

Dodo

Based on a true story

By

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SECNE 1 INT: PROP PLANE**AFTERNOON**

People say that in near death experiences, your life flashes before your eyes... I used to believe them... But in this exact moment, I happen to know... That's a load of codswallop.

FX: AN OLD PLANE ENGINE. PROPELLERS SPINNING.

I am **finally** approaching death, and my life is not flashing before my eyes... All I can see are... sheep, grazing on the hillside, growing bigger and bigger, as the propeller plane I'm flying, hurtles towards them at a hundred and forty miles per hour, destined to kill me and the sheep and anyone else for that matter.

I glance at the white face of the pilot beside me – he twisted my arm into getting on this plane – love will make you do crazy things – and now he's stone cold dead, not a heart beat for Ireland, thumping from his selfish chest.

There are only two seats on this plane, he is in one, and I am in the other. And this is the second time in my entire life, that my body has been more than three feet off the ground... So things aren't looking good for the sheep.

FX: BURSTS OF STATIC. MUFFLED VOICE ON THE TANNOY RADIO.
THE ENGINE GROWS LOUDER.

Through my left ear, I can hear a man on the tannoy radio hissing and shouting between bursts of static, but I have no hearing in my right ear, and my hearing aid's rattling around the foot-carriage...

FX: HIGH PITCH SCREECH. THE SOUND OF TINNITUS.

I reach forwards, trying to snatch it, but it springs away from me as the plane bumps, and I'm sure that without it, I am doomed... So I try again... My finger tips inching closer and closer... Almost there... but before I can lift it, I'm flung back into my seat with an almighty crash and a sharp pain courses through my spine and I can't move.

FX: BLEEP! BLEEP! BLEEP! RAIN. THUNDER.

A red light throbs on the dashboard of dials and leavers and suddenly the plane is engulfed in grey mist. The man on the tannoy is shouting louder now... 'pull up... pull up!' muffled against the screech of the engine... Ominous cloud surrounds, raindrops on the windscreen and everything rattles and shakes... The engine snarls and the wings hiss, and I close my eyes. I know the doors are going to rip open, and the roof will soon be torn off. I clench my fists and I squeeze them tighter and tighter, digging my fingernails into the palms of my hands until I draw blood, and I scream as loud as Jupiter's thunder...
'FUUUUUUUUUUU...'

FX: THE PREVIOUS SOUND EFFECTS DISAPPEAR. IT FEELS LIKE WE ARE IN A FISHBOWL.

MUSIC: BEGINS @ 01:40 – Nils Frahm – 'Says'

But before I can finish my sentence, everything stops. The bleeping disappears as quickly as it came and there is silence. Stillness. Peace. A ceasefire from God and I don't dare open my eyes, but I can't hear a thing...

I unclench my fist, and press my hand against the side of the plane... It has stopped shaking. The roof has stopped clattering. The doors have stopped rattling and I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that '*it*' has finally happened... The grand innings are over... The end is neigh and I am as dead as Diana...

I laugh out loud and think... Let serenity unfold. Let the darkness wash over me like 10mg of Valium on a sunny Sunday afternoon and let my worries float off into the ether... 'Goodnight Mr Tom' - I'm signing off... Yours faithfully, Edna Taylor.

FX: THE ENGINE. PROPELLERS SPINNING SOFTLY. TINNITUS GROWING.

But then... From somewhere deep in the back of my mind... Chugging. Turning. Chopping through the air, I *can* still hear the propellers... My senses begin to return... Tinnitus in my ears... Pain in my legs and back and head... And I open my eyes to find that to my dismay... I am not dead...

Somehow, I have risen above the clouds and the turbulence... In fact, I can no longer see the ground or the sheep at all...

All that stretches before me is the most magnificent sunset conceivable to man, reflected off Columbus clouds as white as Christmas... and although I know, I am still up *shit creak* without a paddle... For this moment – I am calm.

MUSIC: STOPS.

SCENE 2 EXT: SMALL DONEGAL TOWN MORNING

FX: A BUSY HIGH STREET. PEOPLE. LIFE. CHURCH BELLS.

‘One... Two... Three...’ I count as I lift my leg onto the second step... I can do this... ‘One... Two... Three...’ I heave my foot onto step number three and I look up at the tall church spire before me...

The *normal people* shuffle past, climbing the steps with ease and I feel jealousy swirling in my gut... How simple life must be for them. How fun life must be...

My legs are heavy and my back is sore and I fix my eyes on step number four... I must keep my focus or the world will begin to spin...

‘One... Two... Three...’ Lift...

FX: CHILDREN LAUGHING. THEIR FOOTSTEPS AS THEY RUN UP THE STEPS... SHOVING PAST EDNA.

Shit.

I sit down on the forth step, out of breath and... I give up. Like last Sunday and the Sunday before that, and the Sunday before that... I give up.

I watch the final people enter the church and the doors close.

FX: THE CHURCH ORGAN. THE CHOIR FROM INSIDE THE BUIDLING.

The Irish town of Ramelton, is home to oldest Presbyterian church in Ireland... Unfortunately, the oldest church in Ireland has a set of very steep steps - fourteen in fact, that make it almost impossible for someone like me to climb...

My name is Edna Mary Josephine Taylor, and as plunge towards my death in this small aircraft... It is my ninety-eighth birthday. I have lived through two world wars and one civil war. I have *read* about love, lust and life. I have *read* about being besotted and betrayed in every conceivable manor. I have bared witness to the invention of the Spitfire and the Rolls Royce, the electric train and the double decker bus... But... I'm guilty of being life's biggest spectator, and I have been merely an onlooker to it all...

I haven't been around the world in eighty days, or ten thousand days for that matter, but who needs to travel, when you have Donegal, on the emerald isle of Ireland, on your doorstep... At least, that's what I would tell myself.

I have *never* been control of my life... I have *never* really been in control of anything. My life has been plagued with fear of life itself and although I am a master of telling myself that 'everything is okay' and that 'I have no regrets'... This may be my last opportunity, to tell you... It's not.

When I was a child, doctors would visit my parent's home as regularly as the postman, and the prediction was that I would be dead before thirty... But here I am, almost seventy years past my sell-by-date, and life just won't seem to let me go.

I suffer from many things, mostly inflicted upon myself inside my mind, depressions and anxieties that are difficult to diagnose... But by far the

disease that has beset me the most throughout my life, is an acute form of Acrophobia, which, I am told, is an extreme or irrational fear of height...

I'm not talking about wobbly knees looking over the edge of a castle wall... I get nauseous going upstairs, I have to avoid hills and tall buildings, bridges and promenades, I've never jumped off a diving board, or climbed a tree. I've never swung on a swing, or sat on a see-saw... In fact, I can barely look upwards without feeling woozy, and this has made my life... *curious*.

So, it will come as a surprise to the small few who know me, that I find myself gliding at 10,000 ft. with my first and last, lover, dead, in the seat beside me.

After all, I've spent ninety-seven years avoiding life's dangers, a creature of routine and shelter, 'the mundane' was the name of my game - and I was damn good player. 'Impermeable Edna', I'd call myself...

'Impermeable Edna' I repeat inside my head... 'Impermeable Edna'... I tell myself as I heave up off the church steps and walk away as the service continues on without me...

FX: BACON ON A HOT FRYING PAN. SPOKES ON A BICYCLE AS THE WHEELS SPIN.

MUSIC: BEGINS @ 02:00 – Nils Frahm – 'Says'

His name is... Or was... *Sizzling Cecil Tommy Taylor*... Hot as bacon on a Sunday morning frying pan. All man and all Irish - Hair that was

once red as tomato juice, and eyes as black as diamonds. Always on his bike, always cycling past the library where I'd always be *conveniently* in the window booth...

I would follow him every now and again, without him knowing... It's not that I stalked Cecil or anything like that... It's just that I like to keep an eye on the people in the town. Watch them as they come and go, imagine what it would be like to live life as one of them...

He was a pilot in the war and kept it up as a hobby and owned his very own plane... He climbed rocks, swam in the cold Irish sea, shot clay pigeons by day and chopped wood for his fire by night. He was afraid of nothing... He played life, rather than letting life play him... He was a 'yes man' and I was a 'no girl'...

But boy, Old Cecil really got me going.

SCENE 3 INT: LIBRARY

MORNING

FX: THE SPINNING WHEELS ON THE BICYCLE GROW IN INTENSITY.

I would sit in the library, watching him WIZZ past... His firm buttocks bouncing up and down as he pedalled... His hands strong, gripping the handlebars, his calves pulsating rhythmically...

For months I had wanted to run out onto the street and stop him and scream... 'I LOVE YOU' but of course my mind would keep me frozen to my seat.

FX: A TRUCK. GLASS BOTTLES CLINKING. A CRASH. SCREAMS.

I had crossed the bridge in the town, climbed the steps for church on Sunday... I had slept in his bed on the second floor of his apartment building and swam in the open sea...

What he saw in me, I will never know... But I felt invincible with Cecil by my side – so long as he was there, there was nothing I couldn't do.

I can see a blue light in the shape of a fuel canister, illuminated on the dash, that I'm sure wasn't on before...

I can feel that I am not as high as I once was, merely skimming along the surface of the cloud and the sun has almost disappeared...

The plane shunts, threatening to go back into the turbulence and terror, and I know what is below that safety net of cloud... I know how my brain will react when it sees the height of the drop back down to earth...

I would rather die than live without Cecil. I would rather die, than live at all.

MUSIC: BEGINS @ 04:10 – Nils Frahm – 'Says'

FX: STATIC RADIO. PROP PLANE ENGINE LOUDER THAN EVER.

'Cessna 8-4-2-6 – Please respond?' – His voice is desperate now, like he knows that if I don't answer soon, calling out will be an exercise in futility...

But I don't answer him... I won't answer him... I will just stay here with Cecil, my love, the only person who has ever understood me. If he is

dead, I will die too and we will float off into the sizzling sunset together... Bonnie and Clyde. Romeo and Juliet. Edna and Cecil.

I look at Cecil in the pilot seat for reassurance, to make sure that he is thinking the same and that our thoughts are aligned...

But I don't like what I see... His eyes are no longer black as diamonds, but sunken and empty, his skin is pale blue, his neck thick with veins, and his jaw has drooped giving him a limp, hang-dog expression that I have never seen before...

'Cecil?' I say out loud even though I know he won't respond.... 'CECIL' I shout demanding an answer, but of course there is no reply...

I reach out and I touch his hand expecting the warmth and safety and comfort that I have grown to love, but I'm greeted by cold, icy, distance...

I am just going to close my eyes and let the inevitable fulfil its nature. Scared to death of height my whole life and destined to die from 10,000 feet high in the air...

I catch a glimpse of myself in a small mirror – just a sliver of my face... I don't normally like looking at myself, because my skin is pale and the bags under my eyes are heavy... I am used to seeing someone pathetic looking back... An outsider who's out of control...

But in this moment my cheeks are flush and my pupils wide and in this instant of life and death, as I look deep into my soul after ninety-eight years on this planet...

For the first time in my life, it all makes perfect sense.

Although I know that Cecil was by my side when I climbed the steps and crossed the bridge and attended church and swam in the sea...

It wasn't Cecil doing those things... It was me.

HISS! 'Come in 8-4-2-6!'

My back straightens, adrenaline courses through my veins and I decide... Screw Cecil, screw death, screw love... I want to live.

I let go of Cecil's hand for the last time, and I lunge forwards with all my might towards my hearing aid and although it feels like my shoulder is close to dislocation, I grab the little bastard between my thumb and forefinger and slot it into my ear...

The sound of the world comes alive... The engine is thunderous; the propellers slicing through the cloud...

I look at what's in front of me for the first time with clarity...

My eyes scan the dash-board of dials, knobs, gauges, handles, buttons, controls, switches and in the middle of it all, one big joystick, that looks like it could fire the Atomic Bomb.

The fuel light is flashing now, the engine is once again snarling and rattling... And I am dipping lower and lower, thicker and thicker... My seat is shaking... The pain in my head and legs and back has returned...

But I breath. I Just breath. Slowly and deeply... I steady myself... And reach forwards, lifting the tannoy radio...

I push the button on the right hand side, and with everything I have, I say louder than the engine and clearer than the day...

MUSIC: ENDS.

‘My name is Edna Mary Josephine Taylor... I am now in control of this aircraft and I want to bring it in to land...’

Wish me luck.