begin, one by one, to scream out their expanding powers.

How nice it must be for all those people to enlarge themselves so. How condescendingly they must, sometimes, trook down upon us here.

I have a ticket.

I am not unlike those others boardirrg their planes for Chicago, Rome, Miami, and so soon to be transformed.

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And I am not unlike these who sit here waiting too. I am, in fact, quite a bit like them, for I have noticed that within my view there are acually three other coats of almost exactly the same brown as mine and I see two other little black hats. I have noticed myself in the ladies' room mirror, though not so that anyone knerv I was watching myself. I only allowed myself to look as I combed *y hair and put on my lipstick, but I did see how like them I am in my new clothes and from a certain distance. If I could just keep this in mind, for my looks, when I can remember them, influence my actions, and I am sure if I could see myself in some mirror behind the clerks, I would feel quite comfortable approaching them. tsut then there will be no more need of that.

But I know rest room mirrors are not quite trustworthy. They have a pinkish cast that flatters ffid, for all I know, a lengthening effect to make us all think of ourselves as closer to some long legged ideal. I must remember that and be careful. I mustn't fantasize about myself. I must remember I am not quite what the mirrors show me. They are, in a w&/, like subway windows where one sees oneself flashing by along the dark walls and one looks quite dashing and luminously handsome, needing, one thinks, only red earrings or a modish hat to be a quite extraordinary person, even standing otrt from the others.

There go those Rome people. Soon I will be off up there too. The thought is enough to make me feel dashingly handsome again, as handsome as all these clean-cut people so comfortable in themselves, so accustomed to their clothes and their bodies, and I feel young, almost too young, like a little gtl on her first voyage alone (and it has been a long time since I went anywhere so it does seem like a first voyage).

That Rome plane looks slow from here, but I know how fast they're really going, and then, the larger you are, the slower you seem. I think they are already noticing how huge they are getting now. Once up, they may not be able to come down at all. They may sit looking out

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the windows, circling forever, dizzy at their size compared to earth, unable to risk a landing.

But I'm going back. (I don't call it home anymore since I've been here so long.) I'm going back, but once I get up in that plane I don't think anything will matter. I'll see the world as it really is then and I won't mind not ever coming down at all.

I have a seat here by this wall of glass and I don't think anyone is noticing me. I have been here quite some time, but others come and go. They don't keep track of how long I've been sitting here. And, as I glance down at myself, I think again that I look quite as ordinary as anyone else. Why should they notice me with either criticism or admiration? I don't think it is at all evident that all my clothes are new.

I have a little black satchel on the floor beside me. In it I have my glasses, my newspaper, a cantaloupe, and a little bag of peanuts. The cantaloupe is certainly very ripe. I think I can smell it now and then, a sweet, good smell.

Just now I noticed a woman who came up near me and then moved away to take a seat farther on. I think I know why that was. It could have been the cantaloupe, that strange (to her) pungent sweetness, but I think not. In my haste to come here in time (it's true I arrived unnecessarily early) I put on all my new clothes without washing. I might say that washing in my apartment was never easy, and I may not really have washed very well for quite some time. I might as well have feet like a fat man, a very fat man, I should say. My feet are not fat, I mean, but they have a certain fat quality. That woman has found me out, and that is why she is sitting over across the way.

So I am not really at all like the others under all my nice clothes.

Yet is it a crime to be dirty? I can see very well that it is in a place like this though I never noticed back in my own room. Here it is certainly a crime, or certainly

L46

outstanding in one way or another, different, eccentric, extraordinary, and, I do think, a crime. Well, there's nothing to be done about it now, though it makes me feel quite shrunken, new clothes or not. How will it be in the plane, how will it be to be shrunken and expanded at the same time, for surely in the plane someone will have to sit next to me whether they like it or not. Perhaps the cantaloupe will help. Perhaps I will keep my satchel on my lap.

Think if I should drop it somehow up there and this elephantine cantaloupe, still swollen with altitude, should squash down on some tiny building, covering it with its cantaloupe-colored pulp, spreading its rich, sweet smell over everything, a cantaloupe large as the moon, ripe and ready, squashing them all in too much sweetness and too much juice. Too much, they would cry. It's too much.

Flight 350, Flight J2L, Flight zSS, Flight 216. I wonder if my feet together with my cantaloupe are capable of permeating the air of this whole interior as that voice does. Perhaps they already have and I am completely unaware of it. Wondering, I almost do not hear my own flight number, 216, even though I have memorized it, rechecked and rememorized it a dozen times. Flight 216 has been, the voice tells everyone in the whole airport without a tremble or change of quality, everyone, it tells, not seeking us, the passengers, out, to impart its private information, Flight 216 has been (I should have guessed)

postponed.

Well, so that is the way it is, and now, immediately after, I'm not sure if the voice said just postponed or postponed indefinitely. I wonder if there's any sense in asking why or when. I wonder if there's any sense in waiting.

There goes another plane, I have not noticed where to this time. All the other people's planes are coming and going but I don't know why I ever thought mine would, even with my new clothes and my ticket.

Senseless or not, I am going to wait exactly as I waited

L47

before I knew my flight was postponed, but already I see there is a difference in my feelings as I watch the other planes rise. I am quite shrunken. I am shrinking as they rise up. I am growing too small for my new clothes. They will hang upon me in a most noticeable way, I am sure. I will be a spectacle. I will make a spectacle of myself just walking from here to the door. Everyone will notice.

But why am I disappointed in Flight 2:6? I have not even been sure I wanted to go back at all. In truth, I do not want to go back, not really. What did I want then? And the three hundred dollars? If I can get that back will it make up for what I wanted, whatever that was? I wonder if I can get it back for it certainly would be something to have, I wonder should I try now? But the flight was just postponed, not canceled.

I see a man at the desk who seems to be asking something. He is quite out of place there. He is wearing a homemade coat made out of an Army blanket, and he has a tangled, olive-drab beard. If he is asking about Flight 2:6, and he certainly must be, then I don't believe that I should at all. I don't believe that I should put myself in the company of such people. They might even think we were together, going off to the same destination. Still, I would like to have that money. Perhaps if I wait a half hour or so and ask then, they will not connect me with him.

So, here am I, a woman waiting. I wish I had some greater meaning at this time of disappointment. Were I a man, I could even be humanity waiting, all humanity, whose flight is indefinitely postponed, but I am a woman waiting. Rather a cliché. It doesn't matter. Let her wait.

If I sit very still I feel a tiny sliding movement, a tiny, snaky motion of withdrawal inwards. My feet just barely touch the ground. As, yet, goes another plane and I feel my heart lurch.

But the three hundred dollars. Has it been a half an hour yet? I forgot to check the clock at the start. I will have to wait for another to go by. My feet dangle. I am

L48

Like a girl in woman's clothes. Anyone glancing this way will wonder who has dressed me in these woman-sized things and why. Have I lost my own clothes somewhere? they wonder. Was I in some sort of accident? Did I soil myself? Was I sick on myself and did I have to wear my mother's grown-up things? I do not think, if I went to the desk in my present condition, that they would give me the three hundred dollars at all. And even if I did have the money, would they serve me in the coffee shop? If I wait much longer I will have difficulty climbing up on their stools and it would be quite embarrassing for everyone if I continued to shrink right before their eyes as I sat there with my coffee and my sandwich. They would all know I wasn't a bit like them then. Just as we suspected when we first saw her sitting down and watching the planes, they would all say. Just as we suspected all along.

By now I don't even mean woman anymore. I am midget, waiting. I represent all midgets (there can't be so very many) waiting for their midget life to turn into real life, which is, of course, indefinitely postponed. (I am becoming quite sure that they did say "indefinitely" now.)

This slithering sensation, minute as it is, makes me itch, but, here in this huge, public place (there is room for quite a few airplanes in here, should they ever wish to pull away the glass walls and wheel them in upon these polished floors), here, I do not believe I should scratch myself.

My feet no longer dangle. I must slide off this chair before the drop becomes too steep. This I can manage easily within my clothes. By now people must think someone has just left a new brown coat on the chair. I squat, I wrapped in a stocking, under the overhanging edge of it, and in a few minutes more I am small enough to step into my satchel. There it is comfortable and dark. I curl up next to the cantaloupe and newspaper and nibble on a peanut. I had not realized it, but I am quite exhausted.

L49

I roll my stocking into a pillow and lean back upon it. Smallness, I am thinking, must be quite as comfortable as largeness. They each have advantages, Here, snug as .., as anyone might be in a soft and dark, black satchel, I fall asleep quickly.

How long I sleep, I have absolutely no idea, it may have been but a few minutes or the full clock around (and at my size time may seem different); at any rate, I wake, still within my satchel, to the movement of being carried, smoothly and with a rhythmic, m'ovvy motion. I put my eye to the hole in the center of one of the grom-mets that hold on the handles. I see a sign, *Lost Articles Department*. Inside this large, shelved hallway, I am filed beside other satchels and suitcases of similar size and color. Well, I have my cantaloupe, my peanuts, and my newspaper. But I do see that the man here already wrinkles his nose as he comes by my shelf.

No one will be coming for me. That I am sure of. How long will they keep me here? Not long, for I see he has wrinkled his nose again. You don't suppose my feet, my tiny feet can still . . . ? What is that smell? he is thinking. I will have to search it out. Something is spoiling here in one of the packages, something just recently brought in. People just aren't careful, he thinks. They put perishables in their suitcases and then forget them for other people to clean up. Disgusting messes. They don't care. Perhaps, he thinks, perhaps I'll just throw it out without the disagreeable task of examining it. No one could want something spoiled anyway. I won't wait the allotted time (is it a week? a month?). Well, I just won't wait, he thinks. Out it will go by tomorrow, sure.

Perhaps, just at the last moment, I will call out to him and he will discover me here.

How will it be, finding a not very attractive, one-foot high, completely naked woman in the lost and found department? Not so young anymore, either. (But he is not so young, and quite completely bald.) How will

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it be finding a woman who was, to say the least, peculiar . . . different, even when she was of normal height

Will he blush, see it me? Would he take me home with him secretly, hidden in the satchel? Keep me, perhaps, in a comfortable corner of his room with a little box for my bed and a cushion for my mattress? Of course sex will be impossible between us. ...

But this is ludicrous.

No. No. I will not call out. I will not ... f will never reveal myself. If I have to perish at the bottom of a garbage heap, I will not ever call out.