

## The Long Happy Flight of Asa Smallidge Streb

*Settling in by the window, Asa is pleased to see who's got the seat assigned next to him . . .*

Even the way he *yawns* looks macho and youthful. Big strapping nameless jock of the unexamined life: lean build, working-class hands, plenty of hair. *Make sure your seat-backs are in their full upright position*, and so slink back to the glories of 1969, long before I lost my hair, long before my new neighbor came into this world. *Flying time to Los Angeles this evening will be five hours and fifty-eight minutes*. Five no six hours of strapping kid strapped-in beside me, another solid advantage of flying cramped economy. I mean I love plans, and hands, which are relevant to the quest. Who's waiting for him at the other end and what does he want in life? Whatever his culture, it's more physical than mine: already he allows our legs to touch, our elbows. Nice, nice, this marriage of Iceland and Brazil, and such an improvement over afternoons at the Finer Skin Institute. Great nameless child in a t-shirt: Eat My Giant Burrito, it says, And Don't Forget To Try My Beans...These precious hours, who *are* you. Let them take my blood pressure now, the doctor would be stunned to see a mellow one-twenty-five over seventy-five. Back at the Conference, the popular people ate near the fuchsias, while the more socially awkward sat near the doors to the cooks. Only concoct. Cocky, too, he spreads himself, nods off. This sea is fine. This sea is pretty. This sea is always sea and wavy. We live so long, and slink back, every day, to child, hooded. Who is my lover if not you. Bodies join. Clouds, as we ascend, enfeeble the invulnerable, allow me to dwell in an Eden that grows lush as a country club. At least I "matured" *slowly*. What's my direction. Solitude desires only to observe the formulaic ride of ping-pong ball and butterfly. He's sleeping the sleep of nineteen: sleep like the spirit of generations of bruised warriors. His tattoos: probably well-done, but pedestrian. Back at the Conference, the popular people ate by the fuchsias, while the more stoically awkward stayed by the door to the cooks. *Tonight's feature presentation will be Gidget, starring Sandra Dee*. Mommy always said, "When boys hit, don't fight back, but go report them to the yard teacher." Hunt nothingness like an arrow. Let the white coat people take my BP now: a wholesome one-twenty-five over

seventy as long as I'm slouching next to *him*, touching. Reckless venereal sleep of the masses. Hip-hop pumping into brown ears and all the gals aflutter. His name? Oh my Moondoggie. It's the ultimate. The flight attendant asks me — seeing he's asleep — “You want his Oreos?” I accept the Oreos that might have voyaged through *his* body: torn and chopped by his teeth, probed by his tongue, moistened by his spit, forced down through his esophagus, churned by his young stomach into thick liquid and squirted deep into his bowel and absorbed into his bloodstream. Nice. But what'll he be like in forty years, or ten. Serve Gidget to the sharks so I can have my Moondoggie. Serve a forty-year-old movie to a twenty-year-old boy and watch him fall asleep to hip-hop. He is not a beauty — perhaps only his hands are good. This drawn-out twilight as the plane flies west above the clouds. This drawn-out twilight as creases increase and nothing but white hair ever falls to the barber shop floor, and not much of that, as his heat begins to envelop me. Can a therapist be wrong about so many things. Dear southtrust bank Customer: Technical services of the southtrust bank are carry out planned software upgrade, we earnestly ask to you to visit the following link to start the procedure of confirmation of customer's data, please do not answer to this email. Two milligrams of Xanax, once daily, forty milligrams of Lipitor, once daily (by mouth), twenty-five milligrams of Atarax, two hundred milligrams of Celebrex (white with gold band), two hundred milligrams of Leptressor, five hundred milligrams of Bioxin every twelve hours: the patient is very depressed. He is also anxious. He worries about his health, and his future. The patient is so nervous that when anybody walks into the room, he fears that they will come and tell him bad news. He denies having any hallucinations at this point. He is single. There is no family support at this time. The patient claims that he is healthy. The patient is a middle-aged Caucasian male who looks his stated age. The patient is nervous now and requests medication. He denies having any suicidal or homicidal ideation. The memory is intact. The control impulse is fair. “You want his Oreos?” “When boys hit, don't fight back, go report them to the teacher.” A good goal to have: one night, get to bed before dawn. At the Conference the popular people sat by the fuchsias, while the less socially adept strayed far from the toys and the frisbees. Oh my Moondoggie. Oh Mommy. Slink back, every night, to child, hooded. Oh

Mommy, gotta follow the sun, we were an elevator heading for the sky speeding across the ocean it was the ultimate. Hear that? The sea has left its whisper here, in here, come hear and see. Summer of sheer happiness, you can't imagine the thrill of shooting the curl, it positively surpasses every. . .

Naturally, Jeffery would like to think his son was dating the right kind of . . . Put a condom on your toy and live a long and healthy life. As my stomach churns his Oreos. As the mirage of Iceland and Brazil puts its problems on a camel's hump and sends it wishful, diffident, undramatic through the dunes. Say you happen to meet someone who flips you. Say you happen to have a boner at the Bulldog Baths, circa 1969, long before you lost your hair. Say you are lying in front of Charles V's palace lulled to sleep by the strumming of a guitar as swallows swirl and cypresses sway. Peace. Let Dr. Snow see how compliant my blood pressure can be in good company. Dear Mr. Streb: I hope you will respond to this very special invitation to have your name on the Wall of Tolerance when it is dedicated. Placing the name Asa Smallidge Streb has a purpose beyond public recognition.

*Please return to your seats at this time, we've encountered a little turbulence....* Working-class hands, long face, and hair. A hundred milligrams of ease, two hundred milligrams of sanity, five hundred milligrams of lovingkindness, will he let me hold his hand if the turbulence goes on, or gets worse, or if the wings of the pilot catch fire. Mouth open, elbows solid against time. "Sleep thou, Sancho, for thou wast born to sleep as I was born to watch." When I am tested, the sleeve tight around my arm, there is always Dr. Snow like a used-car salesman so I must shut my eyes and I'm at Ka'anapali Beach, ukulele sounds coming from the palms, it's always me and some Hawaiian dude as the waves wash up against us from Here to Eternity ("I never knew it could be like this"). Oh Moondoggie, hear that? The sea has left its whisper here, in here, as night falls on the red states, as the cabin shakes to gentle worries of Gidget this, Gidget that. Put a condom on your boy and love a long and happy lie. Dear Mr. Streb: During one of our regular automatical verification procedures we've run across a technical problem caused by the fact that we could not verify that informations that you provided. Dear Mr. Smallidge Streb: A Democratic victory is in your hands! Now go back to Momma and run, don't walk, call in sick and watch sunlight in the elms playing in the elms as it did in 1955

or 1965. Maybe the urologist will be satisfied with my flow and function, then I'll rejoice in the gym with all kinds of kind people and have fun watching triceps trying to inflate and all showered-up I'll have my non-fat cappuccino in a paper cup with my name written on it. And then I'll wander with my book, looking at hands, even if it rains, and think of someone who rose from a tangle of freeway and cinderblock and put out his cigarette and lay back, crammed my fingers into him, crammed my head and all my thoughts into him, he was from Guanajuato and remembering what he told me about his love of soccer I entered him with an eye to his sterling silver toe-ring and soles like the hard monolithic underside of an iron getting closer, closer, giving off a forbidden scent — and then a handshake and it was over, he slid back, reabsorbed into the smog and the grit. Every day is filled with people we see once and never again. But what hair — black greased and brash, as far from greyness and thinning-out as the rainforest is from the Ice Age. Hair. How soon can I expect results? If minoxidil is working, what will my hair look like? What if I miss a dose? Should I try to make up for missed doses? Can I use minoxidil topical solution 5% more than twice a day? Will it work faster, better? Will minoxidil work for *me*? Piss on ants until they die. Buy Comet cleanser and clean the house finally for God's sake and for God's sake smile at the cashier. Wander the streets until it's all crazy with dawn, as my foot crawls up his athletic footwear. Can't stand my feet these days, will minoxidil work for *me*? Back at the Conference, the in-crowd sat near the fuchsias, while the more socially inept stayed near the door to the cooks. "Don't fight back, go to the yard teacher and report him!" Derek Honda slams his social studies book down on my forehead — hey swell — and when I report him to Mrs. Sarcander (she's going bald, you can tell) she looks annoyed and looks away and walks away, ringing her bell: they swarm around me, even one of the traffic boys, they want my old brown briefcase this time and work and work to peel my fingers off the handle, work to peel them off one by one — bye, briefcase! Faggot. Sissy. Goon. Fifi the French Poodle. It's gone, the goon's trusty briefcase, the wishbone, the traced drawings of fashions through the ages. Work to peel the fingers off, work, work for two hundred milligrams of Lepressor, five hundred milligrams of Bioxin every twelve hours (by mouth). Dominic Garfono is tough in just his undershirt, asks me to show him the jack-o'-lantern

I've just made. I want to show him my jack-o'-lantern, I do, he takes it. I hand it to him and he takes it. The patient denies having any hallucinations at this point. Nice boy. The patient claims that he is healthy, and the swells are getting pretty big, maybe we could get the Gidget to run delivery service to the hot-dog stand. And Mommy there fretting. Bye-bye, jack-o'-lantern. When I think it's safe I skip outside with the dog but Ken Fry is waiting. It's almost painless: a strip of air, a strip of life, a shrinking, a narrowing. His hands squeeze. The world narrows. Hands squeeze my throat — Oh Gidge it was creamy, it was the ultimate. Life is always junior high, sandal, thigh and cigarette. Fifi. Faggot. Grass covers the helpless and grass covers the wild. Where is my new name new body new past? Queen of Iceland, creepy Queen and easy prey in search of prey, in search of their soles' smell first thing in the morning and their forbidden smells, unwashed, after nights on skateboards — the thirst, it's like trying to grab hold of a cloud, nothing but nothing, nothing but no. Peace. Will you please take a pen and gently begin to draw all over me, as if you were sketching ideas for a tattoo over my body. Peace, peace. Start at the troubled feet and work your way to skin usually untouched, draw and draw until my body is new, until my body is acceptable and a boy will slip out of all the used skin and it will be the picture you have drawn, great strapping nude. The sun and the surfers have gone, and when a voice picks out my flaws with the cunning of a sniper, there is always another tongue nearby to reel me in, reel me in, saying: Liliuokalani and Kamehameha; and he, like all the other young men lining up for falafels, is dangerous, even the way he waits is dangerous and athletic, even the way he yawns is macho and electrifying. Tourists are filling the cafés besieged by diseased flamenco. At the entrance to the subway they're playing Pachelbel to the beat of a blind man's cane. An ice-cream truck lurches by, drunk or demented, and I make love with the mattress and write his name and burn his name, just like the therapist told me to do, but I keep seeing him curled up with his tomcats, curled up and powerless over TV, saying: Liliuokalani and Kamehameha; his chest smells like apples. The whole city — where am I? — is lucky with youth and lean with swagger. The subway disgorges a much-pierced crowd — I can't wake up, so I relax into the crowd's wiles, into its pliant optimism, and someone looks at *me*. Wanted: escape into the postcards of the world, where it's always a

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canal and a gondolier. Wanted: a theme park consecrated to facets of the surfing life, to lifeguards' lives and the hollows of their chests. In a derelict cathedral a date palm has grown through the altar, and crows rage in the dome. Shattered rose window, moonglow on the dust. Somebody taps my shoulder, taps gently then harder — talk of *landing*, talk of *arrival*. Put a kiss on his impending laughter.