

Mr. Twitchy

by Joseph M. Owens

I used to think the world was fucked. I did. I used to think the world was fucked and it was up to me and me alone to see it *unfucked*. That's really what I used to think, but I've been trying to work on that. It's not a particularly flattering characteristic I have. I'm trying to be more positive.

But I mean like this fucken guy here, right? This fucken guy's making it real hard on me. I'm in the food court at the airport a good 30 minutes before my flight is set to take off and there's this fucken creepy guy, a real mouthbreathing gizmo, and he's just lurking around the iced tea carafe like it's the last fucken source of iced tea on the planet. Seriously, he's lurking there, like basically hovering, like a real, bonafide creeper, lording over it like it was his own Lolita or something sick like that. *I mean, c'mon, Humbert Humbert, it's iced-fucken-tea, for Chris'sakes!*

I've never seen anyone on the verge of conniptions over a soft drink before, but here is someone, right here in front on me on the verge of conniptions over a soft drink. True story. He's a real twitchy bastard, too. And the kicker is that Mr. Twitchy Conniption-Fits and I are about to cross paths. I just paid for a Coke that's not going to fill itself and the iced tea carafe is contiguous—that means butted up to next to, right?—it's *contiguous* to the soda fountain.

So in any case, because I'm encroaching on the space occupying the soda fountain/tea carafe, I've got a serious stink eye aimed right-smack at my personal mug by Mr. Twitchy, the iced tea gizmo whose got a real serious case of trouser ants, I'm guessing, based on all the pacing back and forth he's doing. I depress the Coke's soda trigger while I watch him watch me out of my periphery while taking a foamy sip in the mean time. I'd like to point out that I think it's just totally irresponsible—regardless of one's cup *ounceage*—to just fill the whole thing up *willy-nilly* because the *soda water-to-syrup* ratio might be all snafu'd but, that being said, I'm vouching right here and now, that this airport's Coke is as refreshing as Coke gets.

I top my 22 oz. cup off and pop one of those opaque plastic lids on it because, even though I'm going to enjoy my Coke and Polish dog—I got myself a Polish dog too, in case I didn't mention it—right here in the lounge while I wait for my flight, the lid will preserve maximum soda *fizziness* in between free refills, of which I plan to get at least two and which are also really just the bees knees if you ask me—free refills, I mean.

My polish dog is OK, but it's sort of dry. It's got wrinkly skin like an old man's (the dog does). My own sensitive skin is smooth as a baby's ass in case you got confused about who or what had the old-man-skin. But so anyway, a sort-of-dry dog, I can deal with. A stale bun, though, is just *snafu* altogether, unless maybe you are one of those professional hot dog eater guys who soaks the bun in water to choke it down, but that shit's disgusting. Seriously, I'd tell 'em that too. So yeah, a *dry-on-the-outside* dog's still got the potential to've retained some of its juiciness at its little Polish core; but a dry, crusty bun just really fucks with my universe, entirely—no redeeming qualities in a dry bun, whatsoever. Feed 'em to the pigeons, I say.

So what all this boils down to, the reason I'm telling you all of this, is that I don't like to take pills on an empty stomach. Pills on an empty stomach gives me the fucken *gurg'*. That's the point I've been trying to get to but Mr. Twitchy's got me all attention deficit and whatnot.

I'm not exactly scared of flying—scared of crashing, *yes*—but scared of flying, *no*. I just can't take all the loud mouthbreathers and annoying tourists talking among themselves too-loudly and babies crying and all that other commotion that makes flying a real pain in the ass and far more stressful than it really needs to be. I, myself, like to pop a Xanax or two and simply enjoy my flight.

Which is what I was going to do just now, pop two Xannies, but I can't find the bottle. I just had it in my hand like ten seconds ago, and now they're calling for my flight to board, so I'm all like, *what the fuck?* I guess I'd be more worried if I hadn't just lifted the pills off the girl whose house I stayed at last night and who I probably

won't ever see again. *C'est la vie* and all that. I think her name was Nicky-something-or-another but I can't remember exactly...

While we're boarding, the voice over the speaker says the flight's not all that full. What few people there are, still rush to pack the plane but I'm like, what's the point? I dawdle a little, scanning the food court one last time for the bottle of Nicky What's-her-face's Xanax and end up boarding dead last. I knew the line rushers would snap up the choicest seats at the bulkheads and the emergency exits over the wings, but I was pretty sure no one was going to willingly take the rearmost seats, a fact I never really understood, especially on such a thinly-booked flight—probably because of all the extra walking, the lazy bastards.

The back of the plane on a thinly-booked flight is like your own private cabin with its own personal bathroom. There's a greatly reduced "*random-asses-to-toilet-seat*" ratio, plus I won't have to sweat the three Cokes I drank before boarding, just the imminent sugar crash from 66oz. of highly refined sugars. So that's why I dawdle. I'm in no rush bringing up the rear of the boarding line.

My nostrils pick up the unmistakable scent of Barbasol wafting down the gangway, which really proves that a good, creamy lather is still a great way to kickstart a real man's man's morning. But I see that it isn't necessarily an old man giving off the smell, it's Mr. Twitchy, who I think looks fantastically overloaded with caffeine and nerves. The guy's got a real case of the sweats going on, pit stains spread around his torso from shoulder blade to nipple on both sides. I suddenly feel bad for the poor bastard, which makes me feel good because I'm thinking positively about someone else again for a change.

There's a twenty-something girl in front of me who has been clicking away on her BlackBerry and snapping her chewing gum—some mango-mint bullshit, which, speaking of a lather, gets me all in one, the snapping does—since I first noticed her. I'm pretty sure that before all the clicking and snapping, she was totally eyefucking me six ways from Sunday, but then, afterwards, she felt

dirty about it, which is pretty par for the course for me, really. I can tell these things just by looking at someone like her.

I'm close enough and tall enough to see over her shoulder, and I notice that we have a mutual Facebook friend—an observation I kind of want to tell her about—but the fact that the line is moving forward (without her and I), and the gangway is too narrow to get around the person in front of you in the event they are a dawdler, which makes me think I should tell her to pay-the-fuck-attention. But then there's my whole attempt at ignoring the planet's unfucking, so I just clear my throat passive-aggressively instead.

I'm flying to Chicago to listen to this writer guy read from his new book which is, you know, kind of long, his book is, in my opinion, but whatever. He's supposed to be the next big thing but I'm always skeptical about the next big thing. Really, flying to Chicago is just an excuse to ditch Nicky What's-her-name, and when I lie to someone, I go all out, even despite my recent attempts at self-improvement. A buddy of mine texted me last night about this writer guy's reading tonight, and so last night I was all like, *hell no*, but this morning, waking up next to Nicky, I was all like *fuck yeah*. This was before I stole her pills. Some habits die hard. What *was* her last name anyway...?

Once the plane finally takes off, I get up to use the bathroom because, even though I don't have to worry about taking a piss for fear of an overcrowded lavatory being at the uncrowded back; it doesn't mean I don't have to actually piss. However—and this is something I just really couldn't believe—the lavatory is already *occupied*, which means *someone* wasn't paying the fuck attention to the keep-seatbelts-fastened sign, probably the BlackBerry chick—a circumstance that also really burns my personal biscuit. But when the door finally opens, it's not the BlackBerry chick but Mr. Twitchy instead. I have to piss so bad that my eyes are probably turning yellow, so I don't say anything confrontational. Again, I'm kind of passive-aggressive that way sometimes. Plus sky

marshals are no joke and they don't take kindly to passengers *throwing bows* at each other, if you get me.

Right as I'm about to shut the door, one of the flight attendants asks if I'd like any peanuts, which, *no*, I really don't since I'm horrifyingly allergic and will consequentially puff up like the Michelin Man if I even eat just one. I ask her for pretzels instead, a request that—oddly similar to Mr. Twitchy back in the airport's lounge—actually almost sends this person into serious conniptions because now, she'd have to notify yet *another* flight attendant—one who distributes pretzels instead of peanuts, given that she has only peanuts to distribute—and reconcile that she herself was unable to satisfy my snacking needs, a fact I'm betting did generally unproductive things to her internal locus of competency. But in fairness to me, all of this was precipitated by circumstances that are completely out of my control.

So after evacuating my bladder, I walk back to my seat and pick up the package of pretzels that had been left on my seat. As I munch on the salty, half-stale victuals, I ponder the disappearance of what's-her-name's lifted bottle of Xanax and its current potential locations. I start to get nervous when I consider that some TSA asshole may have picked them up and located their proper owner from the prescription label, where upon she, what's-her-name?, *Nicky*, proceeds to inform authorities that they were in fact *stolen* from her this very morning, and then the whole kit and caboodle gets linked back to me and I have to spend time in a courtroom explaining my actions to a judge, which, I mean, really, *thanks but no fucken thanks*.

My brief reverie is broken by a commotion halfway up the plane. Flight attendants are scrambling here and there and the only things I can see are two feet protruding into the aisle. It's one of the choice seats in the emergency exit row with extra legroom which, of course, meant that that person would not be able to perform the duties in the event of a...

The plane all of a sudden shudders emphatically, *violently*, like a ship hitting an iceberg which causes the cabin lights to flicker. The

captain's voice tries to come across the PA system but gets cut off when the power flickers again. Turbulence shakes the fuselage and I'm positive that, had I not just used the facilities, I'd have wet myself right then and there. A very unbecoming scream escapes my lips but the rest of the passengers are too freaked out themselves to notice. Windspeeds earlier at takeoff were gusting to 50 mph so I assumed then this was going to be a bumpy flight.

To take my mind off the violent shaking—I start making my way up to the center of the plane where the ruckus is occurring. The seatbelt lights overhead ding repeatedly like someone got the button stuck. Since it can't make up its mind, I just figure the system's gone on the fritz.

Once I make it to the emergency row, I see that the feet belong to none other than Mr. Twitchy. The flight attendant who'd been doling out peanuts earlier acts as if she's never seen me before and asks if I know CPR. In return, I look at her like a deer in some headlights. The truth is, I know CPR, but Mr. Twitchy has a strange looking foam accumulating around the corners of his mouth and I know there's no way in hell I'm giving him rescue breaths without a breathing barrier—I probably wouldn't even with a breathing barrier, truth be told.

There are a lot of *Jesus Christs!* and *You gotta be kidding mes!* and *Fucks!* being tossed around in a verbal exchange of disbelief between passengers. What I gather from the four flight attendants is that there is not a single medically trained person on the entire flight and this guy, a Mr. Oliver, is in need of something along the lines of a miracle.

Amid the panic created by the downed Mr. Oliver Twitch, the lights flicker again, the seatbelt ding goes berserk resulting in an annoying stutterlike effect, *d-d-d-d-d-ding!*, the lights blink twice and then nothing, just the most abrupt and unwelcome silence I've ever heard... or not heard...

The floor tilts a little forward and it feels like we are dropping. It's very clear that the plane has lost all of its power and we are gliding at an unreasonable speed toward the earth. I scream

again, high pitched and shrill, like a teenaged cheerleader, this time eliciting a few *Oh my Gods!* and a *Will someone shut him the fuck up!?*, which, honestly, I found somewhat offensive given the current predicament.

Free falling in a dark and unpowered plane is not a pleasurable experience. I can't see myself recommending it as something persons might want to put on their bucket lists. There is an overwhelming sense of doom and panic in the air so thick you can taste it, and it's really fucken salty.

Some of the passengers are crying, others are crossing themselves and saying *Hail Marys*. I'm promising no one in particular that I'll stop stealing women's anxiety prescriptions—and sometimes their underwear—if we can just pull through this alive. I also begin looking around for Mr. Twitchy because his unconscious body is no longer where the flight attendants left it. In fact, it is now crammed headfirst under the seat of an overly large man who is sweating more than seems physically possible. Impossible sweating.

Some people say that situations like this prompt one's life to flash before their eyes. This is not the case for me. Whoever wrote the book on near death experiences must be a liar or incredibly underqualified to be speaking on the subject. My first reaction is to imagine the ticker tape on CNN. Random, I know. It's going to read: *Plane falls out of sky in giant ball of flaming death!*—I don't think they use exclamations on professional national news stations but my vision has them for sure—and then I think about how they'll probably misspell my name later on when they do one of those memorials to those passengers who died. It's a small flight so this seems realistic at the moment, not to mention we are all plummeting rapidly to a collective certain death.

I also start to think about Mr. Twitchy and to what extent his utter fuckedness is quantifiable in what, in all likelihood, is our last minutes (not exactly) “on” this planet. I'm trying to think about what could have been wrong with him before the plane all of a sudden more or less started falling out of the sky. And then it hits me: his mouth. It all starts coming together and I get a little pissed

because I realize he'd chewed up what was likely the rest of *my* pilfered Xanax. I'm not sure to what end a person would or could rationalize consuming a half bottle of anxiolytics but that's precisely what Mr. Twitchy did, I bet.

In between adrenalized shots of terror, my anger surfaces because he stole “my” bottle of pills—which I'd already stolen prior, yes, but that isn't the point; who argues semantics on a free falling plane?—but pills that could, nonetheless, certainly help in this situation, especially if crushed up and snorted. I might literally punch a screaming child in the face right now for just one of those little orange beauties.

But that in and of itself is a forgone conclusion. I can see a white cap sticking out of Mr. Oliver Twitchy's front pocket, and if I wasn't going to give the guy mouth to mouth, I sure as hell didn't want to fondle around inside his pocket, but desperate times call for desperate measures. I stop what I'm not doing to think about how lucid I seem given the fact that we are plummeting toward terra-firma at an alarming velocity.

People are screaming but it's not like you think. It's not like the movies. There isn't enough people for mass hysteria. This is more like minimalist hysteria, perhaps more like submanic mania or something, but either way, everyone is freaking everyone else out. You don't need a mob for that effect.

Also, I should mention that I can be somewhat prone to overreacting. The reason no one else's level of freaking out is comparable to my own is that the plane seems to actually be gliding now, rather than falling. The power is still MIA, which of course is still a pretty big fucken deal if you ask me.

Mr. Twitchy is really jammed under that seat. The sweaty, fat man seems paralyzed like someone with a reality altering remote control has paused him. Flight attendants try futilely to unstick Mr. Twitchy whose khakis have gone a much darker shade in and around the leg, crotch and ass areas. When he wakes up—if he wakes up—he's going to be really fucken embarrassed.

I personally bounce between seats and make my way over to Mr. Twitchy. I ask the flight attendants if there is anything I can do to help but before they can answer, I'm rifling through Twitchy's pockets, searching for the bottle of pills I'm sure he took, hoping there are at least a couple left that I can chew up. The flight attendants ask what the fuck am I doing and I say I'm looking for his allergy card to see if he's maybe allergic to anything—which doesn't even make sense, they tell me, because no one is allergic to CPR.

Unable to find the bottle I thought I saw, I trip backwards and mutter, "Sorry, just trying to help!" I mean, plane crashes are fucken stressful!

I redirect my attention to Mr. Twitchy's seat where his carryon is stowed underneath the seat in front of him. I'm basically certain the pills must be in there; they have to be. I think my heart is going to jump out of my chest. I feel like if I'm not sedated when this plane hits the ground at hundreds of miles an hour, I'm going to lose it—a sort of irony I'm only acutely aware of because no one is rational in the face of imminent death. BlackBerry chick sits across the aisle from me—seatbelt fastened, tray table in its upright and secured position—and gives me a funny look in the middle of hyperventilating, a look I usually only get from women I've slept with and have forgotten the names of.

