

Airline Icarus
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(The cross-section of a commercial jet airplane, asymmetrical. The plane is cut like a sausage, exposing the inside of the hull: seats, an aisle, baggage compartment beneath. The cross-section includes one of the airplane's wings, shooting off to one side.)

SECTION I

(Scene #1: On the ground, the WORKER pulls a cart of bags towards the plane.)

VOICES

There, there.

WORKER

Loading up for Cleveland,

VOICES

Icarus.

WORKER

Is this the flight to Cleveland?

VOICES

Icarus.

WORKER

Here's baggage for the poor slob
On their way to Cleveland.

(He opens the plane's baggage hold and begins to load the bags.)

VOICES

Are we ascending?

WORKER

I'm freezing.

VOICES

Where are you?

WORKER

Can't see a thing.

Are you hiding from me? VOICES

What a day to fly! WORKER

Are we ascending? VOICES
Are we descending?

Suitcases! WORKER
Put them in the belly.
Put them in the belly of this flying beast.
Hope it's not too heavy.
So strange to me that this machine,
A mess of wires and gears
Ignites, awakes,
And flies so high above us.

(Scene #2: On board, passengers start to board. The first to enter is BUSINESS MAN.) On the ground, the WORKER continues to load bags.)

Thirteen A. Where the hell is thirteen A? BUSINESS MAN

Prepare for boarding. VOICE

(He looks and finds the seat.)

(BUSINESS MAN puts his bags away and sits. AD EXEC enters. She looks for her seat.)

Thirteen B. Where the hell is thirteen B? AD EXEC

(She finds it.)

You put your bags away and you find your seat. BUSINESS MAN

Monster, have you drunk your gallons WORKER
Of explosive gasoline?
Have you charged your miles of wired veins

With electricity?

Thirteen! SCHOLAR

Are you ready, monster? WORKER

(AD EXEC puts her bags away and sits. SCHOLAR enters. He looks for his seat.)

SCHOLAR
Thirteen C. Of course it's thirteen C! 1C...

AD EXEC
You put your bags away and you have a seat.

SCHOLAR
2C...

AD EXEC
Aisle Seat

SCHOLAR
3C, 4C...

BUSINESS MAN
She's next to me!

AD EXEC
You put your bags away and you find a magazine

SCHOLAR
5C, 6C

(SCHOLAR puts his bags away and sits. BUSINESS MAN checks out AD EIXEC. He smiles at her. She ignores him. SCHOLAR nervously studies the airplane's safety card.)

SCHOLAR
Where's my unlucky seat? Thirteen C.

(He finds his seat.)
(The WORKER finishes loading bags. He exits with his baggage cart.)

VOICE
Flight Attendants, prepare for departure.

(On the ground, the WORKER returns, now to taxi the plane. He taxis it with wide gestures.)

WORKER

Sometimes
I think these planes are merely
Modern demons of the air.
The million copper capillaries
Pump to each metallic cell
The juice to function and to fly.

VOICE

(on board) *May we please have your attention for a safety demonstration.*

(The FLIGHT ATTENDANT stands in the aisle and mimes the demonstration. Neither BUSINESS MAN nor AD EXEC pay attention. SCHOLAR watches eagerly.)

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Cleveland again.

VOICE

Fasten seat belts with the buckle.

ALL

Fasten...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I so hate the flights to Cleveland

VOICE

Notice exit doors and windows.

ALL

Notice...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Why'd I have to book this route?

VOICE

Find the nearest one to you.

Find....

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Paris. I'd rather go to Paris.

Flying... SCHOLAR

(eyeing AD EXEC) Look at her. BUSINESS MAN

I'm depressed. AD EXEC

Airborne dragons with their
Roaring engine lungs
Spitting fire into the air. WORKER

Boring Cleveland. Ugly Ohio. FLIGHT ATTENDANT

If the cabin loses pressure VOICE

Cabin loses pressure... ALL

In six months I'll apply for the seven forty sevens. FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Suddenly, a mask will fall. VOICE

Mask will fall... ALL

I'll stroll the streets. FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Cover-nose and mouth. VOICE

Cover... ALL

I'll stroll the streets of Paris. FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I need a vodka. BUSINESS MAN

I long for a new life.

AD EXEC

Boring, ugly Cleveland.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

I hate to fly.

SCHOLAR

Airplanes
With armored skins.
Burning fireshit explosions,
It expels and they propel.

WORKER

*Fix your child's mask.
Breathe normally. In case of water landing,
Use seat cushion for floatation.*

VOICE

ALL

WORKER

Breathe normally.

A wingspan wider than a whale.
Groans to deafen
Whole neighborhoods.

We're happy to assist you.

VOICE

Are you ready, monster?

WORKER

*Thanks for choosing Current Air.
Enjoy your flight to Cleveland.*

VOICE

(The FLIGHT ATTENDANT forces a smile, then sits behind them. On the ground, outside, the WORKER exits. BUSINESS MAN, AD EXEC, SCHOLAR and FLIGHT ATTENDANT collectively sigh.)

(Scene #3: BUSINESS MAN and AD EXEC close their eyes. SCHOLAR clutches his seat and looks out the window. FLIGHT ATTENDANT gazes off.)

Time for takeoff. Breathe.
Relax. Enjoy the power

SCHOLAR AND VOICES

And the speed of an airplane's engine.
Put your head back on the headrest.
I hope it's clean. I'm sweating.
Watch the seat belt sign. It's on.
Does he (she) know I'm sweating?
This person sitting next to me.
Who's that next to me?
I wonder. I wonder.
Will I die beside this person?
Will we all explode together?
Me and her? Him and me?

Think of something else.
Think of sun and sandy beach!
Think of tanning in the hot sun!
Think of quiet breathing!
Think of...think of...
Think...
Think of...think of...

SCHOLAR

Daedalus, to Icarus:

SCHOLAR, WORKER AND VOICES

"The air and the sky are free."

Icarus, to Daedalus:

"Nothing's as free as me."

SCHOLAR

Oh God.

SECTION II

(Scene #4: They are in the air, ascending fast.)

BUSINESS MAN

Absolut.

AD EXEC

Excuse me?

BUSINESS MAN

I hope they've got Absolut

AD EXEC

Do you mean vodka?

BUSINESS MAN

Yes, of course.

Of course. AD EXEC

(AD EXEC looks a magazine. The plane bumps. SCHOLAR clutches the seat, holds his head.)

AD EXEC
(to herself) I wish that I could tell him:

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Just say 'hello', again.

AD EXEC
(to herself) I wish that I could tell him:
Please don't talk to me.

SCHOLAR
(to himself) What's that? That bump....
Maybe the engine will explode!

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Just say 'hello'
(to AD EXEC) Going to Cleveland?

AD EXEC
That's right.

BUSINESS MAN
For business?

AD EXEC
For family.

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) I hope she isn't married.

SCHOLAR
(writhing, to himself)
How can they talk
When we are sure to die?

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Small talk. More small talk.
(to AD EXEC) So. What line of work

AD EXEC
Advertising.

Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! SCHOLAR

Advertising. AD EXEC

Interesting. BUSINESS MAN

AD EXEC
It's a job.
Finding jingles to tingle
the small desires of
specific demographics.

SCHOLAR
(to himself) I have so many
valuable and erudite
insights into Icarus that
haven't yet been put to pen!

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Maybe she'll fall in love with me.
(to AD EXEC) I'm in marketing myself.
Your job sounds interesting.

AD EXEC
(to herself) Leave me alone. I'm miserable.

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Maybe she'll fall in love with alcoholic me.

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Not a chance.

SCHOLAR
(to himself) I am...

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Not a chance.

SCHOLAR
(to himself) As good...

BUSINESS MAN
(to himself) Not a chance.

SCHOLAR
(to himself) As dead.

(Scene #5: The plane levels out, the engines calm. They are at cruising altitude. AD EXEC returns to her magazine.)

SCHOLAR

(to himself) Hey.

VOICE

The captain has turned off the seat belt sign.

SCHOLAR

(to himself) That's better.
Things are smoothing out.

(The FLIGHT ATTENDANT stands and takes
out a drink cart. She starts moving up the aisle.)

(to himself) Still. I don't like it.
Eight thousand years of civilization but
No human flew until nineteen-o-three!
You'd think I'd know the irony
Of flying to a conference
Presentation for a paper on the tragic
Death of airborne Icarus!

(FLIGHT ATTENDANT reaches aisle thirteen.
She looks at the SCHOLAR.)
FLIGHT ATTENDANT

What would you like to drink?

SCHOLAR

Coca-cola.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

What would you like to drink?

AD EXEC

Cranberry juice.

(BUSINESS MAN is eyeing the AD EXEC.)

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) She has a certain
longing in the eyes.
She has a certain sadness,
A certain longing in the eyes
That's so appealing to me.
All my time is spent alone
Pitching high-speed internet
Access to businesses.
Watching late-night television.
Alone.

How sweet she looks.
How sweet she looks.
To be held by her.
Just to be next to her
And her intoxicating smell.

(FLIGHT ATTENDANT prepares his drink.
AD EXEC looks up from her magazine.)

AD EXEC

(to herself) Look at me
Always crying
Getting fat, getting old
Boring advertising.
Living alone.
My sick obsession with calories.
Now I have to visit with
My sister and her husband
and their child.
I hate to witness their happiness.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

What would you like to drink?
What would you like to drink?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) My God, he's cute in that suit
With a bashful, charming smile.

BUSINESS MAN

Do you have Absolut?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

He's got an air of dignity
A dash of vulnerability.
I'll bet that he loves Paris.
(To BUSINESS MAN) On the rocks?

BUSINESS MAN

If you would be so kind.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) Alone.
No ring.
Good news.

Give him a drink for free.
(To BUSINESS MAN) Here you go.

BUSINESS MAN
How much?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
It's on the house.

BUSINESS MAN
What house?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
It's on the plane, I mean.
(They laugh.)

BUSINESS MAN
Thank you.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
You're welcome.

(The FLIGHT ATTENDANT exits.)
(Scene #6: The plane flies. All is normal.)

SCHOLAR
Idiots with their flirting!
Their tempting of the Gods!
Pretending all is normal,
That everything is fine.
That they don't have to worry
At five hundred miles an hour
Five miles in the air.
Five hundred miles an hour.
Five miles in the air.
It is hubris.
It is hubris to pretend that all is normal.

VOICES
Icarus.

AD EXEC
Excuse me...

SCHOLAR
I'm sorry?

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) Oh no.

AD EXEC

Hello.

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) Why is she talking to that neurotic?

(The FLIGHT ATTENDANT appears with a food cart. She watches BUSINESS MAN as she serves food to the other rows.)

VOICES

“All the wide sky was there to tempt him as he steered...”

AD EXEC

Our flight is going well. All is normal.

SCHOLAR

Yes, all is normal...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) He can't take his eyes off that girl.

VOICES

“...steered himself towards heaven, as the heat of the sun struck his back”

SCHOLAR

It makes me nervous. Flying.

AD EXEC

Try to think of something else.

SCHOLAR

Good idea.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) I'll stand beside him.

I'll give him my special smile

As I offer him a meal.

(The FLIGHT ATTENDANT approaches row thirteen.)

AD EXEC

Why are you going to Cleveland?

SCHOLAR

A major classical conference,

My first professional paper

Comparing Ovid and Apollodorus.

VOICES

“Damn this art”

SCHOLAR

Both write of Daedalus
And his son Icarus
Who died of hubris
Ascending.

AD EXEC

Ascending?

SCHOLAR

He was flying.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to SCHOLAR) Do you want chicken?

SCHOLAR

No thank you.

AD EXEC

Icarus, I remember. With waxen wings
Too near the sun.

SCHOLAR

He was foolish. He was young.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to AD EXEC) Do you want chicken?

AD EXEC

I suppose.

SCHOLAR

(to himself)
Here we are.

VOICES

Icarus.

SCHOLAR

(to himself) Encased in a metal shell.
Suspended in the atmosphere.
Eating chicken.
We talk and eat our chicken.

This is impossible.

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) She's talking...
Why to him and not to me?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) Look at him stare at her.

AD EXEC

So, what's your paper?

SCHOLAR

I propose:
Technology's success
(Either simple or complex)
Is nothing by itself.
People's passions, their hubris
Sink Titanics, crash trains and
Computers, or planes.
Technology serves ours burning brains.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) I can't sit still!

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) I can't sit still!

AD EXEC

Yes.

SCHOLAR

Yes.

VOICES

Icarus! Icarus!

BUSINESS MAN

Stewardess!

VOICES

Where are you?

BUSINESS MAN

I'd like another vodka, a very large vodka!

VOICES

Where are you?

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) Maybe she thinks
I'm ugly, fat and boring.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Anything else?

BUSINESS MAN

Nothing else.

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) Maybe she thinks
I'm ugly, fat and boring.
Will I always be alone?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) He didn't even look at me.

BUSINESS MAN

(to himself) Will I always be alone?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(to herself) He didn't even look at me. He didn't even look at me.

(Scene #7: The airplane shakes.)

SCHOLAR

Oh God! What's that?

AD EXEC

It's only turbulence.

(The plane shakes more.)

SCHOLAR

It's getting worse! It's getting worse!

AD EXEC

It doesn't hurt the plane.

(The plane shakes harder.)

VOICES

Are we ascending?

SCHOLAR

Oh God.

ALL

The turbulence. The turbulence.

(The plane is shaking very hard.)

SCHOLAR

Oh God!
I can't... I can't...I can't sit still.

VOICES

Damn this art. This wretched cleverness.

SCHOLAR

And "All the wide sky...

AD EXEC

I can't....

VOICES

Are we ascending?

SCHOLAR

Was there to tempt him...

BUSINESS MAN

I can't sit still.

SCHOLAR

As the heat of sun struck his back...

VOICES

Are we ascending? Are we descending?

SCHOLAR

And where his wings were joined
Sweet-smelling fluid
Ran hot that once was wax."
It is hubris to pretend that all is normal.
I can't... I can't...I can't sit still.

SECTION III

(Scene #8: All stand. The plane becomes porous. They wander, spin, search, lost.)

ALL (various times, various ways)

Icarus, where are you?
Icarus, are you hiding from me?
Damn this art. This wretched cleverness.
Your torn wings wash on climbing waves.
The air and the sky are free.
Nothing's as free as me.
Are we ascending? Are we descending?
He doesn't even look at me.
She doesn't even look at me.
Damn this art. This wretched cleverness.

(Scene #9: In a separate circle, a peaceful, calm pilot appears. He reclines in his seat, smiling.)

PILOT

No peace so great.
No air so clean.
No joy so pure.
To cruise the calm of thirty thousand feet.
The warmth of the sun upon me.
Drifting clouds beneath.
Sunsets radiant. Cloudscapes divine.
All cares abandoned back 'on earth.
I am never more alive.
No peace so great.
No air so clean.
No joy so pure.

ALL

Damn this art.
The air and the sky are free.
Nothing's as free as me.

(Scene #10: They return to their seats. The plane is still flying. The turbulence passes.)

SCHOLAR

Stewardess! Stewardess!

VOICES

There. All is normal.

SCHOLAR

It couldn't be.

VOICES

The captain said that all is normal.

SCHOLAR

I heard. It's just...

VOICES

Yes...

SCHOLAR

I'm so afraid

VOICES

You're so afraid.

So... So...

So, take my hand.

So, take my hand.