

The background of the entire image is a composite. The upper portion shows a white commercial airplane with dark wings and tail, flying from the bottom left towards the top right against a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The lower portion of the background is a high-angle, panoramic view of a dense city, likely New York City, with numerous skyscrapers and buildings. In the immediate foreground, a brown, leather-like suitcase with two straps and buckles sits on a rough, grey stone ledge. The overall color palette is warm, with golden and brown tones.

Struggle and Chaos in three Countries

Renata Plitzko

This Book is dedicated:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY GRANDMOTHER
Emilia Krawcyk
(1908 - 1968)

You will forever be with me in thought and spirit.
I wish you were here.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to my friends for their valuable time and energy in helping to transcribe and edit this book, making it into a wonderful instrument for dialogue.

Table of contents

PROLOGUE

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW WORLD

CHAPTER TWO

GOING HOME

CHAPTER THREE

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

CHAPTER FOUR

NEVER GIVE UP

CHAPTER FIVE

DRUG SMUGGLING

CHAPTER SIX

FRANK AND CARLO

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ESCAPE

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAKING DEALS

PART TWO

CHAPTER NINE

ALONG COMES JOHN

CHAPTER TEN

HOME AGAIN

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SESAME STREET

CHAPTER TWELVE

UNDESIRABLE ASSOCIATE

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
THE MOB

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
MISSING COINS

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
PORTSMOUTH, NH

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
GOODBYE FRANK

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

PART THREE

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
A HOME AT LAST

CHAPTER NINETEEN
JARED

CHAPTER TWENTY
XENAPHOBIA

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
CLEANVERGNÜGEN

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO
OVERCOMING DISCRIMINATION

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE
A SHOCKING DISCOVERY

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR
JAMES

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE
A GREEN CARD NO MORE

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX
UNDER ARREST

EPILOGUE

PROLOGUE

I peered out my window, looking down from thirty-three thousand feet. A placid, azure blue sky surrounded me for now. To be sure, there had been turbulence before, and there would likely be turbulence again. But for now, it was calm and I had long since learned to weather a storm. It is autumn, 2012 and I'm planning an expedition – a pilgrimage of sorts. Traveling to my place of birth to visit the family I left behind so far away, I yearn to re-trace my roots.

Far below, ghostly clouds pass indifferently, as indifferently as the mists of time have passed by me. As we near our destination, I close my eyes and remember that day years ago, and the younger woman who left under such different circumstances.

The younger woman left with nothing. My older version returns as a self-made woman. I left as a German and returned as a German-American. We left at a moment's notice, those years long ago. Only two weeks before I left the first time, I could never have foreseen any reason to hotfoot it to Switzerland, nor any necessity to immigrate to the United States. Yet, for all my changes in fortune now I am, in many ways, the same person who took that leap of faith years ago – a survivor, a maker, a *take-it-as-it-comes* kind of woman.

The plane began its descent to Frankfurt International Airport. Today, it is a beautiful, crisp autumn day, in stark contrast to the nightmarish flight from Zurich to New York in the winter of 1982. There is no fear like the fear of the unknown, but on that day in 1982, I remained convinced

that whatever lay ahead must surely beat the alternative – what could have been, had I chosen to remain in Germany. All I could do at that time was to put my best foot forward.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW WORLD

That day, as I sat miles above the frigid sea, contemplating what future the New World held, the pilot's voice came over the intercom in a stereotypically, indifferent monotone.

"Two hours out from JFK International Airport," he said, halting to clear his throat. "It looks like we might be in for some rough weather. I'll keep you posted on the details as we make our approach, in the meantime relax and thanks for flying air..."

I did not understand English, and Frank sat two rows away. Because the tickets were booked last-minute, the airline could not arrange for us to be seated together. My neighboring passenger, an elderly white-bearded man, kindly explained that it would be snowing in New York.

A short time later, the *fasten seatbelt* light came on. Soon after, the carry-on luggage began to shake and rattle in the overhead storage. The plane shuddered, as if hitting potholes in the sky. The older gentleman told me, almost as if to reassure himself, that no plane had ever crashed as a result of turbulence.

An hour passed by, in nerve-racking manner, before the pilot relayed a breaking weather report. Apparently, the plane was headed into no mere flurry, nor anything as inconsequential as a blizzard. The danger which awaited our arrival in New York was none other than a meteorological

phenomenon unique to the eastern United States, a veritable frozen hurricane: a Nor'easter.

Heavy snow streaked through the air, driven by buffeting, shrieking winds. The airplane's wings shuddered in the swirling winds of the storm as the pilot navigated blinding conditions in the approach. Over the intercom, came more words indecipherable to me.

"The pilot is saying that he is a veteran of bad-weather flying, and that there is nothing to worry about," my neighbor reported.

But this admission, it seemed, only served to provide more tension to the already nervous passengers. *If the weather was not dangerous, the pilot would have no need to assure us of his abilities would he?* I began to wonder whether I had jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire on this trip.

The 747 touched down with a screech. The airbrakes were thrown on, and the plane came roaring to a halt. It landed without any complications. *Despite everything, I contemplated, despite the dangerous weather, despite the run-in with the police, despite the frenzied exodus, despite all the planes, trains, and automobiles, I had arrived in one piece - or had I?*

The plane came coasting to a stop. A tractor came alongside the plane, one of those awkward, square-ish variety, rumbling and smoking with diesel fumes.

In retrospect, I recall that the tractor's driver, who was bundled up like an Eskimo, seemed a little frenzied. Naturally, the ground crew of any airport are trained to hustle, and this would have been doubly true considering the raging storm. Yet, there was also an uneasiness in the tractor driver's movement, almost as if he was afraid of something, I sensed. He hitched the plane and headed down the strip.

It seemed like we were being towed for a long time. Some of the passengers grew uneasy. They began to mutter under

their breath or whisper to their neighbors. The flight attendants moved to the front of the plane and talked among themselves behind a closed curtain. Then someone shouted something in English, in an angry voice. "We are being taken away from the terminal." It was true. We were.

Through the gusting curtain of snow, the passengers could see that the plane had been parked at a dead-end; a corner of the airport far away from the terminal. I watched, meanwhile, as the tractor took off with all the speed it could muster.

At any other time, this corner of the airport might have been a sight to behold, viewed safely out of the elements. The tempest screamed across the frost-bitten marshland upon which the airport was built. The grey waters of Jamaica Bay frothed and foamed. Across the bay, the lights of the New York City skyline could be seen, glimmering faintly. The view was bleak and yet somehow still beautiful, but any appreciation for natural beauty was lost on us passengers, in light of the anxiety we were now feeling.

After several seemingly unbearable minutes, an announcement drifted over the sound system. The captain's voice, filled with duress, explained to all aboard that we must, at all costs, remain calm. I did not need to see the fear on the faces around me, I did not need Frank to explain to me what was being said. I had heard the captain use a word that I understood full-well, and that understanding was enough to send me into a tailspin. That word was *bomb*. I found my life flashing before my eyes, as indeed, must have been the case with everyone else on board.

I had always been one to rise above circumstances. If that were not the case, I would never have set foot on the train to leave Germany; I would never have boarded the plane for America. But had I finally encountered an insurmountable obstacle? What escape could there be from this terrible predicament? What could I have done differently?

It was a cruel trick of destiny to have put me on that plane. Two weeks before, I had no plans to travel to America. Two weeks in the future, the journey would have been an impossibility – the airlines would not have allowed it. Why? Because I was seven-and-a-half months pregnant. Airlines, not to mention doctors, prohibit eight-month expectant mothers from flying. Yet here I sat, in a plane with a bomb about to go off.