

**Pinelands Writers' Circle**  
**November 2009 Assignment**  
***A Memorable Encounter***

1 000 words

First Prize

Ray Hattingh

### **Delightful Delay**

“Sir, are you aware that your flight has been delayed?”

Normally, at most of the world’s huge airports – those horrible monstrosities - these words would make my heart sink – but not at Lanseria.

You see, I love aircraft and Lanseria not only provides a wide variety of these but it also has the feel of a small airport with an inviting open air viewing platform. A pleasant afternoon of plane spotting – accompanied by many cups of coffee – lay before me.

Eventually, after a four-hour delay, our flight was called at around seven that evening.

Having made it my policy to enter the cabin with nothing but a book in my hand I had no need to scrum for locker space and waited for the rush to subside before boarding. Besides, I always choose an aisle seat as I don't want to bob up and down like a jack in the box to let in tardy boarders.

The occupants of seats E and F were in a fit of giggles when I arrived. They had obviously not wasted their afternoon on coffee.

Both went silent as their eyes met mine, “It’s OK,” I smiled, adding “I hope I don’t look like one of those stuffy, self-opinionated businessmen.”

“Oops,” I hastily added, “I hope I’ve not slandered any husbands.”

“Oh no,” the older one replied, “My husband’s not opinionated. He’s an engineer. He knows everything.”

This broke, no literally shattered, the ice.

I fastened my seat belt and stowed my book in the seat pocket, certain that it was not going to be needed on this flight.

I learned that the older one was taking a breather from her varsity sons and her husband to visit her octogenarian parents in Constantia.

The younger one’s tale was almost tragically funny. At least the three of us thought so. At eight o'clock that night the dry run for her wedding was taking place. And as it started she would probably be about thirty thousand feet above Kimberly. She had just been using her cell phone to give last minute instructions to, and at the same time calming, her mother and her bridesmaids.

“What does your husband-to-be think about the situation?” I asked.

“Oh, I haven’t told him. It’s bad enough trying to calm my mother and the bridesmaids. He can find out for himself when he gets there.”

Our mirth merely increased as we imagined what would transpire when the poor groom got to the church for the rehearsal. We were by now all in that wonderful space where everything was funny.

We were also first on the trolley round and gins and tonics were eagerly ordered. I had no sooner poured mine than some comment set us off again and I knocked over my glass. As luck would have it, it coated the older one’s toes.

“Ooh,” she quipped, “I ought to make you lick it off.”

Suddenly realizing the possible implications of her statement, she hastily went on, "No. No. I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have said that,"

"Damn," I replied, "All my life I've waited for a woman who would ask me to suck her toes, but alas, it seems I will be denied again."

When we stopped shaking with laughter I said, "It's just as well. Can you imagine the scene: my backside sticking out in the aisle with my head at a suspicious level in front of the lady in the middle seat?"

We cracked up again.

The young stewardess was gorgeous; she had heard this and entered into the spirit of things. "If you two don't behave," she said in mock seriousness, "I'll have you locked up for indecent behaviour when we get to Cape Town."

"Oh goody," replied the older one, "Just promise we can share a cell so we can try out this toe thing."

By now some of the passengers around us seemed to have forgotten their irritation over the delay and were enjoying our antics as much as we were.

A break from the mirth was welcome and dinner provided it.

We stopped laughing while dinner as served and afterwards the older one and I exchanged wedding horror stories.

She told of her pilot brother's little catastrophe, "Against all our advice he held his bachelor party on the night before his wedding. His so-called friends got him paralytic. He woke up on the day of the wedding, in the crew bunk as they began their descent into Heathrow!"

"My God," I exclaimed, "What about the wedding?"

"His bride-to-be was so angry that she refused to marry him and cancelled the wedding, permanently," she said.

"Actually," she said, "Lowering her voice conspiratorially, "I think that the girl he eventually married actually engineered the whole thing with her pilot buddies. They were stewardesses and were both head over heels in love with him. I'm sure that they would happily have gouged each other's eyes out over him."

"So, do you think a rival of mine got this plane to be delayed?" asked the younger one with a twinkle.

This set us off again.

The sheer joy of our continual mirth was an unbelievable tonic and seldom have two hours passed so quickly.

As the flight touched down, the fun subsided and I felt a strange hollow feeling.

Waiting for my baggage I thought that the feeling was akin to the empty feeling one gets at the end of a holiday romance. Being an incurable romantic this feeling wasn't new to me so I simply stored it with all the other memories.

Just then I felt a tap on my shoulder.

I turned to find the older one behind me. She smiled.

"Open this tomorrow," she said thrusting a note into my hands before turning on her heels and disappearing into the crowd.

I couldn't wait till then. With tremulous anticipation I opened the note. It contained a cell number followed by, "That was such fun. My parents are old, deaf, and in bed early. Jane."