



Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:8:00

The Matterhorn Ashes

A Collaboration

By Karen Kettle, Poppy Newton and David Rowlandson

BING BONG! “WILL LAWRENCE WHITTAKER, PASSENGER TRAVELLING TO GENEVA, PLEASE COME TO THE INFORMATION DESK?”

Laurie heard the unexpected airport announcement whilst seated in the flight departure area, composing himself before undertaking examination of his travel bag in the x-ray scanner, and in his rush did what you shouldn't do. He left everything he had brought with him on the seat he had occupied in the waiting area.

The girl behind the information desk was po-faced and not someone a man, who was wound up like coiled spring, wanted to banter with, but hey ho, it happened.

“Hello, I'm Laurie Whittaker. I have just been called to come here over the tannoy.”

The information desk assistant punched some keys on her computer. “I don't have a Laurie Whittaker on my list.”

“That's strange they definitely called my name. Can you check under flights to Geneva then?”

More keys were pressed. “No. Definitely no Laurie Whittaker travelling to Geneva.”

Panic set in. Laurie's voice reached a higher octave. "That can't be right. I'm taking my best friend's ashes to scatter on the Matterhorn. I have tickets and everything." He reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out his passport and flight ticket and threw them on to the desk. "Here. Have a look." He wasn't going to tell her what was being smuggled out in Big Joe's ashes. Oh no. Nor that his passport was a knock-off. Definitely not, but Laurie, or whoever he really was, was certainly someone who could even forget his own name.

Old Po-Face slowly looked up from gazing at the keyboard and gave Laurie an icy stare, whilst pointing at the corresponding sign on the counter, and responded, in ever such dull tones, "Sir. Please calm down. Verbal abuse of the staff is not acceptable."

Laurie bit his tongue. "Sorry. Will you please look at my flight reservation?"

Slowly the information desk assistant opened the paperwork and scanned it. "This ticket is for Lawrence Whittaker. You cannot fly on that."

"Sorry! What do you mean? That's me. Lawrence Whittaker. Check out my face in my passport." A nervous Laurie crossed his fingers behind his back and prayed that the fake passport would pass muster.

Po-Face opened the passport. "Yes it does look a bit like you, but you said your name was Laurie."

Frustrated, Laurie bit his sore tongue again and through gritted teeth and with watering eyes, he uttered, "Laurie is short for Lawrence you ... oh never mind. Now you know who I am can you please check again?"

“Of course Mr Whittaker.” Looking up at the screen she read out “It tells me here that on arrival at Geneva, a member of the British Consulate will meet you.”

“Oh. Is that all. Thank you. Can I have my paperwork and passport back please?” Once again, he wasn’t going to tell her it wasn’t really someone from the Consulate, but a Swiss Fence organised by the gang’s despotic boss. Po-Face, slowly handed Laurie back his paperwork.

Whilst putting away his passport and flight details in his pocket Laurie caught another announcement.

BING BONG! “PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE ANY BAGGAGE UNATTENDED, OR IT WILL BE REMOVED.”

“Oh Sugar. My travel bag with the urn in it. I left it on my seat.”

Laurie forced himself to turn away from Po-Face and her desk slowly. No point in behaving in any way other than “Normally” under the endless scrutiny of cctv. Whatever normal was though. Laurie felt he was by now a cardboard cut out of himself, trying to keep rigidly calm when all he wanted to do was run, very very fast, in order to get away from the situation he was in, or just to relieve the near explosive stress in his head.

So he looked at the floor for at least eight steps, relaxed his breathing and then looked up with what he hoped was a mild air of concern, increased his pace and made his way back to his abandoned baggage, nonchalantly pulling out his mobile phone and ringing his boss.

“It’s me! No it’s not bloody alright! Oh Nuts”, he murmured through his sore mouth and ground his teeth yet again.

“Yes, I said Oh Nuts! They’ve got the bag with the urn in it surrounded with tape. I’ve just seen it!”

“I don’t know. Christ man, I’ve not done this sort of thing before. You said it was easy.”

“No, don’t get like that. I’ll talk my way out of it. Bit of a delay probably as they’ll have to.....”

“Damn!” Laurie looked at the phone as the line went dead. His boss, Despot Derek, was impossible and frightening, Laurie knew this. Laurie wouldn’t like to find out what Despot Derek might do if he became Desperate Derek. Desperate to get the stash out of this law abiding, watchful country to the freer financial air of Switzerland.

“Er -Hello, Excuse me Officer, this is my bag you have - er behind the tape?”

Laurie looked into the slightly porcine eyes of a police officer and smiled slightly hoping to engender some sort of positive response. Which was silly actually he realised, because his bag was now the shining star of a would-be film. Surrounded in vibrant tape and the focus of many pairs of eyes. Cordoned off in splendid isolation.

He tried again. “Officer.”

“Are you the owner of this bag Sir?” The Officer was obviously not going to deviate from his script. “You do understand that baggage should never under any circumstances be left unattended. Furthermore.....”

BING BONG! “WILL ALL PASSENGERS PLEASE MOVE AWAY FROM AREA C AND FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS FROM OFFICIAL STAFF. THERE IS NO NEED FOR ALARM. PLEASE FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN.”

Laurie looked at the floor and then at the Officer who he had decided to call Piggy Blank in his mind. It gave him something to smile about inwardly, which he was going to need.

“Please turn off your mobile phones,” Piggy Blank ordered the retreating crowd of travellers as they were directed away from Laurie’s isolated travel bag.

“Sir, this bag is now the property of the Bomb Disposal Team and you are to come with me now. What is in your bag Sir?”

“Ashes.”

“Ashes?” If he tried any harder Piggy Blank could not have sounded less believing.

“Yup. My friend’s. He wanted them taken to....” Laurie forced his eyes to glisten - which he had a knack of doing and had served him well when his Mum or more recently his girlfriend caught him out.

Piggy Blank was not going to do anything other than the hard stare, from his little eyes. “They are sending a robot to deal with this Sir. You had better come with me immediately.”

His eyes not leaving Laurie’s face, Piggy Blank spoke into his radio. “It’s ashes Sir.” “Yes that is what he said..... Yes Sir. Will do.”

As Laurie was taken away between Piggy Blank and a taller lankier officer the Tannoy once again boomed

BING BONG. “WILL PASSENGERS PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE WILL BE A DELAY TO ALL FLIGHTS. THERE HAS BEEN A SECURITY ALERT. THERE IS NO NEED TO BE ALARMED. PLEASE AWAIT DIRECTIONS FROM GROUND STAFF.”

Laurie watched the play of emotions on the faces of those he could just see as he was marched away. Anger, fear and in one case tears from a child.

What the hell now?

Laurie turned to Piggy Blank, "Look, this is silly, it's my bag, I'm here, I can just pick it up and take it away."

"Right Chaps, what have we got here?" boomed a loud, Etonian voice.

"Oh no," whispered the lanky officer under his breath, "they've only gone and sent Ballistic Brian."

"Officer," snapped Piggy Blank, "watch what you say."

"Sorry, Sir."

"Do we know to whom this bag belongs?" asked Ballistic Brian.

"It's mine," replied Laurie, "as I've already advised the officers. It's got my friends ashes in it. I'm taking them to Geneva, a ceremony has been organised and I can't miss this flight. Can I please just go and get my bag?"

Ballistic Brian turned, raised his head and glared down his nose at Laurie, "No, Sir, you can't. Ticking has been reported to be coming from that bag."

Laurie rolled his eyes, "Yes, it's my alarm clock."

"We don't know that, Sir. It could be a detonation device and that's why I have to do a controlled explosion."

"What! You can't, please, Brian..."

"Who told you my name was Brian?"

Laurie threw up his arms, "Does it matter? I'm telling YOU the bag is mine, it's safe, there is no bomb device in it and I'm going to get it now."

Laurie lifted the cordon tape and tried to duck under it, but he was yanked back by a large hand grabbing at his shoulder.

“Stop,” boomed Piggy Blank, “one more step and I will have to arrest you.”

Laurie thought of the diamonds hidden in the urn and what The Boss would do to him if he lost them. How many ears, fingers and toes would he have left after they’d finished with him? The same number that Big Joe had left when he was cremated, no doubt.

“Everyone stand back, we’re detonating now.”

“NO,” yelled Laurie, lunging forward and falling over the tape. It was difficult to tell if the bang heard was Laurie hitting the floor or the bag being blown apart. Laurie looked up to see a volcanic ash eruption that was sending rocks, or in this case diamonds, in every direction.

“Ouch, what the hell...” Laurie could just about make out Ballistic Brian being showered with ash and holding his forehead. “How much damned explosive did you put around that bag?”

Police were shielding their eyes whilst trying to protect various parts of their bodies from flying debris.

Laurie found himself chuckling and thinking about Big Joe who, once again, was living up to his reputation of spreading himself around, even when he was dead, but this time Laurie was thankful for it. In the blinding chaos Laurie saw his chance for escape and scrambled towards the airport exit before Big Joe finished his grand finale.

Two weeks later Laurie sat on a beautiful beach in Cancún, sipping a Pina Colada. He smiled, Despot Derek would never think to look for him here. The last phone call he made hadn’t been so bad, “If you want the diamonds,” he’d said, “go and find a man call Ballistic Brian of the Bomb Squad, he’ll know where they are,”

“except,” he thought, tapping his coat pocket, “for these little beauties I managed to grab off the floor.” Laurie had cut off the call before Despot Derek had the chance to screech more abusive threats down the phone and tossed it into the nearest bin.

“Here’s to you, Big Joe,” said Laurie raising his glass, “you said you’d see me right if I did just one more job with you – cheers buddy.”

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