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# *A Month Travelling With Mrs Hunt*

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## **Chapter 2: Phoenix, Arizona**

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The plan seemed like a good one.

Leave home around 8AM. Take Sophie and Zach to pre-school. Drop Emily off at school. Get to the airport soon after 8:30 for a flight leaving at 9:50 for New York. There would be plenty of time to connect with the Swissair flight to Geneva. That was the plan.

Unplanned was the once-in-a-decade storm which dumped buckets of snow on the East Coast of the USA. There was snow in Central Park. Shock, horror!

Unnoticed in Salt Lake City, it stopped air traffic for the best part of the Sunday. By Monday morning, when we arrived for our flight we found ourselves behind a queue of Sunday passengers, some of whom had been flown a bit of the way from their origins in the general direction of the East Coast. In some cases, their planes had not been able to proceed because their airports were closed. In other cases, their planes had not been able to take off from the East Coast to come and get them.

Mel dropped us at the kerb and we happily joined the queue for the self check-in terminals. That there was a queue for these computer screens should have been a clue that something was up. It took us more than half an hour to get that far only to discover that the machines refused to recognise us.

Actually, this whole self check-in procedure looks like a labour saving idea that does not work. Or maybe it's just a process that we all have to learn before it WILL work. Did we all know how to use ATMs when they were first introduced? Or did bank staff have to hover around instructing like they do at airport check-ins? And have to be paid to hover.

Anyway, after a few failed attempts to tell the computer who we were and where we were going and which flight we were confirmed on, a staff member hovered into view and confirmed what we already knew. Namely, the computer was convinced we didn't exist. I checked out Mrs Hunt and sure enough she was still there so I presumed my own substance was also not in doubt.

"Come with me please," the attendant said and guided us to a longer line that was, we soon discovered, moving with the tempo of a sloth on sleeping pills.

Long story short. By the time we got to the counter, our flight had left. Without us.

I was not surprised. It had happened to me more than once before. But Mrs Hunt announced to all within earshot (radius about two kilometres I reckon) "YOU'RE JOKING!"

Frankly, I think we had been bumped off our flight long before we arrived at the airport. The airline is not responsible for passengers who have not checked in. But once you are on a flight, they are stuck with you. So our flight to New York had probably already been loaded up with Sunday passengers long before we woke up. Be nice of the airline rang you and told you, but they don't do that. Certainly not in America. And certainly not if you are travelling on a discount economy fare.

What happened then was fascinating and lengthy. For the next hour or so, well meaning, but out of depth Larry behind the counter, tried to work out how to get us to New York when there were no more flights.

First option was to go same time same flight tomorrow. No seats. Would Swissair honour a day's delay. He rang them. They told him to go away. "They said *Get them to New York and they can talk to us then*" he reported, clearly miffed.

Second option was to find some other flight tomorrow. Like Salt Lake City to somewhere else and then to New York. This took so long I got through War and Peace and was beginning the Collected Works of Dostoevsky when Larry finally announced he had a solution. Except it would cause us to miss our connection with Swissair for a second day. No thanks, mate.

Third option seemed so obvious I wondered why I needed to suggest it. By now I was aching to climb over the desk and show Larry how to do it. In the days when I flew a lot, which was mostly every 25<sup>th</sup> day for twenty five years beginning in 1978, there was nothing I enjoyed more than working out novel ways to get from A to B, especially if A was a small village in Ecuador and B was in Lesotho. I would ask the flight attendants for their copy of the OAG, which was, in those days the size of a telephone directory. With a blank sheet and a pen, I would plan alternate routes. A nice way to while away a flight before they had TVs in the seat backs.

“Why don’t you fly us somewhere today where there is a flight to New York tomorrow,” I said. “We could stay there overnight in a hotel.”

Turned out to be not too hard. There was a flight going from Phoenix, Arizona, tomorrow morning at 7AM. And one going there from Salt Lake City this afternoon. We took it.

We said farewell to Mel and Riley who had returned to airport expecting to be driving us home again, and proceeded into the terminal at around midday for a 3PM departure to Phoenix.

I found a WIFI connection and emailed John Lengacher, our travel agent, asking him to fix the Swissair connection. It was 5AM in Australia so I didn’t expect an instant response. But within four hours he was awake and it was fixed. We called Graham and Franny in France and gave them the sad news that we would be delayed a day.

And we chatted with one of the more senior counter staff who was on a break, had seen us standing forever reading our novels, and came over to ask if we had got sorted. We appreciated this step beyond the call of his duty. He gave us a voucher to get a “Distressed Passenger” rate at a local hotel and I called and booked a room at the Airport Radisson.

At three, we were up, up and away. Expecting a quiet night in Phoenix. How mistaken can one be?

The Radisson had a free shuttle service (Tip \$5) and the room was nice. Or so it seemed. But strange metal monsters lurked under the bed.

We went and had dinner in the hotel restaurant. Mrs Hunt had a hamburger and I had a Club sandwich and we both had a nice glass of Napa valley Cab Sav. Thus sated we repaired to our room which was one of those rooms with no view that they give to people who have booked at the maximum discount rate. It works the same on planes too.

We were going to put a call through to Mel and then get an early night because we had booked the shuttle bus for 5AM. We got in our pyjamas and I went to the phone beside the bed and dialled Mel’s number and then noticed that Mrs Hunt was sitting by the phone at the desk. I called her over and as she walked by the bed she seemed to trip. She shrieked in pain (I think she did) and then we both looked down at her leg. Not a pretty sight, I TELL YOU! There was a gash in her leg about 3 centimetres across and all the skin was pushed up on one side. Seriously UNPLEASANT sight.

I think I said, “Oh that’s BAD” and told her to get a towel from the bathroom and wrap it up quick. I was afraid it was going to bleed something horrible (but it turned out not to be a very deep laceration). Mel’s phone was ringing in my ear, so I hung up and dialled the front desk.

The man at reception answered. “Hi, this is Steve. How can I help you?”

“My wife has just gashed her leg on a piece of metal sticking out from the bed.”

“Umm, excuse me. What did you say?” I repeated myself word for word.

“OK. I’ll send someone up immediately.”

“Thank you.”

By now Mrs Hunt was back holding a towel to her leg. She got up on the bed and we had a look at the wound. It didn’t look much better, except the skin had been pushed back a bit and there was less of the mince meat look on display. *Hope you’re not having lunch at this stage.*

The knock on the door was the young woman from reception. She was carrying a first aid kit. We knew that was not going to be enough.

I explained what happened and Mrs Hunt obliged by opening up the towel. The young woman went white and stepped back two paces. With much fluttering of the eyes and hand flapping she listened to our explanation of what had happened and what needed now to happen.

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“She’s going to need it stitched,” I suggested. “Can you call a doctor?”

She thought about this aloud for a sentence or two and then suggested the paramedics. We agreed and she went off to call them.



Within 5 minutes there was a fire engine outside the building and four uniformed firemen/paramedics entered the room with bags, boxes, trolleys and black humour. They were all young men and seemed huge in the room, which itself had seemed rather larger when there were only two of us there.

They looked at Mrs Hunt’s leg and said, “Oh that’s a good ‘un.” They suggested we go to a hospital and have it stitched and called an ambulance while they put a bandage over the laceration which was not bleeding too much. It certainly looked better with a bandage on it.

Two more uniformed guys arrived with a big yellow gurney and after getting Mrs Hunt’s Kathmandu jacket to add a bit of elegance over her nightie, all eight of us paraded through the empty hotel reception to the ambulance.

En route there were forms to fill out for the paramedics, the ambulance and the hotel. The hotel receptionist assured us that they wouldn’t be charging us for the room. I suggested they fix the bed before we get back. The problem was relatively simple. The bed was not sitting square on its base, allowing one bracket to poke out about a hand span, hidden beneath the valance on the bed base. They gave us the phone number for the hotel and said that they would send the shuttle bus for us when we were done.

At the hospital it was mostly waiting and waiting. Spasms of activity during which they asked questions and then left us alone. They didn’t seem to have too many customers, although with about a dozen treatment rooms it did seem that they were all used. Everyone was very nice to us.

Finally around 10:30PM the Physician Assistant embarked on his third laceration reconstruction of the night. On Mrs Hunt. Someone had his lip pierced because someone else threw a metal object at him. Another person had fallen through a wooden shelf she had been standing on.

“It was a laceration just like yours,” said Andy, the PA. “Except her’s was more a vertical vee while your’s is sideways.” I was looking sideways at this time.

Andy really seemed to enjoy his work. When he had first looked at the wound earlier, Mrs Hunt had asked, somewhat rhetorically, “So you can fix it?”

“Yeah, we’ll just take the leg off around here,” he answered pointing at her knee.

He gave Mrs Hunt some anaesthetic which is just like the stuff they give you at the dentist. And hurts just as much. And then he proceeded to remove bits of unnecessary flesh, checked that there was no tendon or muscle damage, washed the wound and stitched everything back.

Fifteen stitches and she was as good as ever.

We got to bed after midnight, and rose at 4AM to make sure we made our flight to New York.

On the flight up from Phoenix we had scored the exit row so had plenty of leg room. But the guy that sat next to Mrs Hunt seemed seriously out of it. For the whole 4½ hour flight he constantly fidgeted. Opened and closed newspaper pages, as opposed to actually reading them. Drank tequila and margaritas. And poked at the touch TV screen in front of him. Constantly.

New York was showing the remnants of its snow storm when we arrived, three hours ahead of our departure time. We found our way easily to the Swissair check-in and were guided to an empty First Class counter. They tagged our suitcases and then said, “Just put them over there by the post.”

Mrs Hunt walked away from the counter VERY slowly. She wanted to be sure that someone official actually came and picked them up. She never did see



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what happened to them. But next morning, they came off the baggage carousel in Geneva.