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It's my first time on an aeroplane and I'm enjoying it so far. My mother is sitting beside me on the window side. I'm travelling with her and my baby sister. My elder sister and father aren't here. I don't know where they are. Childhood memories are like that; missing people, missing links. The plane is an old Fokker Friendship, the sort of plane used during WWII but then put into service for many years after to ferry people around my sparsely populated country. There were jets, but they were for international travel.

I'm sitting in my seat in the last row of the plane. I should explain here that the layout on the Fokker Friendships was different from today's crowded arrangement. The rows of seats end abruptly several metres from the back door, which allows for a sort of empty foyer area. And in this space, instead of the tiny capsule-shaped windows we're so familiar with, there is a large picture window on the port side.

The air hostess—that's what they were called then—looms up beside me and asks me directly if I'd like to go and look out the big window. She says I can see better from the back window and I can stand up there too.

In those days my parents were very strict with us, especially in public: no speaking unless spoken to; always be polite; never bring shame on the family—whatever that meant. I am quickly trying to assess if any of these rules will be broken if I say yes. I don't, or rather, can't speak. I just look to my mother with beseeching eagerness in my eyes. By some miracle, my mother assents, 'Yes go on, go and have a look'. And then comes the usual rider, 'But be careful'.

I unbuckle myself from my prison of a seat and glance over at my baby sister with all the smugness I can muster.

I suppose being such a relatively small plane, we are not really that far above the ground. I look out and see the earth broken into irregular purple patches of Patterson's Curse kept in check by the huge yellow squares of useful, edible crop. The rest is shades of brown and red.

The back door of the plane is right next to the wide flat window I'm looking through. I look around.

This is where my memory becomes inflected with old WWII-era movies like *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*, because the interior of the plane is in black and white and everyone is wearing a hat and looking suspicious. My initial excitement has already worn off. Suddenly I sense a presence beside me. It is a lady, but not the air hostess and I don't recognise her as one of the passengers either.

With a very kindly voice she bends down to whisper in my ear, 'Go and sit down now, dear'. I obey as though she has cast a spell on me.

As I reach my seat and plop down, resuming my bored posture, I hear a loud shout from behind. It is the otherwise quiet voice of the air hostess. I turn around, fast enough to see the back door swing wide open. Now the pilot is coming down the aisle. He gets from front to back in as few as six commanding strides. But no-one is panicking. No-one seems in the least bit worried. There is no announcement of any kind.

The air hostess reaches for a large leather contraption—I learn its proper 'harness' name some years later—and places her arms through it. The pilot does likewise with another one. They tie themselves together with buckles and clips. The air hostess shackles herself to the inside frame of the plane while the pilot walks towards the threshold where the door is dangling and flapping noisily against the plane's fuselage, the rush of air, pushing his hair out of shape.

The pilot leans out. The air hostess leans in. The pilot lets out an impassioned curse at the door. Still no-one is angry or worried. Some of the passengers aren't even turning around to observe this performance. It appears to be a routine occurrence met with a routine procedure. After the third attempt the pilot finally gets hold of the handle, not without talent, even I can appreciate this, and swings the door shut with a vacuum-sealing thud. He secures it firmly and strides back up the aisle in the same confident manner, though perhaps in eight or nine steps this time.

I don't remember much else. I don't remember landing. I don't remember recounting the event to my father or elder sister or school friends afterwards. But I do remember my mother turning to me as I sat quietly in my seat, saying, 'Thank God you sat down when you did. You were lucky you weren't sucked out that door.' I turned to her and said, calmly, 'Yes, I know. Our Lady whispered in my ear and she told me to sit down.'

That was a long time ago, almost a lifetime ago. I grew out of Catholicism. I'm not even an agnostic. I lost my faith in my early twenties and I've never found it again. It was pushed out of me in my early student days when politics was urgent and passionate and vicious. And yet I am very sure of my memory, of Our Lady personally appearing to me, to help me in a moment of danger. I might have lost my faith, but I will never lose that memory.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Maria Miranda.