

One night, after a long day at work, Philip sat down triumphantly on the couch, another eight hours of dealing with jerks cleared away. It was finally Friday, and that was cause to celebrate. Phil hated his work, being head of customer service at Midway Airport in Chicago. Every day he was forced to deal with bothered travelers and privileged businessmen, shocked that THEIR flight could have POSSIBLY been delayed. Nevertheless, it paid well, and it had great benefits. Plus, Phillip needed the money, having recently been fired from his last, less stressful job. He used to be the manager at a men's fashion store, but it was bought out by a larger company, so he was "let go." It had taken him three months to get his new job, and he needed to pay his last two months in rent to his landlord. Phil lived in a small house in the city. It was small, but it had enough room for one person who is rarely home to get by.

Phil made himself comfortable on the couch, taking long swigs from the drink he had retrieved from his refrigerator earlier. After watching several episodes of America's Next Top Model on his dated television, his cell phone started to ring. He checked the caller ID and saw that it was his co-worker, Jeremy.

"Hey, man, it's Jeremy."

"I saw. What's up?"

"Can you cover my shift for me tomorrow? I have to go to my brother's girlfriend's grandma's funeral or something like that."

Phil released a long sigh. "Sure man, I'll do it. Tell your brother's girlfriend's family I send my condolences."

"Alright. Thanks, buddy. I owe you one."

Phil hung up the phone and slumped further into the couch. He had been looking forward to his day off, but Jeremy was a good friend. Jeremy worked loading the cargo for airplanes, but all employees had basic training in the other jobs as well. Phil would just be given the lighter things to carry, due to his lack of experience and his scrawny figure. Jeremy worked a later shift, though, so Phil could still enjoy his favorite part of his day off—getting some sleep. He was usually required to get to work at six o'clock sharp to get the United Airlines customer

service line. There were usually several irate people surrounding the desk, requiring him to put his head down and burrow his way to the swivel chair awaiting him.

Phil was awakened at the peaceful hour of ten-thirty a.m. by his alarm clock, set strategically to give him enough time to get to work early, but enough to give him ample time to sleep. He woke up and followed his daily morning schedule—get out of bed, take a shower, dress for work, make coffee, toast and eat a bagel, and leave. Phil decided that since he had more time than usual, he would take his time, and maybe even go out for coffee. However, after an extra long shower, a home-made breakfast, and one cup of coffee, he looked up and had the startling realization that he had to be at the airport in twenty minutes, which was at the very least a forty-five minute commute.

Phil cursed himself as he ran to get his keys, phone, glasses, and shoes. He stumbled his way to the garage where he quickly got into the driver's seat of his thirteen-year-old car, threw on his seatbelt, and was off. He had the car since his eighteenth birthday, and it had already been two years old when he got it. It needed a tune-up every six months, but Phil was stuck with it until he had more money. It being the middle of the day, Phil was able to make good time to the airport, but not soon enough to be on time. He made his way to Jeremy's boss, Mr. Thompson, the manager of cargo loading, to let him know that he was filling in for Jeremy, and he was sorry for being late. Mr. Thompson was a grumpy old man and simply grunted at Phil and handed him the loading area he was to be working at, Area No. 6.

Phil donned the uniform of neon-colored reflective clothing all of the workers on the runway wore and began to walk towards his rightful area. Many people stopped him asking for directions on how to navigate the airport, but Phil simply said, "I don't know," and moved on.

One man, however, forcefully stopped him. He was wearing a Hawaiian flowered shirt and khaki shorts, flip flops, and he was dragging behind him a heavy-looking suitcase. "Excuse me sir, could I have a word?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, sir, I'm in a hurry. I have to go and load cargo," Phil replied.

"Yes, yes, I understand that," he replied. "I was hoping that you could do me a favor." He looked left and right and lowered his voice. "For some... payment, of course."

“I’m sorry, sir, I don’t know what you mean,” Phil replied, though he knew exactly what the man was driving at.

“I need this suitcase to be delivered somewhere. It needs to go on United flight 223. It’s nothing too bad, I assure you. I just require some... assistance. I was hoping you’d be willing to do the job for me.”

Usually Phil was an ethical man, but after being let go from his previous job, he was in great need of the money. He thought about the man’s proposition for a while. “How much would you offer me?” he asked.

“Name your price,” replied the man. “Well, name your price within reason.

“What’s in the bag?” Phil asked. “If you don’t tell me, I won’t even consider doing it. I need to know that I’m not directly hurting anybody.”

“Why don’t you take a look?” the man replied. He opened the bag. Inside, there was nothing, apart from a couple of articles of clothing and an empty wallet.

“What’s this?” Phil was flabbergasted. Why on earth would this man be trying to smuggle nothing?

The man leaned in and whispered in Phil’s ear. “The plane is going to Mexico. I have some... clients in need of some Mexican... souvenirs. *Comprende?* But I’ve got to make an appointment later today, so I was hoping a fine gentleman like yourself could see to it that this bag made the trip. I have one of my men on the plane; all you need to do is make sure it gets loaded. I’ll give you ten thousand, if that’s enough. In cash, of course.”

Phil was shocked “In... in cash? I’ll do it. Do you have the money right now?”

“No, but I can have it mailed to you. What’s your address?”

Phil told him his address, took the bag, and went on his way. He stopped outside of the baggage deposit, taking several bags on a cart to make the suitcase seem less out of place. *Oh well*, Phil thought, *some people will have lost their bags. Pity.* He smirked.

As Phil reached Area No. 6, he received menacing glares from the four, significantly more burly men he was to be working with. He looked at the nearest clock and noticed that it was twelve forty-seven, and he was more than a half hour late. “Hi, I’m Phil. I’m filling in for

Jeremy today. Here are some bags.” Phil immediately started loading bags onto the conveyor belt.

Burly Man #1 spoke. “You’re late. We’re almost finished.”

“Well, I’m very sorry. I can get to work now, if you’d like.”

“You can finish. We’re leaving,” Burly Man #2 said, annoyed.

Phil sighed and started to load the bags. He carelessly threw them on the conveyor belt, except for his “special bag.” After about a half hour of straining his muscles, Phil was finished. He looked at his work assignment and discovered that he had eight more flights to load until his shift was over.

The rest of the day went by in a nervous blur. Phil kept dropping bags, his mind preoccupied by the illegal thing he was doing. *Maybe I should have asked for more. Ten thousand dollars doesn’t seem like a lot for drug smuggling.* After his eight more flights were over, he hopped in his aforementioned old car and drove home.

As he was driving, he found his mind once again wandering. He snapped to attention only when a driver honked his horn very loudly. Phil looked in his rearview mirror and saw that a man in a Prius was flashing him a very obscene gesture. Phil honked in return, shouted obscenities, and merged into the next lane, leaving the man in his wake.

As Phil got home at slightly after seven-thirty, he kicked off his shoes, took a drink from the refrigerator, and immediately went to his couch, turning on the TV. He turned to a movie channel, where he saw Harrison Ford protecting the president from terrorists. “How appropriate,” he thought. He continued to watch it though he soon grew tired. At a quarter past nine o’clock, Phil retired to his bedroom, thankful that he at least had Sunday to relax. Phil soon slipped into a deep, restful sleep.

Phil woke up once again to the sound of his alarm. He realized that he had forgotten to turn it off the previous morning. He turned it off and tried to return to sleep, but he stayed awake. Frustrated, he finally threw the covers off his bed and went to his kitchen to put a pot of coffee on.

After pouring a cup of cheap coffee, Phil once again sat down on his couch and turned on the TV. Playing on the TV was a Spanish soap opera. Phil started to flip through the channels,

but nothing caught his interest. He was about to give up when he decided to stop on a local news channel, which had just come out of a commercial break.

“If you are just joining us,” the anchorwoman said, “United flight 223 out of Chicago’s Midway Airport has most likely become the most recent victim of a terrorist attack after being blown out of the sky by what the police have identified to most likely be a bomb that was concealed in a suitcase. There were no survivors.” Footage of the plane, then commercials followed.

Phil lost his breath. It was as if he had been hit in the stomach; he could not even breathe. After he caught his breath, he started thinking to himself. *Maybe it wasn’t that suitcase. It could have been any flight. Thousands of flights leave there every day. They might never find out who it was.*

The news resumed. The anchorwoman was back at her desk. “Officials investigating United flight 223 say that a man has stepped forward as saying that he saw a ‘suspicious – looking man with an equally suspicious suitcase’ walking through the airport on the way to flight 223. Here is his interview.”

The screen changed, and suddenly Phil found himself looking at the very same man who gave him the suitcase. He was wearing the very same Hawaiian-print shirt he had been wearing when Phil saw him. “I saw this guy walking towards the gate,” he said. “He was dressed in the uniform of the people who, you know, load the planes. He had this suitcase that was all, like, bumpy and stuff, like there was something in it. He kept looking around all suspicious. I saw this thing on a TV show where a guy had a similar experience and ‘accidentally’ bumped into the guy and asked him a question. As he was asking the guy, he took a look at the name and address on the luggage tag, so that’s what I did. I gave the information to the police immediately.”

That was enough for Phil. He threw the remote at the TV with such force that it cracked the screen and went black. Phil stood in silence for a moment. He heard sirens in the distance. He started to run through his house, frantic.

As he was running, a plan formulated in Phil’s head. *The police will never believe my story. This is the only option.* He ran into his basement, where he found a rope he had used on a camping trip. *I’ll do what I have to do, he thought. It wasn’t my fault!*

He started to cry silently as he tied the rope into a crude noose. He took a plastic chair from his desk in his basement and got up on it, tying the end of the rope to a pipe running across the ceiling. The sirens were getting closer.

His sobbing increased as he slipped the noose around his head and tightened it. Phil was known for acting on impulses, but even now he thought he might be taking this too far. The sirens were a couple of blocks away now. *It's too late now*, he thought. He said a short prayer, desperately asking God for forgiveness, although he wasn't a religious man.

The police were on his block. He heard running footsteps outside his door. "Police! We are coming in!" That was enough for Phil. Sobbing, he kicked over the chair.