For Justice and Liberty

Kohn Liu - January 2005

The sky that hung above the Portland International Airport that day was unreasonably grey and gloomy, as to deliberately depress every single living thing underneath it. To exacerbate this untimely ill omen, the airport itself was, like most others, an awkwardly oversized structure that showed no sign of welcoming hospitality for its passengers. It wasn't a pleasant day to travel, at least not from this airport; the almost hostile austerity around this particular airfield was too overwhelming for anyone to bear. As one entered the airport, any comforting thoughts, or those sweet memories of home, would be completely filtered and left behind in between the airport's cold concrete walls and the dreary sky.

The man took the folded plane ticket out from his pocket. He unfolded it and carefully read over the flight information again: UA354, departing at 11:17am, Gate E7. It was the third time he had done this within the last five minutes. But this time, the ticket was not going back to his pocket.

He held the ticket tightly and turned around to give his wife and his eight month old daughter one last hug.

"I love you. I will call as soon as I get there."

His wife didn't say a word. But from the look on her face, the farewell message did not do her much good. She was about to cry.

The man quickly stepped in line. He did not want to bid goodbye again. He didn't dare, actually, because his wife would definitely cry.

A female airport security guard in her 50's greeted the man politely.

"Sir, your photo ID and boarding pass please."

"Sir, you better hurry. It's already 11:05. You are going to miss your flight."

"I know."

The man didn't exactly know how to respond. The fact was that he had never boarded an airplane and did not know how long it would actually take for him to get into one. This would be his first time. And yet everything already seemed too overwhelming for him to handle – he was to board a plane, leave his country, and work in another one for who-knows-how-long.

He was somewhat excited a few weeks ago when the assignment letter arrived, but now he did not want to leave at all. They told him repeatedly that he was leaving for a good cause, to serve his country, and at the same time, secure a better pay for his family. Yet, today, just the airport alone was enough to hold him back.

The town where his family lived right now wasn't doing too well, as far as local economy was concerned. He had to find a better paid job so he could raise his baby girl and still manage the mortgage and car loan payments. This was, therefore, pretty much his last resort, and deep inside, he knew it was for a good cause too.

The line was moving rather quickly. He periodically waved at his wife, signaling her to leave. He didn't want her to go at all, but he couldn't bear looking at her sad face which had now covered with tears. It made him want to cry too. He then remembered

that he had some tissues or napkins of some sort in his backpack, but alas, he couldn't leave the line anymore. He was moving forward. It was too late.

His wife was literally howling now. Such an unsightly scene, he thought, in an international airport. His wife moved anxiously within the crowd outside the restricted area, hoping to have a better look at her husband. He waved at them one more time and blew a kiss. It didn't stop her from crying though, but the baby seemed to have gotten it. She smiled a little, or so he thought.

The man put his rather empty backpack into the X-Ray machine, just like everyone before him did. He waited by the metal detecting door for the permission to pass through. The security gave him the sign and he moved forward. Unfortunately the alarm sounded immediately.

"Sir, would you please remove your belt?"

"Sure."

He was glad that his belt had triggered the alarm, for it bought him some more time. He quickly returned to the end of the line, right in front of the X-Ray machine, and searched intently for his family. Yes, they were still there; his wife was still crying, and his girl staring at her mother blankly.

The man removed his belt and waved it passionately in the air, like a true patriot waving the American flag on the Fourth of July. I am here, I am right here, he murmured. His wife finally saw him and seemed to be overwhelmed with joy. She waved back feverishly and broke into a teary smile.

"Sir you are holding up the line."

"Oh I am sorry."

He could not take his eyes off his family, but he had to. Good bye, he thought, and with much resolution, he turned around and passed through the metal detector.

Gate E7 was at the end of the E Concourse. The man stepped onto the automatic moving pathway to let it take him to his gate. He didn't feel like walking anymore. He already missed home and he wanted to cry for that fact. But he couldn't. He was a grown up man now, with a wife and an eight month old baby, and crying simply was not allowed for a man with responsibilities.

Suddenly he remembered the prep talk his father gave the night before.

"You are doing this for a good cause. That should be all you care about now. You are fighting for justice and liberty. Be proud of it."

He closed his eyes but he could no longer hold back the tears.

The man started to run. He ran off the moving pathway and continued. For justice and liberty, he thought, when will justice and liberty serve my family? He raced down the E Concourse heedlessly, in between the cold metal walls and underneath the sad gloomy sky that hung above and beyond.