

SESSION 01 FLIGHT

In the end, you learn the difference between an origin and a coming of age can be as simple as an airplane crash. Just your typical, everyday mile-high disaster.

This model in particular—the one that I’m on, is a Boeing 747-400. It holds 416 passengers, has a wingspan of 64.9 meters, and is notorious for storing in-flight meals five degrees below the recommended temperature. These are the types of things you know when you’re a commercial airline pilot, an engineer, or me.

If you want to break something correctly, it’s best to know everything you can about it. Potential food poisoning or diarrhea by way of an undercooked Salisbury steak ranks right up there with understanding how the landing gear and turbines work. Study your statistics and diagrams. Never overlook the little things.

From seat 5G of the first class section, it’s a parade of coach passengers trudging along on the blue and cream carpet, admiring the oversized slate gray leather seats, these “thrones of the skies,” as they’re sometimes called. They revere the padded armrests and expansive legroom, the bottles of French champagne already being poured. Ornate tins of caviar and cashmere blankets patterned in tasteful pilot wings. For all of about ten seconds, these people get a sample of the good life. Just a taste. Airlines do this to encourage people to upgrade their tickets. It’s their way of saying, “This is what you’re missing.”

For at least the first hour of the flight, all the coach passengers are haunted by this same luxurious imagery. Anyone in marketing or sales knows this just as well as I do. In a few hours though, prestige will be the least of their concerns.

Flight 8160 is scheduled to cross an ocean today, but it’ll never make it.

Holding over 57,000 gallons of fuel, this aircraft has a maximum range of approximately 7,200 miles. That means, theoretically, we could fly from New York to France on a half tank of gas. A rigged fuel gauge and an absent pump technician is all it would take to get the job done, but that’s being optimistic.

If you’re me, then you already know the captain has two successful emergency water landings on his record. Another three on land. Your weekend would be split between a cramped life raft and a rescue freighter. Then a police station.

When a \$266,000,000 aircraft drops out of the sky, everyone gets questioned, including first class. Even Mr. Hero Pilot would get a turn in the interrogation room, so

it's important to get this right the first time.

No survivors.

No questions.

Overhead, the red and off-white "fasten seatbelt" sign illuminates, accompanied by the formal announcement to raise all tray tables and turn off our cell phones and any electronics. Forget what you've heard about these items causing any sort of damage to the plane or its instruments. That's a rumor. You could start a telemarketing firm in here and all the pilots would notice is some light radio static.

Being able to discern a scare tactic from a threat is important when you're 40,000 feet above the ground. If you're a terrorist, a hostage, or me, then you already know this.

Meanwhile, on ground-level, the spray-tanned stewardesses pitch us the safety spiel from their respective aisles, hand-gesturing along with the FAA-standardized commentary as the plane distances itself from the terminal. We're given the "how to" walkthrough of operating a seatbelt and the correct way to apply an oxygen mask, a systematic tutorial on seat cushion floatation devices.

The speakers say things like "don't panic" and "calm, orderly fashion."

They pair the words "in the event of" with some sort of disaster.

Emergency exits are pointed out. Nobody looks.

We're all barely listening.

Even on the brink of a catastrophic affair, these people are more concerned with reading USA Today or their in-flight magazine. Playing travel-sized board games. When you're surrounded by this much ignorance, you can pretty much get away with murder.

Or in this case, over four hundred of them.

We can relax for now.

Calculate cruise speed in relation to the rate of ascent, and we've got at least four hours to reflect on our lives. That's plenty when you think about how it's all going to flash before your eyes anyway. One last montage of spouses and children, your immediate unconditionally loving family. Pet dogs and cats.

If you were about to bite the big one in the dead center of the Atlantic Ocean, more than likely, that's what you'd get.

But not me.

Just like anyone who's been tampered with and brainwashed, I'll end up seeing the person that got me into recreational terrorism in the first place. She's the one that taught me everything I know, including how to take down this airplane.

About a year ago, she was my therapist.

Her name is Dr. Paradies.

SESSION 02

WOUNDS

Each traipse into my shrink's office of #2 Pershing Square is usually met with the same two questions.

Did I do this to myself?

Or was it someone else?

I'll walk in and she'll see the zigzagging shoestring stitches tying some part of my face back together, the brow-line or the cheekbone or chin. She'll notice a series of cuts. Of bruises. A loose tooth or a future scar. Every session it's something different, but the inquiry never changes.

"Is that wound self-inflicted?" Dr. Paradies asks, indicating it with pen and legal pad at the ready, her knuckles white in anticipation with those blush red fingers. She waits for that avalanche of bullshit to cascade out of my mouth while I pose in the frame of her office door, conjuring a defense mechanism.

"Oh, this?" I casually motion to the left side of my face, indicating the injury. Technically, it's a black eye but it stopped being that color a couple days ago. It's finally reached that medical disinfectant shade of yellow with a trim of opaque purple on the outer rim. A "sight for sore eyes," as they say. It literally looks worse than it feels, but I could say that about all my injuries, past and present alike.

Let's get back to the question, though. The issue at hand. "My eye...fell down some stairs?" I potentially smile at Paradies.

"You're evading again," the doc says, scribbling on her legal pad. She's always scribbling and speaking in terms. I'm almost used to it by now: her "doctor's speak."

Examples of this would be:

You're never making light of a situation; you're "evading."

You're never placing blame on someone; you're "projecting."

You're not a numb-nutted freak; you're "somatically deficient."

I finally come clean and tell her someone clocked me a few nights ago at a bar, and FYI: This isn't the first time I've had this sort of encounter for those of you just tuning in.

"Did you provoke him to do it?" Dr. Paradies asks.

"Her," I correct, rousing a glare of cross-examination (of disgust possibly) as the doc checks out my eye again. Closer this time. "And, yes," I admit, "I provoked it."

"Have a seat," she advises after a few scribbles, mildly sighing.

One of the things I don't like about this office is the doc's \$6,000 imported chaise lounge, which almost makes it *my* chaise lounge since I'm the one sitting on it all the time. Doctors have this tendency to spend most of their office budget on high-end patient furniture, almost seeing it as an investment. The active theory here is that the more comfortable the patient is, the easier the information will flow, but comfy things sort of work the opposite with me. Honestly, I wouldn't mind standing, but Paradies seems to think that would be "anti-productive."

That's more doctor's speak in case you didn't catch it.

"By the way, how's the Colace working out?" she asks, ready to scribble.

One of the major "perks" of my affliction is I have no idea when I'm supposed to go to the bathroom. That stinging burn of having to piss or the bruising pressure of a major dump brewing—I don't feel those things, so sometimes I have accidents. The doc's first suggestion was for me to start wearing an adult diaper. I told her to go fuck herself and to think of a better idea. That's when the Colace came in. It was Plan B for my bathroom scenario. Typically, it's used on people who can't go or won't go. Not with me. I just don't know when I'm supposed to.

Everyday at 1:00 P.M. I take it.

At 1:30 P.M. I sit down and start pushing.

By 2:00, I'm done. That's the schedule.

Keep in mind that this wasn't my idea. Dr. Paradies says that we need to control my condition—not the other way around, so now there's a timetable for everything: with pissing, with eating, with shitting. Everything. This is why she gets paid the big bucks; because she's done something I never thought possible—potty training the same person twice.

The Colace is working out fine. "Just fine," I tell her.

"It must be," she says. "Looks like you've dropped some of the weight," pointing with her pen at my midsection, my shrinking love handles and man boobs.

Paradies is referring to the residuals of my eating binges from when I first developed this little curse. Much in the same way bathroom time eludes me, I also don't know when to eat, or more importantly, when to stop eating.

I never get hungry.

I never get full.

It's really the taste that I'm addicted to. And I stress the word "addicted."

Up until Dr. Paradies came along with her food schedule and portion control I was averaging ten meals a day, and one of those was usually cheesecake. Not a slice, mind you. The whole thing. All 3,800 ass-fattening calories of it.

When my jeans started to not fit quite right, I knew there was a problem. It took me a week of fasting and colonics just to get back into a 34. If you're taking notes, that's another place the Colace comes in handy.

Dr. Paradies still is.

She's always doing this.

"Stick out your tongue," she orders.

I do it and she makes a face. Takes more notes. Last time I checked, the tip of it was mashed and purple. A blister cluster. She's probably notarizing this right now, that I've got this nasty little habit of chewing it, almost on a par with a canker sore. It hurts

like hell and it's irritated, but for the life of you, you just can't seem to stop rubbing your teeth against it.

Just to check.

Just to see.

When that familiar taste of copper hits, I know it's time to stop.

"If you keep doing that it's going to get infected," she warns. "I want you to start chewing more gum and I'll prescribe you an antibiotic," she says with more scribbling. "And try not to smoke so damn much."

The good news is that if the antibiotic stings, it's not gonna hurt. Same goes for lighter burns, razor cuts, and facial abrasions. Anything painful. This is something Dr. Paradies has been trying to get me to do: seeing the bright side of things.

"I take it you're still using your proof object?" she asks, the scribbling silent for now. "Your arm is bandaged," she points out.

Anytime you see someone who is handicapped, whether they're blind, deaf, or crippled, there's always this little part of you that has doubt. Most people, normal people, need to see hard evidence to remove that last shred of disbelief. They have to know you're the real deal before they start dispensing pity. Before they decide to care.

The blind have their seeing-eye dogs and walking sticks.

The deaf have their sign language and speech impediments.

I have my little sewing needle.

That's what Dr. Paradies means when she says, "proof object," because anytime I tell someone about my condition they never believe me. Ever. No one wants to believe they're meeting a guy who can't feel anything.

The science on that is the body sends my brain a message that I'm feeling pain or that I'm not hungry anymore or whatever the sensory-related respondent is, but the message my brain is supposed to send back informing me of these events never makes it. It's a one-way street, but that's way too complicated for most people (or too complicated for me), hence, the proof object: my little sewing needle. It's the simple answer to that unspoken mistrust.

How it goes:

I tell them my condition.

They say they don't believe me.

I unflinchingly stab myself in the arm.

In the event that they still don't believe me after that, I offer them the needle and tell them to have a go at it. Most don't take me up on this offer.

"Yes," I admit to her. "I'm still using it."

"You've got remember that you have nothing to prove," Dr. Paradies says, the scribbling on full throttle again. "Even if you can't *physically* feel it, you're still hurting yourself. The sooner you realize that, the better."

And I'm thinking, *Oh, that's deep, man.*

I say nothing. I'm working on keeping my snide comments to myself.

"We need to get you in touch with the inner-you," she says, not writing, but looking at me instead. As if she really cares. I let out a long foreboding sigh, adjusting my body on the blue suede cloud that is the chaise lounge, thinking about how this is going to be yet another long mind-numbing session at #2 Pershing Square. My visits here usually are.

But let's go back to my "pre-condition" stage for a bit.
About one month ago. In the "before" period.

SESSION 03
HUSH

June 17th.

A Saturday.

I toss my Ferrari key to a Mexican or Puerto Rican (is there really a difference?) valet while the three girls behind me stumble along the cement walkway in designer heels. To Hush. They're giggling and coked out of their minds, trying to catch up as I sift through the queue of people. Toward the black velvet rope and I meet eyes with Derrick or Brad or Oliver (whatever the doorman's name is), who shoots me the look of recognition. Of acknowledgment. Barely nodding. It's a little past 11:00 P.M. and I'm always flanked. Untouchable but completely available. Free. It's a Barbie conference in front of the black velvet rope, and the girls play the part so well that sometimes I fool myself into believing they'll anatomically follow in suit; a crackless ass. Blank crotch and stolid breasts. Standard shades of tan. Of hair and make-up. And their eyes never blink. Ever. They bat. Because a woman can be an object if that's her objective. She can be a product, and I spot a couple of blondes not-so-tastefully begging to get in. Leaning and squeezing and flirting, and when the doorman unhinges the rope for me and my group, I whisper to the nearest one that they can join my table for drinks. They (of course) accept (because they'd be dumb not to), and I slide the doorman a crisp fifty for no good reason, being led inside now by a hostess whom I've fucked a couple times on speed-laced X and French champagne two and five weeks ago after a couple rare nights of nonsuccess with other patrons, but I look her over and recall it unflinchingly. Feeling nothing except indifference. Mild callousness. And then the lights hit. Of magenta. Of teal and yellow and orange and jade that flash and wave over the wood and steel, and I put on black Versace sunglasses because my pupils are the size of dinner plates as side effect and growing. Because I'm making an impression walking in here with five Barbie clones in designer clothing by Burberry and Guess and D&G. But mostly because I can. And the girls are still giggling and chatting when we're seated in our tan suede leather sectional, talking about my car with the air-conditioned seats. About how un-stepped on my coke is. About nothing. Still playing the part, moving their shoulders, their hips, to the music. I blow out the pearl votive candles arranged on the table. It's 11:27 and the Asian girl across the table from me has bronze skin and bleached blonde hair. A glossy little advertisement of a mouth. I think she works at BeBe. Bottle service is delivered to

our table consisting of two bottles of vodka (one Belvedere, one Grey Goose), a bucket of ice, black plastic stirring devices, glasses, mixers (cranberry and orange juice, tonic water), eight Red Bulls, a bottle of Voss water, and I have only a vague idea of how much it costs but that doesn't matter. The DJ gives me a nod from the steel and glass booth across the room and my hands are shaking a little. The blonde to my left asks me what I do and I tell her I'm a doctor. A surgeon. She touches my leg and I don't get excited, then says something about wishing she had bigger boobs. Fuller lips. Club lights pulse from above. I look away. There are three blondes planted on the suede couch across the way giving me the eye. I wave them over and they pop up a little too eagerly for my tastes. We have just reached full table capacity. They introduce themselves as Hannah, Nikki, and Fallon, but all I hear is whore, whore, and coke-whore since I already know their reputation and I'm, metaphorically-speaking, all-knowing and all-powerful here. At Hush. I ask for three more glasses even though they already have drinks. I consciously act a gentleman, noticing the queue at the bar is three-deep when I sneak a glance. The dance floor has already spilled over to the seating areas and it's not even midnight yet. Everybody is shoulder-to-shoulder. Wall-to-wall. I light a cigarette (a Parliament) and blow smoke in one of the girls' faces (maybe on purpose). It doesn't bother her so I put it out after a couple drags and my mouth tastes like ashy garbage now. I make myself a drink with no mixer and lots of ice. Take four large swallows. It's gone. Then a manicured hand belonging to a future rape victim lands softly on my shoulder and I flinch. She wants to know if I have any X so I give her a Flunitrazepan (a roofie) and she goes away. Satisfied. Her legs: hard and tan. They remind me of polished wood. Like oak layered on bone. I set my cell phone to go off in 15 minutes and she's wearing a red low-cut dress, taking the pill with a swallow of cranberry juice. The DJ bends over but I can't tell if it's to mix songs or to do a line. A moment passes and the song remains unchanged, some rap anthem that's popular this week. I take a Xanax and feel a foot in my crotch. There are three girls sitting across from me so I apply an ice cube to the foot to identify which one it is. The blonde in the black Gucci top flinches then smiles, but this is nothing to me. She's nothing. The manager of the club comes up to me and shakes my hand, and just like the hostess and all those gatekeepers that seem so much the same, I don't remember his name, either, but he informs me that the four gentlemen across the way would like to invite me over for a drink. I glance over and it's four guys in lame suits but with no women. Lawyers, I'm thinking, and now I know it's not necessarily me they want to meet, but rather, the girls I'm with, which is a fairly logical play on their part. The Hush trickle down effect. Club Reaganomics. I tell the manager to let them know I politely decline, and send them a bottle of Cristal to keep them at bay. At Hush, or at any other club for that matter, this is informally known as a "restraining order." Another blonde at the far end of the table is wearing a black top with a silver A|X set tastefully on her right breast. I think about chopping her skull in half with an ax and wait for the Xanax to kick in. The blonde Asian girl that might or might not work at BeBe says something in gook-speak and I tell her to never do that again even though I liked it. She smiles unhappily. I make another vodka straight and wait for my Xanax. The lawyers get their bottle of Cristal and give me a wave. An appreciative set of smiles and nods. I return the gesture and take two large swallows of vodka, looking away. The song changes. Some remix of some popular song that's being played too much. I'm not sure what it is. My cell phone buzzes in my pocket and I turn to look at

the girl in the red dress I roofied earlier. She looks sleepy and less tan. Less Barbie. More human. Weaker and vulnerable, and therefore, accessible to me and my immediate needs. The group eyes me when I move to stand, and I announce my quick return, though I have no idea how long this departure will last, escorting the red dress to the men's restroom. Downstairs. She's wobbly and out of it but still able to walk. Her hands clutch weakly to my shoulders. To my waist. Inside are two well-dressed Middle Eastern guys who don't seem to think a woman inside the men's restroom is out of the ordinary. One of them apologizes for not calling me back and I tell him it's okay even though I don't know what he's talking about. They're both doing coke off the onyx marble countertop and I'm waiting for my Xanax to kick in. Inside the stall, I sit the girl on the toilet and unfasten my pants. I don't put on a condom. I have one, but I don't put it on, and her legs are smooth and polished. Like wood. Expensive wood you see in IKEA catalogues, brochures, and high-end store windows. I slide her dress from under her ass and prop her legs on my shoulders, noticing vanilla-scented shave lotion mixed with Clinique or the new Versace. She's wearing the kind of thong that could fit between teeth. I move the crotch of her underwear to one side. She smells expensive, so when I start fucking her...it feels a little bit like shoplifting. It's a little dry but adequate. The Middle Eastern guys are snorting outside the stall and listening. Chortling. I fuck her for about ten minutes, five or six fragmented songs, but can't come. Can't stay hard because my Xanax is kicking in. Relaxing me. Every part of me, and when I leave her on the toilet with those hard legs and soft center exposed, I don't wonder why the Middle Eastern guys eye what's in the stall inquisitively. Hungrily, even. I don't question it. Everything makes sense when you don't care, and after exiting the restroom and sifting through the crowd, I return to the table and find to my displeasure that the lawyers have taken the liberty of seating themselves. Chatting up my dates and drinking out of my bottles. One of them is in my spot, and when I point that fact out to him, he apologizes and promptly stands, mentioning something about him hoping I don't mind that they joined my table. I tell him aside from the fact that it's incredibly rude, no, I don't mind at all. He forces a chuckle, but I really don't care because my cock is wet and this Xanax feels good. One of the blondes at the table asks me where I went all doe-eyed and slutty. Desperate. So I tell her what I did (what I almost did) and she laughs her little head off, assuming it's a joke or chic. I lean in close enough to taste her and ask if she'd like to be next. She smiles mischievously and tells me you can't rape the willing. Touché. I lie and tell her I'm taking her home with me tonight while dawning a rare smile. The DJ mixes tracks. I've heard these all before. Have had these conversations many times. The lawyer that was in my seat asks me if he can do anything to return the favor. For the Cristal you sent, he specifies, so I ask him if he's got any coke even though I have some of my own. He does. I've also got some X if you want some, he tells me. I take one from him and examine it to make sure it's not a roofie. It isn't. I swallow it down with the vodka that's left in my glass, and I don't detest this guy as much. The girl I told I was going to take home is wearing a sleek silver top with a black skirt and stiletto heels. She smells expensive and wants to know when we're taking off. The two of us. To my place. I run my hand between her legs and she doesn't stop me. There's no hesitation or regard for what surrounds us: the crowd and the noise, the shapeless mass that comprises Hush where people are bought and sold as an act of privilege. Her face relaxes when I ease my fingers inside her. Sampling her. Teasing. They emerge wet and oily, and taste like

pocket change when I suck the ends. I tell her soon. She sits and the lawyer I'm standing with elevates his eyebrows impressed, something I enjoy more than what he's reacting to. He asks me what I do for a living and I tell him I'm a broker. A stockbroker, to be exact. We're lawyers, he tells me while motioning to his three counterparts. I try to pretend I didn't already know that and tell him some coke sounds good right about now. He nods, empties his flute of Cristal, and I begin sifting through the crowd for a third time. The girls at my table are all looking at me, even the ones talking to lawyers. It's all about me and it's well past midnight. When we enter the bathroom there's a line. Not for the urinals, because those are completely vacant. The line is for the stall. There are three well-dressed guys standing outside of it, each looking eager yet uncomfortable. I look at the space at the bottom of the stall and see legs that remind of smooth polished wood, and then another set in between those. A black thong sits on the floor surrounded by DNA droplets and condom wrappers. Three Trojans. A Durex. One Lifestyles (ribbed). Heavy breathing heaves from within. The lawyer chuckles and I do the same so he doesn't think I'm a fag. He takes out the bag and starts racking up lines on the counter with an AmEx card. Big ones. I roll up a hundred and take the first one. Sniff. He asks me how it is and I tell him it's good even though my stuff is definitely better. Less cut. The guy inside the stall comes which evokes a mild jealousy. I take another line and try not to feel stretched from all this shit I'm doing. The next guy enters the stall and I'm not sure what happens next. Not sure I want to. I do another line. My Cartier tells me it's 12:47 at night when the sound of another condom unwrapping crinkles in acoustic. I think about fucking the Asian girl tonight. I'm about sixty-seven percent sure she works a BeBe. Not that it matters. I do another rail. Another well-dressed guy comes into the restroom and asks us if we're in line for the fuck-doll. He actually says this. Fuck-doll. I shake my head. The lawyer chuckles, asks me about the girl. The fuck-doll. Wasn't she sitting at your table earlier? I shrug and do another line, tell him I'm no one's keeper. Gotta look out for #1, he agrees. I'm so fucking bored. Or far too acclimated. This is my sixth or seventh line. I do a gummer to get the nasty taste out of my mouth. It sort of works and I think my Xanax has been subdued. After the lawyer re-bags his shit, we both go back out to the table for a drink. He flags the waitress down and gets us a couple Heinekens. One of his buddies suggestively thumbs his nose at him and he smirks in return. The track playing is something by some group, but I can't remember if it's the one song or the other one. Regardless, it's very deep couch and appropriate for the make-out session that's happening between the two girls at the table. It makes sense. The three lawyers are all seated and watching as the rest of the girls look on in either boredom or jealousy. A tingle ripples through my neck. The ecstasy, I think, is coming. Our Heinekens are brought to us. Lawyer drops a \$50 on the waitress. We clink necks and swig hard. Tastes good. The expensive smelling blonde that I gave the run-through to earlier gives me her best I-wanna-fuck-you-now look. I turn my gaze to the two blondes making out instead. Kinda hot, the lawyer says. I nod in agreement since being bi is in this summer and take another drink. They stop kissing and both look at me. At *me*. They are looking at me in hopes that I enjoyed the show, and I walk over and squat between the two of them, take another swig. They're both blonde, both wearing black skirts. One of them a mini-mini. I can see between her legs and she knows it. She wants me to see it. It's waxed and egg-smooth. My middle finger enters and she grinds her pelvis into it. I take it out and put it in the other girl's mouth. She sucks. I resume

standing position and take another drink. The one not wearing the mini-mini grazes my cock with her hand. Then squeezes, and it's not hard because this is nothing to me. They're nothing to me. Completely expendable. Disposable. In a place like this, like Hush, that's all you'll find, but this is my life right now. Right then. An act. A magazine. An advertisement. These are girls who fuck for tables. For coke and drinks and three hours of glamour. Girls who publicly degrade themselves for pills. For a shot at a lawyer or doctor or whatever my profession is that night, because at Hush you're not your name or your dreams. You're an income bracket and self-promoting socialite. We're all pretending to be more than what we are. Something we're not even close to. It's the trend, and every night I'm doing this. Living this persona: an existence based on surfaces. On face value. I am the result of unregulated freedom and privilege. To get to where I am, you don't own the club. You own the owner. You own the staff. You come to the place where people come to look important, and then you do it better than them. And tomorrow that changes forever.

Tomorrow I'll be out of touch.