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Airborne

By Darren Lo

I like to think of myself as a frequent flyer. Over 90,000 miles and counting, nearly three trips around the world. I have taken part on multiple flights of over nineteen hours sitting in a cramped, itchy, overstuffed seat on my way from one end of the Pacific Ocean to the other. Everything 40,000 feet up in the air seems so calm. The soft buzzing of the pressurized cabin drones in my ear. Dark and drearily, I glance out my frosted window. I take a peek at the twilight sky from my seat, stealing a glance at the moon, inspecting the frosted water droplets on the glass. The clouds sit still on the horizon, so fragile that a sneeze could whisk them away. Below me lies an ocean of marshmallows, white and lumpy. Above me expands the emptiness of space. A million stars freckle the sky. The moon burns itself into my eyes as slivers of the setting sun pierce through the marshmallows below. Within, the entire cabin is shrouded in a blanket of dark. Stewardesses occasionally pass me by with hurried looks and toothy grins as they pour drinks and close the cabin windows.

Everything on the plane proceeds at a painstakingly slow pace, a twelve-hour flight lasts a lifetime and a half. Meals come by slowly, movies pass slowly. People using the public restroom take forever.

Everything on the plane is like a droning hum. It drills into my skull. Food is stale and dry and lukewarm, the movies are old and unentertaining. My mouth is dry and my voice is ragged. I feel like a satellite, a lifeless probe speeding through the sky. No one talks much on a plane save for the stewardesses. I overhear conversations of layover at Salt Lake City, Utah and of recent business trips to Tokyo. They converse of their favorite airport facilities or their recent stop at O'Hare International. I sat next to an elderly man. He wore a silver watch much like my father's and enjoyed laughing. Few attempts were made by either of us to engage in conversation. He could have been anyone, I could have been anyone and he would have believed me.

We are four hundred strangers with four hundred different stories to tell. Some are travelling on vacation, others for business and networking purposes, others still for a chance at a new life in a new, foreign country. The elderly man sitting next to me is probably a businessman. He may or may not have told me his name, but I would not have remembered it either way. We glanced at each other as he sat next to me and he gave me a hurried look and a toothy grin. All I could do was smile and nod my head up and down like an idiot. His origin could be filled with mystery and adventure. He could be a spy or a superhero or a war veteran or something spectacular and grizzly and what not. I will never know. All I know is that he rode on a plane next to me, a frequent flyer.

Some people are born in Africa. Some are born in Valparaiso, Indiana. I am airborne. I have traveled across many countries and many continents. I have made many friends with too many faces to remember. Too many names to even care. I do not know how to tell people where I am from because I have lived everywhere. Since birth, I have been a vagabond. I have never lived in one city for longer than four years, cities far away over vast oceans. My father's job keeps our family moving, from city to city, state to state, country to country. And at the end of it all, I feel a hundred and eighty years old, as though my bones are tired and creaking. Some old fart who just cannot keep up anymore. As I wait patiently in my stuffy seat to arrive at my destination, the stewardess hands me another glass of Coke. I thank her kindly and she smiles and walks away hurriedly.

My best friend is the sky. The sky is the only constant in my life. It will always be there. My friends have come and gone, but this overarching dome above me and below me and all around me will always be there. The sky is like my safety blanket, a comforter in a harsh new environment. But even so, every time I move it gets harder and harder to adapt. The new kid on the block and everyone wants to know where I'm from. I don't know what to tell them. I want to laugh and point up and imagine their dumbfounded faces. My bonds with these people are ephemeral. I'll be gone in four years or less. I don't need to make connections with these people when I'll be leaving for a new and strange

land in just a few short years. My bonds are forever with the sky and the stars and the sun and the moon. Some have known each other since kindergarten. Some have been best friends since second grade. I have few such relationships.

I am content—content and stoic. I am self-dependant and independent. We know who we are on the inside, regardless of the environment, our family, the friends we choose, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the beds we sleep in, the country in which we reside. Regardless of our origins, one cannot escape the grip of our own personalities and temperaments. There is nothing that will ever change that. I am a satellite, traveling at breakneck speeds across the sky. I am a frequent flyer.

All these things make my personality and influence my decisions and steer my life. My origin and my perspectives need no verification or validation from any others. Often, the opinion of others is the only thing one cares about. I see everyone clinging to each other, looking so desperately to find anyone in this void that is life and love and fulfillment. There are always individuals, supposed freethinkers, looking for acknowledgement as being funny, or talented, or beautiful, or interesting by other people. They are looking for validation and approval of their origin and their perspectives and their choices. A classmate of mine has nearly 1100 friends on Facebook. He feels very accomplished.

My origins are in the sky, from above and below and all around, where I have been born and where I will perish. I am content, for I am Airborne.