

## THE TERMINAL WOMAN

I was returning to Port Angeles from Los Angeles, where I'd spent two weeks nursing my sister through a surgical procedure. The flight from L.A. to Seattle had been the roughest I'd ever been on — severe turbulence in thick fog the entire trip.

So I had a bunch of drinks, a practice I'd sworn off years before (on planes) and had a nice little buzz going as I sat in the lounge at SEATAC waiting for my connecting flight to P.A.

I never used to drink at airports either. Too expensive. But now they've got a good thing going. Because there is no smoking allowed anywhere in the terminals, business has fallen off 30% in the lounges. A bartender told me this. So they pour doubles now for the price of singles. So now I drink at airports. Simple economics. Anyway, I have a few Scotches and head for my gate.

As I take a seat, I notice this woman about my age darting around, jabbering and laughing to herself — really gone. Ordinarily I would think, "Oh Christ — another AWOL from Reagan's Army," and move in another direction.

But this woman is almost beautiful in a scary kind of way. And I'm a little loaded, so I watch and wonder.

They announce it's time to board and I notice the crew noticing the crazy woman, deliberating whether or not to let her on the plane, It's a little 18-seater and she's definitely making a splash.

But they let her on. And, of course, she sits right across from me. She keeps mumbling and laughing. I can't understand a word. The flight guys give her another going over but then we are in the air. She really gets rolling with the laughter and I wonder if she will bolt from her seat and run the aisles.

I reach over, touch her shoulder, and ask, "Are you all right?"

She looks at me like a raccoon caught in the headlights of an oncoming logging truck, then smiles and says, "Yes, it's just an organic imbalance."

Good answer.

"Is somebody meeting you in Port Angeles?" I ask.

More laughing, then, a few moments later, "Yes. My father."

I instantly visualize the John Huston character in Chinatown.

"Do you live in P.A.?" I ask.

Accelerated laughter and dramatic head tossing.

As we are walking from the plane to the terminal, she presses a piece of folded paper into my hand and walks ahead of me.

She walks up to a tall, impressive looking guy with a beard who is no older than she or I and puts her arms around him. Looking at me, he kisses the top of her head, takes her travel bag and escorts her from the terminal.

I unfold the paper she has given me.

Written in large graceful script, is what appears to be a local phone number. Except that there are 8 digits. Beneath the number she has written, "Don't be afraid." And a little Happy Face.

#### ON HERITAGE AND HERESY

i recently submitted some of my writing to  
a professional poet/publisher  
he returned it with a letter telling me  
the verse exhibited a "delightful imagination"  
but the prose was "too concerned with self"

I stayed up all night drinking  
and as the sun rose from behind the mountains  
I hauled out the typewriter  
and tapped out a response to this professional

it was a rather nasty and defensive piece and  
after i read it a few times  
i discarded it and  
wrote another  
less angry  
more patronizing in tone  
i went to bed in the sunlight

when i awoke some hours later  
i read what i had written to the pro  
it was still too defensive  
not really what i wanted to say  
so i pitched it  
and wrote a third reply