

Unison Dreams and Airport Scenes

By : Christopher M. Brinson

Rachel Asbill was in a deep far away sleep dreaming - oblivious to the world outside of her mind. Even though she was dreaming, she wasn't aware of it. Her perception was reality. She was standing in front of at a small white wooden box church somewhere deep within a forest. The door was open. She walked in. There was an old upright piano at the front of the church. She walked up to it and took a seat at the bench. She started banging out a song on it. She didn't know what it was, but it sounded nice. The piano sounded a bit out tune. She played harder and harder. The piano morphed into a typewriter. She banged on those keys. She was writing a letter to her mother. She finished the letter, pulled the page off the platen and then folded it into a paper airplane. She threw the airplane across the sanctuary. It flew out the door, she ran after it. She tumbled down the church steps chasing it. She pulled herself up. The church faded away, the airplane faded away, the forest disappeared. There was an older woman standing in front of her, arms crossing mouthing the word, "Miss..miss...miss."

And then Rachel's body began shaking. Her mind became unfrozen from the dream state and thawed out to the real world outside. She very slowly became aware of her surroundings. The flight attendant gently said, "Miss, wake up. We've landed in Denver." She shook her head quickly and rubbed her eyes. She repeated the word in her mind, "Denver...Denver...Denver" It made no sense to her.

The flight attendant had helped her stand upright, put her army-style duffel bag over her shoulder and handed Rachel a skateboard. Rachel walked off the plane, her legs still unsteady beneath her. She hobbled through the tunnel and out into the gate area of Denver International Airport. She went to the ladies' room, looked in the mirror at the freckled face sitting there in the frame of mussed up red hair in front of her. It was all starting to come back to her.

She walked out of the bathroom and sat at the bench of the Terminal C coffee shop. She ordered a cup. She took a long gulp. It all came back to her now. The fight with her mother. The call to her grandfather. The Seattle airport.

She had hitchhiked all over the west coast, kayaked down the Columbia River, lived in a tent, picked cherries and sold them on the side of the road. Done more than your average twenty-one-year-old. But the one thing she had never done was fly in an airplane. She now remembered. Calling her grandfather down in Alabama. He had wired her money; he had bought her a ticket to come see him and her grandmother down in Mobile.

The flying phobia had overcome her at the airport. She barely had made it onto the plane. She began to panic. She enumerated all the safety facts about flying in her mind to try to calm herself down. About how you were much more likely to die in a car accident than a plane crash. That the airline industry was the safest industry in the world. But none of that had calmed her nerves. She opened a box of Unisom pills she had purchased at the airport gift shop. She read the instructions. Recommended dosage was one or two tablets. She took three. And that's how she found herself waiting in the Denver International Airport for a connecting flight to Houston.

The coffee cleared her mind and washed a level of stamina through her system. She put her hand in her coat pockets and pulled out a folded and somewhat crinkled boarding pass for her next flight. The flight boarded at 7:14 pm. She looked at the nearest clock, nearly 7:00pm, she picked up her bag and started walking across the terminal.

She got her seat on the flight to Houston. It was a window seat at the back of the plane. She thought about doping up again but changed her mind. She gave herself a long-winded severe pep talk. When the plane took off and leveled, she pulled the tray table down and took out her drawing pad. She had started a new piece back in Seattle. She was drawing a portrait of the stained-glass windows at the end of the terminal. It was a picture of the sun and moon gods

riding in a golden chariot pulled by Pegasus across the constellations as they poured water on the world below from a magical clay pot. She had sketched the rough outline back in Seattle. She now set upon filling in the drawing with color. She yawned. The hum of the jet engines wore down her senses. She leaned onto the window and fell asleep again.

She woke up on arrival in Houston, scrambled off the plane and ran to her next connection with just minutes to spare. This time it was a small dual propeller plane with only 40 or 50 seats. She took her seat. She was convinced she "had this". She had mastered the art of navigating airports and dealing with her fear of flying. In less than two hours she'd be on the ground in Mobile and in three hours she'd be at her grandparent's house.

The plane took off. It was louder and rougher than the jets she had been on coming from Seattle. About 15 minutes into a flight the pilot's voice came over the intercom and alerted the passengers that they were about to go through some "minor turbulence". It started raining outside the window, she could see lighting all over the sky. She started to have an inner panic but tried to keep it under control. There was a rather nerdy man next to her in the aisle seat reading a paperback novel, he didn't seem concerned. He looked up from the book, looked at Rachel, slightly smiled and nodded. He then went back to his book. Rachel returned the nod.

The plane flew on, slightly rocking and then suddenly dropping violently. Items that were on people's trays seemed to hover very briefly in midair before either falling back onto the tray or missing the tray and falling on the floor. All the passengers grabbed for their belongings. Rachel grabbed onto the seat in front of her. Her heart flew into her throat and began beating like a machine gun in her chest. She started to have visions of the plane nosediving into the swamps of Louisiana.

The plane swooped down again. Her eyes dilated. Her grip tightened and she began to sweat. She looked at the man next to her.

He was still reading his novel. Didn't seem to have much concern. He looked up again from the book. He turned to her, "Steady," he said.

Rachel said nothing but gave him a questioning look.

"Nothing to be worried about," he said.

She gasped for breath. "This is normal?" she asked.

"On these little puddle jumpers, it is," he replied.

"Puddle jumpers?"

"Small propeller planes."

"You've been through this before?"

"Yes, it's normal. They'll fly out to the exterior of the storm, circle around it a bit, try to find a clear path. If they can't, they'll land somewhere else safe."

"You fly too much." She said.

"Yes, I do." He replied.

The pilot came on the intercom and said they were going to fly around the storm. They flew on for about 10 minutes.

The pilot came on the intercom again and said they couldn't make it to Mobile and were going to land in New Orleans instead and wait the storm out.

Fifteen minutes later, the plane was on the ground in New Orleans. It was just a few minutes before midnight. Rachel disembarked yet another airplane at yet another airport, still short of her destination. The passengers huddled around the exit gate, stretching, yawning and browsing through their personal effects. An airline representative came out and told everybody that they wouldn't be able to try to fly out until 9:00 am at the very earliest. People shuffled to various corners of the airport terminal and curled up for the night waiting for the next flight.

Rachel paced back and forth and walked in circles. She took out her skateboard on the floor and skated a bit up and down the terminal.

Finally, she walked over to the rows of seats and sat down. The nerdy man who sat next to her on the plane was still there calmly reading his novel. "Hey.", she said to him.

He looked up, "Oh hello, how are you doing? Quite a lot of excitement up there."

"I'm better," she replied. "Good to be on the ground, prior to today, I'd never flown before"

"Sorry about that, it did get a little choppy up there. Not a pleasant experience to be your first in the friendly skies."

"What's your book about there?" she said pointing to the book.

He closed it, looked at the title and smiled, "It's about an ancient telepathic robot who's been manipulating humanity since the dawn of time.

"Whew..." said Rachel. "That's some nerdy sounding stuff."

The man nodded. "It is indeed." He agreed. He put out his hand and said "Bradley LeJeune. Pleasure to meet you."

Rachel put out her right hand and shook his., "Rachel Asbill. What kind of name is that...LeJeune?" She took her first long look at the stranger. He was in his late twenties, possibly early thirties. Short cut thinning brown hair, cleanshaven, blue jeans and polo shirt. He had a constant habit of letting his glasses fall upon the edge on his nose and pushing them back up. Kind of looked like a younger, nerdier Bill Gates.

"Its French. It means 'The Young'. The British kicked my ancestors out of Canada three hundred years ago. And then about one hundred years ago, and they migrated to Louisiana. And then about a hundred years ago, Louisiana kicked us out and they moved to Texas. Imagine that, huh? Being kicked out of Louisiana. My great grandparents must have really pissed somebody off to be kicked out of this state that you and I find ourselves in right now. Had something to do with my great grandfather being a Free Mason." He chuckled to himself and made a motion to their surroundings in the airport.

Rachel nodded and said, "You sure talk funny, Bradley."

"Hmmm..." he said. "Funny words or funny sound?"

"The way you sound, your accent. I like it."

"Well, I suppose we are all a product of our environment. I grew up outside of Houston. I know my accent is thick. Every time I have to travel to Philadelphia or Chicago, I get pretty much the same reaction that you just gave me. I'll go to a restaurant there, make an order, and they will look at me like I just spoke in Russian or something like that."

"You travel a lot?"

"Quite a bit. I'm on my way to Mobile now, a week there and then to Philadelphia, then Cleveland, then back home."

"What are you doing in all those cities?"

"I'm a chemical engineer for Phillips."

"Oh, I can't stand the Chemical Industry," said Rachel. "all the poisons they are putting into the environment. Evil. Evil. Evil."

"Well, Rachel," he said, "I hear you. There is that. It happens, not as much as you would think. But just consider, we both took a plane here, they use and are made of chemicals. Those wheels on your skateboard there," he said pointing to Rachel's skateboard, "that's made from plastic. Plastic is nothing but a chemical."

Rachel picked up the skateboard and spun the wheels on it. She thought long and hard about it, looked up at Bradley and said, "OK, I take your point, we're all part of the problem."

He nodded his head, "Yes, we are."

"So is that what you do, you go around just doing nerdy chemical engineer stuff. How did you get into that gig?"

"Went to Texas A&M, got a chemical engineering degree. Been working for Phillips now ever since then, the last seven years."

"Sounds like you followed mom and dad's plan for success, there Bradley?"

"I did. I suppose there are worse plans for success and failure in this world," he replied.

"Ever do anything really crazy, ever buck the system, even fall off the cart and go against the grain, though Bradley?"

"Suppose not," he said, "Never been enough time I suppose. I'll get around to something like that before too long." He closed his book, put it in his backpack and said "Well, Rachel. You now know my boring back story. What brings you to New Orleans with your duffel bag, skateboard and flannel shirt on your first flight ever?"

"I'm leaving Seattle," she replied. "Maybe for good. I don't feel like I'll ever go back."

"And why are you leaving Seattle?" he asked.

"Too many people there bringing me down. I need to put as much distance between them and me as I can. So, I'm headed to Mobile to stay with my grandparents for a while. I haven't seen them in years. I finally realizing that I need to get my head together. I need to get my shit straight. I can't keep waiting for everyone around me to get their act together. So, I figured Mobile would be a good place for me to get my head together."

"Well," said Bradley. "Mobile is certainly a world apart from Seattle."

"Yeah, I can't wait to get there to eat some mustard greens and cornbread."

"Mustard greens?" he asked.

"Yeah, mustard greens. Pops keeps talking about them and his garden."

"Ever had mustard greens before?"

"No," said Rachel.

"Well, you might change your tune about them once you eat them. I've grown up eating mustard greens. Mustard greens, turnip greens, collard greens. Nothing to write home about. Just douse it with a lot of salt and pepper and hope for the best."

"Salt and pepper?" she asked.

He nodded.

Rachel got up from her seat. She walked around the terminal some more for a bit. She walked outside. There were a small group of homeless cats wandering around. She kneeled down, gave them some attention and let them know they weren't alone in the universe. Then she walked back in. Bradley had gone back to reading his novel. He was eating an orange. She sat down and said to him, "Got anything else to eat in the bag, Tex? I can't find a thing open around here and I'm starving."

He opened his bag, took out another orange and handed it to her. He also gave her a chocolate bar.

"Thanks," said Rachel, "Much appreciated."

"You're welcome," he said and then went back to his book.

Rachel put the candy bar in her duffle bag and started to peel the orange. She ate it slowly and patiently. Carefully, pulling out each wedge, considering it and then eating each one. She curled up on the hard-plastic shell airport chair, leaned on her duffle bag and fell asleep again.

She fell into her dream state again. She was at her house that she grew up in, but it looked different. Strangers were living there. It confused her. She knocked on the door. The new owners answered the door. The man looked at her and said "Rachel." It surprised her that they knew her. She asked if she could go in and look around. She barely recognized the house. The new owner called her name again..." Rachel", she turned around. He said it one more time, "Rachel. Wake up."

Once again, Rachel shook her self-back into the world. Back into the emptiness of the New Orleans airport, back into the world of one plane flight followed by another plane flight. The chemical engineer, Bradley LeJeune was standing in front of her, "Rachel, hate to wake you up. Looks like you were in a deep slumber there. But the car rentals agencies just opened, and I went ahead and rented a car. I'm going to go ahead and drive to Mobile. It's 5:00 am now, only about 2 and half hour drive to Mobile from here. Our plane is not leaving until 9:30."

She rubbed her eyes. She smiled. His drawl was terribly amusing to her. She focused on him intensely.

"Well," he began. "I gathered you aren't too much on flying and if you wanted to, I'll drive you to your grandparents in Mobile. You'll get there earlier and won't have to worry about flying anymore today."

She smirked and said, "How do I know, you won't kidnap and whisk me away on some crazy cross-country escapade?"

He looked at his watch and said, "Well, for starters, I have a meeting in my company's office in Mobile in five hours where I have to make a major presentation at, so I just don't have time for that craziness."

She laughed. The Texan was one of the most strait-laced people she had ever met. She considered her options and said, "OK, I'll hitch a ride. Just give me a minute to get my crap together." She visited the restroom, washed her face, repacked her duffel bag and followed him to the car rental garage.

They walked across the garage and she asked, "Did you finish your book?"

Bradley paused and said, "Oh yeah, I did."

"Well?" She asked.

"Well, how did igt end?"

"Oh." He said. "The robot finally dies, but humans live on.

"Poor little robot. Poor little humans." Said Rachel.

They arrived at the rental car and put their luggage in the trunk, got in the car and pulled out of the garage. In minutes they were on interstate 10 headed East out of Louisiana. Bradley turned on the radio, it was on a news station. He listened intently to it. He nodded to Rachel, "Did you hear they caught that guy last week?"

"What guy?" asked Rachel.

"The Unabomber. They caught him last week in a shack in the Montana forest."

"No, haven't heard about that. I probably haven't paid attention to the news for five year."

"Yeah, it's tragic. He was mathematical genius back in the sixties, but he flipped his lid and lost it. He'd been sending mail bombs to airports and universities for the past twenty years."

"Sounds like another good reason to not get on a plane today." She said. Rachel looked out the window and said "Oh, is that the Gulf of Mexico out there?"

"Nope. That's Lake Pontchartrain. We'll be driving over it for about 15 or 20 minutes. We'll see the Gulf a little way down the highway when we get to Mississippi."

He drove. She fiddled with the radio, listening to a variety of stations, rock, hardcore, country and then she landed on another station. "Hmm..." she said, "That's French they are speaking?"

"Sort of," said Bradley. "It's Cajun. It's mostly French with some English and Spanish thrown in for flavor. A lot of people in these parts spoke it until the early 20th century. The government banned it back in the twenties. If kids tried to speak it in school, they'd whack their hands until they cried in front of all their classmates. As a result, the language almost died out. In the last 15 or 20 years there has been a resurgence in the language and culture."

"Say Bradley, "Where do you get all this odd trivial knowledge from?"

"Guess I read a lot of books."

"Obviously," she said. "You were way deep in that robot book you were reading."

"Yeah, now I've got to read the sequel."

"Christ!" She exclaimed. "A sequel." She repeated. "What about a social life, what do you do besides the chemical engineer gig and keep your nose inside of books."

"Hmmm..." He thought. "The occasional movie." I suppose.

"Who do you go to the movies with?"

"By myself."

"Ever had a girlfriend, there Bradley?"

"Yeah, once several years back. Didn't work out."

"Well, what was the problem, then"

"We were kind of high school sweethearts. Just woke up one day after college and realized I didn't want to spend my life with her. And decided to let her go."

Rachel gasped. "You broke her heart!!!!??? You're a heartbreaker, Bradley LeJeune. You have a dark side after all."

"Well, perhaps. She's none the worse for it, though. She's married some big shot lawyer in Houston and lives in a five thousand square foot McMansion now."

"So how long did y'all live together?"

Bradley chuckled. "Never did. We just were kind of social with each other on the weekends."

"What the hell," said Rachel. "You dated this girl for years and y'all never lived together? Boring!"

"Well, Yeah, and thing was I didn't want to either live with her either. That's what kind of tipped me off as to why I should call the whole thing off."

"Weird! So, are you a Mormon or something like that?"

Bradley chuckled again, "Mormon, no. I'm Muslim."

"Muslim? You got to be shitting me!"

Bradley paused and smiled, "Yeah, you're right. Just joking. I'm a Methodist, and just barely at that."

"You really need to let loose and sew some wild oats, Bradley."

"Maybe one day."

"But not today?"

"Not today, got that meeting to make"

They had crossed the Mississippi state line, Bradley took a turn south and then got onto old Highway 90 in Biloxi. He rolled down the windows, "There you go, Gulf of Mexico on your right. White sand beach, enjoy."

Rachel stuck her head out the window in the wind as they drove along the gulf's shore. She took in deep gulps of the wind heavy with salt and sand. She inhaled as much air as she could into her lungs, pulled her body back into the car and collapsed in the seat.

Forty-Five minutes later they were on the outskirts of Mobile. "You have the directions to your grandparents?" asked Bradley.

"Sure do," said Rachel. She pulled a paper out of her pocket, unfolded it and told him the proper exit to take. When he got to the exit, he signaled and crossed the highway to the exit. They took the exit.

"Say Bradley." Said Rachel.

"Yes." He answered.

"Why don't we just blow all this shit off and just keep driving. You and I keep driving across the country, up to Canada and back."

Shake off all the crap that's holding you down and let's live for the moment and adventure, man!"

Bradley amusingly shook his head, "Just like that?" He snapped his fingers on his right hand, "Leave the world behind?"

"Hell yes. Why the hell not?" She proclaimed.

"I thought you had to get your head together?" he replied. "Is that a good way to get your head together?"

"I am man. I'm down here in the south. The weather is beautiful. I'm thousands of miles away from those assholes in Seattle. My head's never been more together. You and me, let's see where the road takes us."

Bradley smiled. "Well, as attractive as that sounds, Rachel. I'm going to pass on that offer today. I kind of feel a responsibility to get you to your grandparents. I know that would kill them if you didn't show up. Don't you agree. All of mine are dead and not a day goes by where I don't find myself wishing I could have had just a little more time with them."

"Aw, damn, man. You think so logical and make too much sense. You got me there. I sure love my Pops and my Grandma. I don't want to mess with their minds. But I almost got to you didn't I, Bradley. Didn't I?"

"Well, you put a thought in my head. I understand. An attractive thought, nonetheless. Just something I can't do now."

"But when, Bradley? You aren't getting no young, Tex!"

"Yeah I know. I guess that's for me to figure out." He stopped at the intersection right off the freeway exit. "So, give the rest of the directions to your grandparents." She gave him the directions.

Minutes later, he pulled up his rental car in front of a small beautiful light blue craftsman style house. There was a sidewalk paved in bricks leading up to the steps to the door. The sidewalk was lined with beautiful lush azaleas. There was a swing on the front porch.

Bradley parked the car, got out, and helped Rachel get her things from the trunk. She picked up her duffel bag and skateboard, started to walk away. She turned around and stepped back up to him. "Come here a second." She said to him.

Bradley stepped over, she leaned up to him and kissed him on the cheek and said, "Thank You."

"Your welcome. I enjoyed your company. Glad we met." He replied. "I hope you get your head together sooner than later." He added. They both laughed.

"And you need to get out and have an adventure before it's too late, Bradley. Before you're married with two kids, a cat, a dog and a mortgage from hell. Get out and sew a few wild oats."

"I'll think about."

"You do that." She commanded. "And if you need somebody to do it with, you know where I'll be at."

"I'll remember that. Bye now, Rachel."

"Goodbye, Bradley."

Rachel could smell pie baking in the oven inside the house and by this time, both of her grandparents had come out and Rachel fell deep into their warm embracing hug. She melted into their arms and had never felt so safe and loved in her life. Tears filled her eyes. She knew she was home.

Then Rachel and her grandparents turned around and waived at Bradley LeJeune as he drove off to attend his business meeting somewhere in downtown Mobile, Alabama.

