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Outlook International

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Author Bio
Alexander T. Englert is from Colorado and is a current senior. In a three item list, he summarizes his Gettysburg College experience as follows (in no particular order): friends, philosophy, and lost innocence.

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Attention all passengers, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has decreased the level of security to blue, please leave all bags unattended to join the dance and limbo fest at the center of your respective concourse. Have a sunny, bluesky day!

I imagine hearing this while making my rounds at Outlook International Airport. Every workday, I push my trolley from trashcan to trashcan. The same voice that sounds like a fly trapped in a tincan warns of the terrorist threat and the “orange” level of security. Every day finds the same parade of airport-security frisked corpses marching to their various gates and every day the alert is orange.

One day, just one damn day, I want to hear another shade of warning from that smooth-talking intercom announcer. When that day comes, I will toss my arms in the air and dance a jig with my trash trolley.

RED! RED! Oh, God or Allah or Shivah! It’s here! The pest! The plague! The apocalypse – all at once! Armageddon! Run for your lives, all you passengers, pray to your gods and run! Jim, Jim, did you see that? The plane didn’t even fall! It just disintegrated from nose to tail! Comets are raining down! Red, red, we, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, tell you all the current threat advisory is red, so kiss your asses goodbye!

Or maybe it would be:

The current threat advisory is teal, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. That is to say, we have nothing to tell you and needed a color to correspond to this nothingness, with which we are wasting your time. Black was another option, but black is such a depressing color and is one certain that nothingness is black? Couldn’t it just as easily be teal?

So I dig through your trash and ponder what other colors could mean if announced during the threat advisory announcements. Don’t pity me. What is it you do that is so special?

My trolley is armed with disinfecting sprays, extra plastic-non-leaking trash bags, and wipe towels. Essentially, my job is to keep the area of space clean where you hate to spend long spans of time in. Yeah, that’s the catch of it all. No appreciation, no thanks, or “way to keep it sparkling there where I’m about to land my gigantic McDonalds-inflated butt like the asteroid that killed off the dinosaurs.”

Do any of you know what children leave over those seats? None of the chunky mixtures seem human. After work when I’m watching Star Trek and the nameless crewman is being crystallized in an alien goo, I have flashbacks of cleaning the airport concourse seats. Just be glad that I disinfect.

Some co-workers, who will remain nameless, pleasure themselves by rinsing off baby-goo residue sparingly with water. Sniggering, they meander slowly in the same area, putting by the trashcans until they’ve “goo’d” one. At lunch, they report, but I don’t laugh. I’m normally sympathetic for the passengers. The poor zombies want to be trapped there as little as I do and they’re the ones about to be herded into a cabin the size of a playplace tube at your generic fast-food establishment.

Thinking this way, though, about all the details of life at Outlook International Airport normalizes at some point. Weekdays, some weekends, sunny days, rainy days – I spend as much time here as I do at my empty home. Funny how fast we normalize, right? There is no one who says we have to. At least, that’s how it seems to me. I just sort of take what comes. That’s essentially how I got here. I took the job when we were all fired at the
GM plant. It’s not as bad as one would think—trash collecting allows for a free-spirited imagination.

My first name hangs in a laminated lanyard around my neck. When I was still new, the first nametag had to be replaced, they had spelled my name Jary, instead of Gary. I don’t get it. They don’t care, though. That is a worse job than mine, making nametags, but it must be done like emptying the trash, I suppose. Otherwise, we would empty it namelessly.

When I come to a full can with my trash trolley, I take the lid off, like I’m popping the cork off of my blue bottle—that’s an old relic that Grandpa Beau gave me, which I store my schnapps in. Then, I tie the top of the full trashbag. All the McDonalds bags, Styrofoam platters with Chinese sauces hanging in the corners, plastic foils, tissues with snot, and bubble gum wads churn together. That makes a crackling sound like pebbles in a cement mixer except much quieter.

Bubble gum... that stuff is the worst. I almost killed a man because of bubble gum. What an ass! This guy was a businessman. His clothes were fancy—don’t ask me for brands; can’t afford them myself and don’t care. Anyway, he had that smug look like every nest he roosted in was made from golden twigs or something. That type you want to sock in the teeth without them having to say a word. You know the type I mean.

Well, he was flying to Denver for some reason and looked proud about it. He sat there with headphones on and a music gadget in his hand. An invisible beat filled his gel-haired world that caused him to pound one heel repeatedly on the concourse carpet. Was the pounding of his foot a voluntary motion? I try to ignore people when I collect trash, but this guy caught my eye when he checked out a girl. I have to admit that her curves caught my glance as well—just as one can’t fight being caught in an avalanche, her beauty swept me away. Still, I had the decency to show a little control and not gawk.

To say the man “checked her out” is not strong enough—molested her with his eyes is more along the lines, I’m thinking. He pursed his lips together like a red-hot poker were branding his left butt cheek—as if to say, Oooh! That’s hot! It was as if he his gaze kept her from lifting into space—he wouldn’t look away and she began to notice. Rather than look back at him with a similar attitude, she folded her arms over her chest. She feigned interest in a mother of two boys wrestling them toward their gate, promising a treat if they behaved. The entire time, the beautiful girl’s face was turning red.

What a punk to make her feel so uncomfortable!

I had the full bag on the bottom shelf of my trolley and pulled out a fresh bag to replace in the empty shell. It had that chemical-new smell that I’ve come to like. I opened the bag by tugging it through the air three times. Schwapp! Schwapp! Schwapp! Then I stuck it down into the shell with my arms fully extended and pushed down the lid. I turned my trolley to take the full bag to the waste room, but stopped.

The ass in the monkey suit pulled out his gum with the tip of his tongue licking his top lip. The beautiful girl was looking at him again and he was looking at her. It seemed like she was sending some ominous smoke signals back his direction, but I could tell that the beast had its prey in the corner and was licking its chops. One of his hands ran over his gelled hair and the hand with the gum floated towards the seat.

Yell at him! Yell at the bastard before he gets away with it! But I said nothing.

With the same sort of finger twisting that goes into extinguishing a cigarette, he jammed his mint-green wad of gum just under the lip of his leather seat. Tunnel vision swirled in and I wanted to take him out. Can the chemicals in my disinfectant spray blind people? Mace him with it and see, that’s what I should do, I thought. Then his suave façade would melt away while he crept along on the floor weeping—eyes puffing into red
blossoms, while he cried out for help. BLINDED ME! HE’S BLINDED ME! And I would stand over him holding my broom like a spear and would smirk down at him and say, “Yeah, friend, I did.” Then I would jab him in the side of the head, break my broom over my knee, and strut away tossing my lanyard in the next trashcan. People would huddle around him and I would laugh!

Instead of trying out the blinding capabilities of my disinfectant spray, however, I could only ogle at him, while he gave the girl a pseudo-wink.

“Excuse me, sir,” I said. “Can you please put that gum in the trashcan?”

“What gum?”

The nerve! I was floored. How typical, I thought. This ass does not want to admit to being caught and is not afraid unless the person who catches him has some authority. No respect for those who take the full trash bags to the bin, so that he can cram his gullet full of expensive coffee and egg croissants! The little voice that I seldom obey cried, “Kill him now!” My hand began to go for the broom. Blinding wouldn’t sate my bloodlust; it would have to be a good old bludgeoning like they did at the time of Hammurabi. Then, I’d get some respect.

Staying polite, I said, “The gum you just stuck to the bottom of the seat.”

“I didn’t,” he said with a smile that I see politicians wear, when they know that they are out of reach of the small man, the man like me. But are they really? What did our French brothers teach us in 1799?

“Look down, sir,” I said through clenched teeth. “It’s that green lump next to your right leg.”

“It must have been there when I sat down.”

“It wasn’t.”

The man looked back to the woman and raised his eyebrows as if to say, “Can you believe this guy?” She was turning red just watching us and played with her blond locks. I tried not to get distracted by her—there was something seductive in the simple way her eyes shone. I looked down at my hands. My knuckles turned white from my grip on the lip of the trolley.

“Just clean it up,” I said. “You did it. I saw you.”

This was the nicest that I could get. There was no where to go from here, but to violence. Physical contact—crunching bone under my knuckles, wetting them with the blood running in his cheeks.

“Don’t make me ask again,” I said, putting my hand on the broom.

The man laughed. Can you believe it with a hulking guy like me ready to brandish a broom and give a war cry in the middle of Concourse A? The son of a bitch laughed at me and said, “What are you going to do?” He squinted at my lanyard and landed loudly on my name, “Jerry,” as if it were pronounced, “Jer-ee.” Like the damned ice cream tycoon!

“It’s Gary,” I proclaimed and drew my broom out of its hold as if it were Excalibur drawn from the stone. I made threatening steps in his direction and raised the broom in the air. His eyes opened to giant squid proportions and his top lip quaked like a jell-o dish slammed on the table. Yes! MY NAME IS GARY! FEAR ME!!! I grinned down at his frowning, worried face. Too late, sucker. This broom is going to give your straight nose an elbow. Then, I’m going to hang my lanyard around your neck and squirt you in the eyes with the disinfectant.

Suddenly, though, I looked into two giant watery eyes. They were ocean-blue and belonged to a toddler peeking over the seats at me. She belonged to a blond woman with her neck bent reading something. They were in the seats that attached to the back of the seats where the ass was stationed. The little girl had pigtails with pink marble ties holding them up. Her lips were parted like the Gerber Baby lips and I thought about my and Angela’s kid—Angela is my ex-wife and my kid is Susan, another cutie just about to get
married. Kids grow into adults and the adults show us oldies that we’ve got to make a little room.

These ocean-blue eyes were nets and I flopped in them like a fish in a net. If God speaks, then he does it through the eyes of children. Then again, that is partly why Angela left me, the belief-in-God issue. I’m just not sure about the guy (or gal). The little girl with the ocean-blue eyes, though, made me see myself, feel ashamed; you know?

All my anger was still there, but I lowered my broom ashamed of ever having lifted it. The little girl hiccuped and I turned to leave. The anger still made me tremble, but I made my way calmly towards the room where I would dump the bag full of the trash only to make my way back out into concourse to find the next full bag.

“Yeah, walk away, friend. That’s the right thing to do,” I heard from behind me. And I almost turned to resume my charge, but those ocean-blues just flashed in my head. I don’t want to show them a man pummeling another with a splintery broom handle. Turn on the news reports and that’s all one sees. She’ll know that people hurt people as soon as she begins to understand that the flashing pops and blinks over city skylines and the rubble chaos after suicide bombings are real—are happening to other human beings. So, I spared the ass.

In the trash room, I dropped the bag into the large bin and left again towards the gate where the gum-chewer was probably resuming his advances on the poor woman with the gorgeous legs. Some people! My adrenaline wasn’t throbbing through me anymore. Even though I had already emptied the trash in the area, I decided to go once more past the gate. I would tell the man how it is—no violence, no brandished broomstick. Simple talk would lead us to an understanding. Be diplomatic; don’t be like the bully regime in power in the US, struggle towards talk. This is what I kept on telling myself as I approached the gate where the...gentleman was waiting to board his’plane to Denver.

I rounded the corner and the line was formed and migrating towards the boarding bridge. I know I stopped pushing, because my front right trolley wheel stopped squeaking. The man, the ass, was just visible giving his ticket to the airline employee. She tore it and smiled him onto the plane. But what stopped me in my tracks was that the girl with the gorgeous legs and curves stood next to him with a flirting grin! Why?! Women are strange in their choice of men; some of them seem programmed to choose the ones that will damage them the most.

The little girl with the ocean-blues held her mother’s hand. Her ponytails bobbed against her ears and she clasped a sippy-cup in her free hand, which flopped on her side dripping with every other step onto the concourse carpet. She looked forward and up to her mother to giggle. It reminded me of how Susan used to laugh when I she wanted me to chase her like a monster, so that she could fall into a heap as I caught her and tickled her. But that thought vanished before the migrating line.

No chance to talk, to tell the man that he shouldn’t step on the little guy. That would have been a priceless lesson. Instead, he will fly to Denver with his legs stretched out in first class and the prospect of sex upon landing. My Grandma, when she was still alive, always said, “C’est la vie.” Before dementia turned it into her favorite phrase to say at every juncture—after she belched or while she sat on the toilet—she would say it to point out the ways that we just couldn’t change the assholes into gentleman. When Angela left me, I cried to my Grandma and she just patted my head saying, “c’est la vie” over and over.

...the current threat advisory is orange...

“C’est la vie,” I say in remembrance and begin to whistle. The gum comes off with two scrapes of my pocketknife. I whistle a song, since we are not allowed to listen to music on the job; it’s that good old Elvis number, Little Sister. And I go back to the trolley.
for the disinfectant, have my fingers around its ridged neck, and stop. Do they deserve disinfected seats? What if another asshole plops down? Or is this my gift, my one power, which I can exert at will?

In any case, that happened a while ago and you should know just from the short time that we’ve spent together how I decided at that point. Yep. Well, I’m good now; you see I imagine a lot and like to whistle. That’s something that they can’t tell me to stop. And there is always my friend, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security representative to spur me on towards new color ideas.

Attention all passengers: the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has changed the threat advisory to purple. Turn to your fellow passenger, even if they look mean, and offer them your hand. Shake it and begin to chat. Come on now! You’re bound to find something you have in common. Meanwhile, we are going to play Bach through the speakers and think optimistically. If we all do it together, there might come a day when such announcements are superfluous, even if that costs me my job.