

# THE TURBULENCE

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Student's Name  
Institution of Learning



# The Turbulence

When the airport information system announced that my flight to Shanghai was delayed at least for four hours due to a storm on the flight route, my mood fell down through the floor. It drizzled from the early morning that day, and I got out of bed from the wrong side. The foretelling eight-hour flight itself was not a jaunt, but such a long delay unsettled me completely. Having passed the airport security control, I haunted about the departure lounge and duty-free booths trying to amuse myself somehow. Time dragged pushing me to drink coffee after coffee. My e-mail was checked ten times with no new messages, and I realized that boring-day-ever prize detected its date.

A sudden buzz of my mobile pulled me out of prostration. I forgot to set it into the flight mode as I usually did. I did not expect any calls from my relatives or friends, as they knew I was to be on the flight. The incoming call displayed “Johnny One Note”. As if that wasn’t enough! I knew that guy too well not to be brightened up. John was a queer fellow belonging to the sort of people who could cudgel some idea into their head to bug everyone around them. After obtaining a class of Tibet therapy, he decided to establish a special training school for children with infantile cerebral paralysis. He was not a doctor, but his self-confidence was unlimited. Having no medical degree, he could not appeal to any official social protection authorities with this idea. However, being stubborn and intrusive, John managed to gather a group of parents whose invalid children were denied by the traditional medicine so they grasped at straws.

“Hi, I know you are busy, but my project is almost ready to start. I found a perfect room, so please keep your pledge,” Johnny aggressively reminded me about the thousand dollars I promised to give him for my charitable contribution in case he could find accommodation for his training class.

“Right you are, John, I’m really busy now. I’m buckling my seatbelt in the aircraft, please call me in a week or so,” I tried to escape from the corner he drove me in. Not but that I was against charity, but Johnny took me at my word. It was so irritating in the light of the past events. “But you’ve promised! You know we need those rubber mats for exercises. Children rely upon you, think it over!” he attacked me in his manner.

“Sorry, I must switch off my phone. In a week, John. Wish me a kiss landing. Bye,” I pushed my mobile into the pocket berating myself for the faintness.

I usually dozed right after the dinner on board. I was used to traveling by air, and sleeping in a tight airplane seat was a killing time method quite familiar to me. However, that flight was an exception from the rule.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Due to bad weather on the route, we meet significant turbulence. Unfortunately, we may not change the altitude because of the intense air traffic. We highly recommend you to remain seated keeping your seatbelts fastened”.

While our plane was bumping along like an old wagon on a field path, I returned to my reflections on Johnny and his project. I was not the one born with a silver spoon in the mouth, but my family’s wealth was enough to provide me with all I wanted. However, I knew that money did not grow on trees. I kept my bank deposit account untouched trying to increase it whenever possible. Sometimes, it was not easy for me to vanquish the temptation of buying some vanity or newest gadgets. Of course, Johnny’s case was another pair of shoes. In spite of his entire eccentricity, Johnny was a social volunteer by nature. Sometimes, he was ready to share his last shirt with somebody indigent, and his pockets were always empty. Very often, I felt white envy watching Johnny pumping hands with almost everyone we met in the streets of our small city. Whitebeards, veterans, small children, and

even stray dogs revered him badly. Once, I promised him to support his project with money; now, my cupidity was fighting with that promise inside my heart.

After a while, my lassitude overcame, and I dropped asleep. From time to time, in my sleep, I heard some indistinct announcements of our captain. Suddenly, I felt weightlessness. My seatbelt compressed my thighs preventing me from flying out of the seat. In a moment, a tremendous strike from the bottom made my head bash against the backrest in front. I saw stars and caught hold of armrests. “Cabin crew, take your seats, cabin crew, take seats!” – it was our captain. I opened my eyes and noticed two stewards lying down in the aisle along with bags and suitcases dropped from overhead lockers. Another moment of zero gravity made my stomach jump up to my throat. In a split second, I realized that our Boeing was swooping down. Somewhere behind, I heard a blood-curling outcry. Much to my surprise, I discovered myself being not afraid. Time seemed to slow down, and the situation resembled a time-lapse filming. That moment, I was able to embrace my life journey in whole. Everything was crystal-clear. I saw my mom and dad decorating a Christmas tree, my childhood friend Pete playing with his fat basset hound, my full-dressed classmates marching in front of the school, and Johnny in his green military jacket pushing a wheelchair with a disabled child.

Our aircraft did not go down in flames that day; the pilots managed to level off. In several minutes, the stewards started to run about the cabin trying to calm the over-shocked passengers. Probably, I was the only who seethed with a peculiar tranquility. I realized that we escaped the air disaster that time. That was not a fault of our aircraft or pilot; that was nothing else than a severe turbulence. The turbulence pulled several weird questions in my mind. Looking into the illuminator, I asked myself what could have happened in case our captain was not so professional. I tried to identify the

significance of my life for the surrounding world. Unfortunately, my life observation could not show me too many people stricken with grief while reading my name in a newspaper memoir after the plane crash. Within the hours remaining to landing, I ran back over the past. All outstanding works, unemployed funds, and missed opportunities revealed themselves sliding in my mind. Deeply immersed into the recollection, I even missed the moment of touchdown.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Welcome to Shanghai. Now you may use your mobile phones”. Passengers around were in a hurry collecting their belongings. I heard dozens of switch-on ringtones all over the cabin. I took my mobile from the pocket, checked my call list, and crisply pushed the last incoming number.