

ZEN AND THE FEAR OF FLYING

By Robert Burns

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ZEN AND THE FEAR OF FLYING

A One Act Comedy

By Robert Burns

SYNOPSIS: Karen Carlson is the kind of woman who checks the pilot's credentials when she boards the airplane. Unfortunately, when traveling with her business partner Janice Marshall she forgets to complete her own flight plan. When she finds out that the plane is going down, she'll do anything to see that great white tunnel loud and clear. Janice, in perfect balance and very centered, can handle it all until the line is crossed into the spiritual world of her wine collection.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 either; gender flexible)

KAREN/MIKE (m/f) 50; Airplane passenger.
(185 lines)

JANICE/KEN (m/f) 48; Airplane passenger.
(185 lines)

DURATION: 20 minutes.

SETTING

A commercial jet on an approach to landing. Two seats face the audience.

PROPS

- Two Chairs
- Two Pillows (orange or yellow, placed under the chairs to look like flotation devices.)

PRODUCTION NOTES

There are several sounds during the play. The nature of the sounds is different, to signify events occurring to the airplane; the actual sounds are at the discretion of the director. The lights can dim and/or flash at several points, although there are specific times when they should flicker/fade.

This script is the female version of this play. There is a male version of the play.

For the male version, please make the following changes:

Change KAREN to MIKE

Change JANICE to KEN

In the male version, a total of 18 lines are changed.

There are changes in the dialogue for the change from female to male. In those lines, I have included the alternative lines, labelled by the male character whose line it is. The changed lines are separated in the text. Cross out the unused line for the actors.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Zen and the Fear of Flying was first produced by Pittsburgh New Voices at the Pittsburgh New Works Festival.

AT RISE: *Lights up, KAREN and JANICE are seated and facing the audience. KAREN is leaning forward, arms wrapped around her legs and head close to her knees. JANICE is seated, hands resting on thighs, palms up.*

SFX: *Boom.*

KAREN: We're going to die!

JANICE: We are not.

KAREN: We are too!

JANICE: Will you stop it.

KAREN: I can feel it.

JANICE: It's just a precaution.

KAREN: Then why am I leaning forward and hugging my knees?

JANICE: Turbulence.

KAREN: I've flown in lots of turbulence and never had to do this before. We're going to die, I can tell. Look, the flight attendants are even doing it; you can tell it's going to be a bad one.

JANICE: Think positive.

KAREN: Is that all you can say? Think positive?

JANICE: It's better than all of this negative emotional energy you're putting out right now.

KAREN: What self-help book did you read this week?

JANICE: What's wrong with self-help books?

KAREN: Security blanket for the mind.

JANICE: That's my point. Always negative. Think positive and we'll...

KAREN: What am I supposed to think?

JANICE: That the pilot will get the landing gear to unjam and...

KAREN: The landing gear is jammed?

JANICE: Yes, they said it...

KAREN: How do you know this?

JANICE: The pilot announced it.

KAREN: Where was I?

JANICE: Asleep.

KAREN: And you didn't tell me?

JANICE: You're too emotional.

KAREN: Emotional? I'm never emotional. I'm the president of a company, I can't be emotional. Do I seem emotional to you? DO I? I am not emotional. I am not an emotional person. Ever. Why didn't you tell me? I could have...

JANICE: What could you have done?

KAREN: Prayed.

JANICE: That is an emotional response to a crisis.

KAREN: Lots of people pray.

JANICE: You haven't prayed in years!

KAREN: Sure I have.

JANICE: When was the last time you prayed?

KAREN: Well, I guess it must have been... Well, maybe it really was... No. I got it. When they subpoenaed the merger files.

JANICE: That was ten years ago.

KAREN: It's like roller skating. You never forget.

JANICE: Are you sure?

KAREN: If the wheels aren't going down, I know how to pray.

JANICE: Who would you pray to in this situation?

KAREN: What?

JANICE: Saint Christopher?

KAREN: Why?

JANICE: Travelers. Or St. Ignatius?

KAREN: He's for lost items.

JANICE: Well, maybe it's a lost cause. Then how about St. Jude? Isn't he the one for miracles?

KAREN: You're making fun of me.

JANICE: No, I'm not. I'm just trying to figure out where it is directed.

KAREN: General delivery. I don't care who answers it as long as it works.

JANICE: But if it doesn't work, you'll never know.

KAREN: Sure I will.

JANICE: You'll be dead.

KAREN: Don't say that!

JANICE: You did!

KAREN: I did not!

JANICE: You said you were going to die.

KAREN: Don't say that. It's not a subject to joke about.

JANICE: It's the truth.

SFX: Air rushing.

KAREN: What, what, what, what's that?

JANICE: Probably blew out a hydraulic line.

KAREN: What does that do?

JANICE: Supplies power to the landing gear.

KAREN: Don't say that.

JANICE: But you asked me.

KAREN: Lie to me.

JANICE: That's what men are for. [If KEN, cut Janice's line and insert the following. KEN: I can't lie.]

KAREN: This plane is going to crash. We're going to die. It's a land flight, we can't even try to land in the water so we could jump out with these flotation seat cushions where we might have an infinitesimal chance of living, and you can't even humor me by telling me a lie?

JANICE: I have my integrity.

KAREN: Your integrity isn't going to be worth anything when this plane crashes.

JANICE: I'd like to think it is worth something.

KAREN: Wait! A sign!

JANICE: Now what?

KAREN: We're going to live!

JANICE: Well, there's a chance, but I'm not so sure if the landing gear doesn't drop soon.

KAREN: We're going to live. I have a sign! My life hasn't flashed before my eyes. That's the tell-tale sign, isn't it? Just before you die your life flashes...

JANICE: That's a myth.

KAREN: I believe in myths.

JANICE: Since when?

KAREN: Since I started hugging my knees and praying to St. Jude.

JANICE: You know, I think the traveling saint is a better choice.

KAREN: I'll pray to whomever I want.

JANICE: It's just like the white tunnel.

KAREN: What is?

JANICE: The life flashing before your eyes. When people say they see a white tunnel just as they die.

KAREN: Then how do they know it's a tunnel?

JANICE: They don't die.

KAREN: Wait a minute. If they don't die, then how do they see a tunnel just before they die if they're not really dying when they think they are?

JANICE: It's a near death experience.

KAREN: So, if at the last minute the wheels come down this is a near death experience?

JANICE: No, it's not.

KAREN: Am I going to see the tunnel?

JANICE: That's only if you die.

KAREN: But you said they didn't die!

JANICE: They die and came back, all right.

SFX: Explosion, air rushing.

KAREN: Now what's that?

JANICE: Let's see. Yeah, that's it. The other hydraulics line.

KAREN: You can tell that from a sound?

JANICE: It's a very distinctive noise.

KAREN: How do you know these things?

JANICE: My father flew bombers in the war. He used to take me flying when I was a girl. Taught me everything; he let me fly every now and then. [If KEN, cut Janice's line and insert the following.
KEN: I flew bombers in the war.]

KAREN: Did he ever crash? [If MIKE, cut Karen's line and insert the following. MIKE: Did you ever crash?]

JANICE: Twice.

KAREN: You never told me.

JANICE: It's not something you broadcast around.

KAREN: Are we going down on this one?

JANICE: I think it's a high prob.

KAREN: St. Christopher, if you're listening, we need some help.

JANICE: I thought it was St. Jude.

KAREN: Covering all the bases.

JANICE: Don't you think they're all listening to what you're saying?

KAREN: I can't be too careful.

JANICE: Life's a probability. If it's going to work out, then it'll happen. If not ...

KAREN: Then what?

JANICE: Well, we'll die as the plane rips apart.

KAREN: Don't say that!

JANICE: All right. We'll be dead before it rips apart.

KAREN: Don't say that!

SFX: A fading whine.

KAREN: Now what? I can't stand this. What was it?

JANICE: Sounds like he lost power to the coax cable on the right side.

KAREN: That sounds bad.

JANICE: Look out the window.

KAREN: I can't.

JANICE: Sure you can.

KAREN: But if I don't see it, it's not real.

JANICE: Look.

KAREN: All right.

JANICE: Are the flaps pointing up?

KAREN: Flaps?

JANICE: Metal panel, hinged, on the back of the wing. Is it up?

KAREN: Thank you St. Ignatius. Ninety degrees. Straight up!

JANICE: We're goners.

KAREN: Why?

JANICE: No control of the plane. We'll spin out on the way down.

KAREN: Don't tell me these things. Oh. Oh no. My ears are popping. We're going down.

JANICE: Feels like it.

KAREN: What do you mean feels like it? We're dropping like rocks.
We're going down. Help! We're going to die!

JANICE: Will you please calm down.

KAREN: How can I be calm when I know I'm going to die in a few minutes?

JANICE: Positive imaging will help.

Lights flicker on, off, on, off, on.

KAREN: I can see the tunnel.

JANICE: No you can't.

KAREN: How do you know?

JANICE: Because you're still talking to me. When you die, you see the tunnel.

KAREN: I need help. The tunnel is coming fast.

JANICE: Focus with positive imagery.

KAREN: What's positive imagery?

JANICE: See yourself doing something nice.

KAREN: Like what?

JANICE: Say, winning next week's lottery.

KAREN: That's it?

JANICE: Yeah.

KAREN: Is that what you do?

JANICE: All of the time.

KAREN: Oh. Really. I can do that. Anything positive?

JANICE: Yeah.

KAREN: Can it be with someone?

JANICE: Sure.

KAREN: Um. Ah. Are you sure we're going down?

JANICE: I'd say greater than 95%.

SFX: Loud pop and hissing sound.

JANICE: Brake line. 99.6%.

KAREN: Think we'll die?

JANICE: We've got bad seats.

KAREN: Bad seats?

JANICE: Never sit in first class.

KAREN: Let's try to remember that for our next incarnation. So, really, you're pretty sure this is it?

JANICE: Has St. Jude answered?

KAREN: No.

JANICE: Then this is it.

KAREN: Oh. Well, then, um, there's ... I think ... Since we're going to die there's something I need to tell you.

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