

Third Prize Mom Tri's Boathouse Writing Contest

Dust in the Wind by Barbara Ransom, USA

I 'm on my third cigarette. I have been waiting out on the sidewalk in the cold December air for at least half an hour. The taxi is late. I reach into the front pocket of my wool overcoat again to make sure my passport is still there. "Carrie," I yell toward the house, "What's the hold up?"

"Shit, Charlotte. I don't know. I'm on hold again." Her voice answers from the open door.

"Can you call another cab company?"

"Yeah, they all say it'll be twenty minutes. I've got four of them on the way."

Four? I shake my head, inhale, try to relax, look up at the pine trees. Maybe we aren't meant to go to Phuket now. Maybe we should wait until next month and go to the Singapore Straits Regatta instead.

"Stop blowing smoke in the house, would ya?" Carrie steps out and slams the door behind her. She rattles the keys in the lock and turns, rolling her suitcase down the path toward me. Her overcoat and blonde hair billow behind her. "They'll be here. We'll get there. Don't worry." She puts her arm around my shoulders. We stand and wait silently on the sidewalk.

We've planned this "mission" (as we've been calling it), as best we can without consulting anyone, keeping it as quiet as possible, trying to make everything seem normal. We figured that dividing up the "goods" would make it less detectable, somehow. So we split it up into 4 small plastic baggies; one baggy is in each of our suitcases and one in each of our carry-ons. They are all triple bagged and sealed with duct tape. At one point we even considered swallowing some of it, but decided against it, thank god. Finally one yellow taxi pulls up to the curb.

There's a sudden flash of light and I can see! I can see! What, it's been like a coupla weeks or months, maybe? It's hard to tell how much time has passed when you're dead. But man, it feels great to see again. A rebirth. The air is cool and I can see for miles: miles of blue sky and white clouds. I feel like a bird. Like a weightless bird. I'm flying above the city, looking down into the buildings, seeing life everywhere. And whoa, who do I see down there, but my two daughters, Charlotte and Carrie, my gorgeous girls down there below. But something's not sitting right there. I mean there they are, the apples of my eye, but something's wrong. They're in two separate taxis, one behind the other, pulling into the airport. Why aren't they together? It makes no sense. They're going to the same place, right? And they're sisters. So what's with the separate taxis? Charlotte is still smoking, which is not a shock. She's climbing out of her cab, and putting out her cigarette on the sidewalk. But then she just walked into the terminal without

waiting for Carrie. She didn't even look at her or anything, even when Carrie's taxi pulled in right behind hers. What on earth? Carrie is just fumbling with her glasses and a book and didn't even look at Charlotte either. Oh, those girls. They would put me in my grave if I wasn't there already. Is a father's job never finished?

Carrie is four rows behind me on the left. She has been snoring for hours: head thrown back on that little airplane pillow, mouth wide open. I think she's even drooling. We haven't talked since we left the house. It's part of the plan. We're pretending not to know each other. I am traveling under my married name; she's traveling under our maiden name. That way, in case one of us gets caught, the other won't be suspected. And maybe at least one of us can finish the mission. We even booked separate rooms at the hotel. But I think I'd want that anyway.

I don't know how she can be so relaxed. I can't watch any of the movies, I can't eat and I definitely can't sleep. I need a cigarette. I can't wait until this is over and we can relax on the beach in front of the Boathouse. I lean back and try to imagine it: warm white sand between my toes as I lay in the sun on a beach chair, a glass of wine on the table next to me, small waves surging at the edge of the beach. My only worry will be whether to go for a swim or get a Thai massage. It will be heavenly.

I found my girls again. They flew to Bangkok, Thailand and then down to Phuket. And guess what? They are staying at my favorite hotel - AND during the King's Cup Regatta of all things. It's my favorite time of year. So, what are they up to? They always fought me when I dragged them along to that Regatta. It figures that now that I'm dead, they turn up there voluntarily. Should I be bitter in death? Charlotte especially is throwing me off. She looks tired. Her hair looks greyer by the minute - if that's possible. And her brow is in a constant furrow. I do have to say, however, that the sun feels amazing here, and the moist humid air makes me feel so alive.

Finally, we've made it! We are at the Boathouse. I have just finished a shower with the citronella soap and am in my robe sprawled flat out on the crisp white bed. Carrie's room is on the floor above.

I can't believe how smoothly it all went at the airport. We weren't suspected at all, weren't delayed one bit. We have both checked on the baggies in our suitcases and there were no holes, leaks or spills. I can't imagine cleaning all that off my clothes if there had been. But, this is Thailand. Everything has a way of working out here, even when you think it won't. What a relief. I'm glad we didn't try Singapore after all. They are so strict over there that you can't even bring a Durian on the subway! I am so tired and hungry. I think I'll head over to the restaurant to eat and then get to bed. Tomorrow this will all be over. It's pathetic that I am not enjoying this. I'm pathetic. I need to refocus, slow down, and be present. I need to focus on the purpose of why we are here.

Ok, now even stranger are the two separate hotel rooms. What is with those two girls? They've only been outside their rooms once in the twenty four hours they've been here. Charlotte went out to the restaurant, sat alone at a table on the patio, chain smoked, and downed an entire bottle of Australian wine by herself. But the sunset was unforgettable. Like a bright candle burning out in the ocean on the horizon. Carrie at least walked down the beach. She was talking to our old friend K. Toi about taking his boat out tomorrow. Get that. One of my girls wanting to be out on a boat? Will wonders never cease? What is this all about? Now if Charlotte goes with her I will roll over in my grave. To be out on the ocean again – imagine the peace.

We are out on the boat now, speeding along in the morning air, with K. Toi at the wheel. Carrie's wearing an indecently small bikini, especially for Thailand, bright pink and yellow flowers, ugh. She's laying out on the bow, working on her tan, completely unaware of how ridiculous she looks. The water is a dark sparkling blue, the sun warm on my shoulders, and I am enjoying the juiciest pineapple I have ever had. This is almost perfect. I can't remember boating with dad ever being like this. I may actually do this again.

We are just about to Koh Poo when K. Toi announces, "Here is good," and kills the engine. The boat slows.

"Here?" My pineapple drops and rolls on the floor as I stand up, peeling my bare legs from the blue vinyl seat. I scuffle on my unsteady feet as the boat drifts silently in the current. The small island looms up and down, up and down next to us and I notice how sticky my hands are. I wipe them on my khaki shorts while I wobble toward my bag. I reach down into it and feel for the two small plastic baggies. This is it. Seventy seven years and this is it.

Carrie, now wrapped respectfully in a sarong, is suddenly at my side, "Ready?"

"I'm ready." Deep breath. We both ceremoniously, cautiously head to the stern of the boat, two plastic baggies in each of our hands.

What the...?! It's suddenly dark again. Pitch black. I can't see anything. But I can feel. I'm in a very small space. There's no air, just a soft plastic wall around me. It's tight, confined, suffocating. I am surrounded on all sides. Where am I? Where are the girls? I can't breathe. I want to push my way out, break free again, float in the air like a bird. I can't breathe. And then there is a sudden breeze.....

I lean over the rail of the boat and rip open both baggies at once. I notice the grey ash has small bits of bone in it. Leaning as far over toward the water as I can, I pour, letting it fall slowly at first, and then dumping it all at once like an avalanche, until it's gone. My dad's ashes float on the surface of the water, drifting toward Koh Poo. "Bye, Dad," I whisper, "I love you and miss you and hope you are at peace." It feels right. It absolutely feels right. I turn and see Carrie next to me.

She is also watching as our father is being caressed and carried off by the Andaman Sea.

Oasis.