

## Just Checking

by Rosalyn St Pierre

### Application

A long sigh, a muttered curse, a moving of head, an adjustment of glasses and a squinting at the screens, evidence that he was aware of the days of flights were coming to an end. He thought with a tenderness, admittedly not felt at that time, of boarding procedures for domestic flights in Lagos. Waiting passengers stood on the tarmac as their plane landed and headed towards the terminal building. They ran to where they anticipated the plane might stop, not always right, which meant scurrying after the plane, some getting scorched in the jet emissions. As passengers from Ibadan fought to get off, the Lagos passengers pushed their way on. No seating plan, but a lone traveller with just a small back pack could afford to wait. Moving the back pack to cover his chest and he was protected from elbows, giving him force to claim a seat. On more than one occasion there were more passengers than seats, which meant someone had illegally got on. Once identified the penalty was rough but efficient as they were just thrown off as the plane circled at the end of the runway for take-off. Along drop, survived by most who were watched with some compassion as a chase started with the airport police. Seating arrangements were in the hands of the gods or the strong or the rich, though bribes were ineffective against the might of these citizens,

He yearned for the days of checking in at an airport. He wondered how many people he had looked at all his life and never really seen? Waiting in the long queue gave him an opportunity to scan his fellow passengers. Not seeking a friendly face, not really viewing them as human, but as pawns in his game. His best move was to wait. to listen, to watch for those signs of impatience. Those with tempers frayed, vanity challenged, the business man who did not have expenses for Club Class, the couple on the edge of divorce, the elderly confused that would delay boarding. Such fun. Let them give the checking in staff real grief, let them vent their anger, their confusion on some underpaid ground staff, who we all know yearn to be in the skies. So approaching the desk everything ready, luggage well under the weight limit, he says,

“I really admire your courtesy, your patience, your tolerance in this difficult job.”

Works a treat nearly every time.

An announcement, he hears his name called,

“You are being moved to Club Class, some late arrivals means Economy is now full.”

Even before take-off, that glorious glass of champagne, the thought of those behind, crowded, babies crying, adds to his joy.

Back in the day - oh for those days. What has he done to deserve such torture now? In all his years he had been a faithful passenger, never missing a flight, rarely drinking too much that getting off the plane was problematic.

He glares again at the screen. Self check in!

Before him the seating plan of the Boeing 737. How can he choose a seat when he cannot see who will be sitting next to. God forbid an overweight couple that compress him into the window, who cannot get up if he needs the toilet. Does he sit on the aisle, trolleys barging up and down, the obese couple barging into him, the endless getting up to let his neighbours out. And where in hell are the kids, the babies? He can smell the stench of soiled nappies, he recalls the cries the screams of toddlers that constantly escape the futile clutches of their minders.

## Inspiration!

Emergency exit. Strangely still vacant, four seats still available. Unusual. Why? OMG Alaska, the door blew out. Now if he could ensure the most obese passenger had the window seat and he kept his seat belt on, then maybe he would be protected from being blasted out at 35,000 feet. He reconsidered his former critical view of obesity with more positivity. But it could not be guaranteed. What if there were a skinny old lady there?

## Reconsideration

Two seats at the front, still free. Limited leg room but the front of the plane is the safest. Pilots always protect themselves. But before him Club and First Class and only two doors up there and life has shown him that despite any emergency the rich and privileged are the slowest to move. Heard stories of people causing death and mayhem and they searched for their essential jewels and iPads. Understandable. He would do the same if he was there, but not when he was condemned to cattle class. So it's back row, again. He recalled when it was the refuge of smokers and child free. Still he will be near the toilets, near the galley to sneak an extra drink or two from bored air stewards. Unpopular, so might be able to stretch out. He clicked confirm.

## Termination

The flight is full, the stewards are surly, the drinks are slow to arrive, the children are screaming.

'I wish to god this was over, can't stand much more of this travel and for what? Bloody project is failing, should have learnt Japanese cannot understand what those crooks want now.'

An announcement:

"Please fasten your seat belts we are expecting severe turbulence..."