

Los Angeles, California. September 1973. Los Angeles International Airport, TWA Flight 21, touched down at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon, the first day of September. The airline mixed up his reservation; his ticket placed him in the smoking section. Several passengers sitting next to Robert had lit-up during portions of the transcontinental flight, and now, sickened by the overwhelming smell of cigarette smoke, he couldn't wait to flee the cabin space. Why are people allowed to smoke on planes, he wondered? Walking toward the baggage claim, he lifted up his cotton shirt to his nose. The smell of rank, tainted, recycled air-conditioning, circulating back and forth throughout the cabin of the plane penetrated deep into his clothing. Cigarettes are so vile, he said to himself once he'd deplaned. The heavy scent of nicotine even permeated up into Robert's nostrils. This, especially, put him in a sour mood. When a skycap pointed to an available rolling cart, Robert lifted his bags off of the winding, carousel and placed them onto the wheeled trolley. Once outside, he approached a line of waiting taxicabs ready to return him back to school and university life. He would continue his journey, resuming his pre-med studies now officially a sophomore.

"Where to?" the driver asked.

"UCLA, Dykstra Hall."

Robert always preferred to maintain a good humour. His temperament nearly always tilted toward amicable. His sunny, upbeat personality was enthusiastic; he always opted to see the good in others. He longed to feel that way again. He pulled off the navy, nylon strap away from his shoulder, releasing his heavy carry-on filled mostly with textbooks. It sounded with a thud against the floor of the taxi. Leaning back, he eased into his seat and strained to relax. Looking out the window, passing several familiar sites he told himself it was good to be back in L.A. He tried to will himself happy, but couldn't. Instead he thought about his uncle – the real

reason behind his bad mood. This situation was so upsetting to him. The whole affair crawled stubbornly under his skin.

Of course, Robert knew his uncle was a good person, he'd witnessed his kindness all of his life growing up in the family. He practically idolized him. Then why this? The resolution he'd made, this terrible choice to start performing abortions troubled Robert greatly. He couldn't reconcile the two things, a career as an obstetrician delivering babies, to then one day deciding to abort them. He didn't understand. It didn't make any sense.

Robert's shoulders bore the emotional yoke of his mother's anguish, it engulfed him. He knew how sad Claire had been about her brother and he elected to carry part of that sadness back with him to California. In his mind, he made an analogy about how uncomfortable he felt during the flight, to what was going back home. Just as the toxic layers of cigarette smoke had draped themselves around him, he thought, his uncle's horrifying decision had infiltrated his family, producing a cloud of alienation, jeopardizing their normally strong bonds, the connection between loving family members.

Then, something dawned on him. As things stood now, Robert would have to rethink his entire career path. He'd always envisioned joining his uncle's medical practice in Greenwich, partnering with him at his OB/GYN office someday. Suddenly, this idea became ludicrous, impossible really. He couldn't imagine working alongside him now? It would never happen.

As the taxi entered the on-ramp to the freeway, he thought about his life and the choices he'd made. He was pleased. So far, he'd followed his heart, his dreams, his desires. Working as an EMT the past two summers ignited his passion for medicine. He looked forward to seeing where that would lead him. One thing was for sure; it wouldn't be taking him back to Greenwich. Where, then? Where would he begin his practice as obstetrician? He realized he

had loads of time to make up his mind, he wasn't worried about that. So, he allowed his mind to open up to the possibility. Where might he go, Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford? Would he even stay in Connecticut? What about New York, or Chicago, perhaps even the West coast? In fact, he enjoyed California; he liked what he'd seen up till now. His thoughts began to fade, he hadn't realized how tired he was. He hadn't been able to close his eyes once during the entire plane ride. His mind began to drift. He felt himself nodding off, slipping into sleep the back of the rumbling taxi.

Allied forces had captured Hitler. The condemned man was restrained, sitting in a seat resembling an electric chair. His movements were held tight, restricted by leg irons. Above him, hanging from a thin, black wire, was a single, blinding spotlight glaring down. Robert, who represented the American armed forces had achieved the rank of general. He alone was conducting the prisoner interrogation.

"Give me one reason why I shouldn't kill you right here, right now?" Robert said as general.

Hitler's head was shrouded in a hood made of grey cloth. Eva Braun handed the prisoner a delicate, finely woven chain necklace. An unpretentious gold cross was attached. She placed this in his hand, carefully wrapping it around his fingers. In spite of her efforts to place the chain, he wantonly opened his hand letting the cross slip away. First, it transformed itself to the rosary, then fell quickly to the floor.

"I'm done with him," she said, disgusted, "but the people still insist upon a trial," she added.

There were several military personnel standing all around the darkened room. Each man represented a different country: Holland, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, and Hungary. They all argued loudly, none agreeing about the prisoner's fate. Some shouted, "Trial! Trial!"

Most of the others called out for the guillotine, insisting, demanding his immediate execution. The shrouded figure remained motionless, but told the military panel, whatever the outcome, he embraced his fate.

This ready acceptance of death greatly intensified the anger inside each man, particularly the general who became caught up in the intense fervor, their prodding. Without warning, Robert pulled out a long, gleaming military sword.

“With all the children he’s murdered there’s no need for a trial,” the general said, seething.

The blade traveled along the prisoner’s throat, and in one gesture it killed the man instantly. When the end came, Eva Braun lifted the prisoner’s hood uncovering the man’s head. A familiar face appeared. Whispering low, Robert spoke into his uncle’s ear. “You got exactly what you deserved.”

“Ten-fifty,” the cab driver said, abruptly ending his dream.

“Huh? Wha?” disoriented, Robert opened his eyes.

“That’ll be ten-fifty,” the man repeated.

“Oh, yeah, okay,” Robert said, quickly shoving his hand into his pocket to retrieve some cash.

The driver had pulled up, and then called out to his passenger. When he hadn’t stirred he let him sleep a few seconds longer. The man got out of the cab, opened his trunk and placed Robert’s three large suitcases outside next to the driver’s hack vehicle. Now, the only thing left was to get paid. When Robert saw his things were already placed on the sidewalk, he took a deep breath, stretched out his arms, then he picked up his shoulder bag from the floor. He handed the man a twenty-dollar bill.