

# Air Fair

by Richard Leise

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“Air Fair” doesn’t make sense. What Mary sees doesn’t compute.

Only there’s no doubt. Right there, on TV, is Aunt Kit. And she’s wearing, down to the necklace and turquoise earrings, just what she’d worn to her mother’s funeral. What sort of demented mojo is this?

Beneath the dramatic voiceover—

*This is the Plaintiff, Catherine Schmidt. She says that she purchased airfare for her son so that he could attend his grandmother’s funeral. She also said that she paid kennel charges for her son’s pet cat, Poster, who couldn’t be left unattended, and required daily medication for a thyroid condition. This is no mere child’s play. Catherine’s here in the name of justice, suing her unscrupulous adult child for the price of the roundtrip ticket and the kitty condo, an amount....*

—in walks Aunt Kit.

Mary gawks. Reaches for her phone. Dour in funeral blacks—obviously coached, Aunt Kit never sneers like that—she takes her place at the stand. And like that—just like that!—Aunt Kit looks completely out of place, a tombstone in the middle of a playground. And just like a headstone she, too, is inscribed, defined by a bold white font detailing her name, complaint, and the sum she’s seeking.

This, and Mary thumbs open her contacts, is horrifying.

Since summer, Mary has seen some fantastic episodes. “Material Witness” is a favorite. The defendant, a pretty woman who, after discovering her fiancé was having an affair, arranged to meet the man for

dinner, poured her glass of Malbec atop his head, then left the restaurant. The man sued because his suit, a pinstriped Saint Laurent, was ruined.

Judgment: The Defendant.

“I Scream” is another classic. “Single Mom” Jasmine Hearth had sued King Cone (the conglomerate humorously represented by the high school senior who served the sundae) because her tween daughter’s “bug out” ice cream contained, in addition to candy, an actual spider—a brown recluse.

The girl had been eating while swinging, and she had set her sundae on the ground.

No one had been hurt.

Judgment: The Defendant.

Most disputes were petty. Salesmen renegeing on third-party warranties. Roommates recouping security deposits. Mary marveled at the sorts of people *The People’s Court* attracted, noting how producers planted fap fodder in the audience so that the aspiring actresses’ reactions—bemused and suggestive—were available for public consumption.

That the litigants dressed up? This bothered Mary. The idea that these people were in a courtroom? This bothered Mary. That producers wanted Mary to believe these people cared about what was on the line? This bothered Mary. Whatever the context, Mary was expected to believe that each dispute carried the same gravitas. And so the litigants, parading themselves as celebrities, had very little means by which to distinguish themselves from one another.

Not one to judge, but what could Mary do? Sometimes your thoughts have you.

These people?

Ew. No thank you.

Ponytails aside—how many men sported ponytails?—these were guys whose dress shirts came pre-packaged with ties. And the women. Mary didn’t understand them. She imagined them circumnavigating department stores, the air a miasma of bubblegum and cheap perfume, passing mirrored colonnades making a fun house of “Women’s Clothing” sections as they picked up sleeves and slid apart slacks, images of their televised selves, like sugar plums, dancing in their heads.

So to see her family? What does this say about—

In comes cousin Anthony, bursting through the door like a WWE wrestler, the spectators laughing, the announcer professionally oozing.

*This is the defendant Anthony Taylor. He insists his mother was helping him, and that she darn well knew he didn't have the money to fly across the country. Moreover, being new to Colorado, his mother understood he had no one to look after his sick kitty. Touched that his mother wanted him by her side, he arranged to be with her during this difficult time. Because his position as a junior tax accountant was new, he had not accrued paid time off. Anthony is counter-suing his mother for....*

Ooof. Disgusting.

Isn't an awareness, not to mention an acceptance of the margins outlining one's limitations, uncommon? Had to be. This is what sets Mary apart, makes her extraordinary. Or maybe it doesn't. Or maybe it doesn't matter.

Either way, Mary is *not* one of *them*.

She drops her phone.

The other morning she had read, and had no trouble believing, that trees communicate; that, for example, acacias alert other acacias to the presence of nearby giraffes, grazing. While she enjoyed this content, what she values most is not her thoughts (which she still entertains), but that she has entire afternoons of ideas she is not obligated to process, let alone share. Sentiments and opinions that she is free to discard as much as she is expected to possess (let alone defend, or come up with).

And she turns off the television.

Quietly, even diffidently, Mary rises from her seat. Cupping a hand in front of the screen she feels heat, her hand a glass containing warm water.

And she shakes her head as if remembering something.

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