

## The Whistle from Left Field

My seat was in the right field stands in the second to last row just past the foul line. I was coming back from concessions with my second hot dog of the game. The crowd sang “Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jacks, I don’t care if I ever get back” as I climbed the concrete steps to rejoin my mother and brother in the sunlit stands. My dad had wandered off about fifty rows toward home plate to get a better photo of his favorite player who had just made it to first on a shallow outfield single.

I watched my mom and brother energetically arguing. Or debating as our family called it. I felt left out and that made me feel guilty. A wave of sad nostalgia swept over me. I wished we could get together as a family like this more often. I really missed those special childhood moments. Like when my brother and I would play home run derby in our parents’ green backyard in the 90s. Watching my little brother and mom up in the stands choked me up. But besides the nostalgia, I felt a confusing mix of gratitude, love, and this weird impending doom like I had better soak it up now before I missed my chance.

Foolish, I know. But I couldn’t shake the feeling that it was all going to slip from my fingers soon.

A distant whistle came from somewhere beyond the 45,000-person stadium. I turned and looked past the massive collection of unburning lights in left field. The afternoon sky was beautiful, a perfect blue streaked with cirrus clouds and the dissipating contrail from a plane that passed minutes before. The whistling didn’t stop. I squinted my eyes to search the distance in the bright sundrenched afternoon.

Then I saw it. A large white-bodied torpedo with a black tip and a three-finned tail. Some kind of plane? Is there a military base nearby? I wondered.

The object swam through the air on a near-horizontal arc. It was large. As long as a work van but slimmer like a shark. Actually, it was bigger than that. But it didn’t move like a plane. It seemed mechanical, unmanned. The white and black projectile disappeared behind one of the new condo buildings erected behind the baseball stadium. One or two seconds later the spinning object reappeared. Then I thought I recognized what it was. And it was moving our way.

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I wasn't the only person who had the loathsome lightbulb go off in their heads. With each passing second, more and more baseball fans recognized the object. People around me started to gasp. A fever of fear jolted the calm, fun-loving atmosphere and grabbed the stadium by its throat. The batter dropped his bat and stepped out toward the edge of the grass between him and the pitcher mesmerized by the whistling object beyond the stadium's left field wall. The catcher came out of his squat and joined the batter. He put his hand on the opponent's shoulder. Together they looked.

From all around me, people started to scream. Then I heard plops of plastic beer cups falling to the concrete floor as people's grips numbed. I dropped my \$6 hot dog. I started running toward mom and my brother in the back. Their debate had ended. The large white-bodied and black-tipped thing continued toward the stadium. I heard its whistling hiss get louder despite the stadium's uproar. The crowd burst into panic.

Baseball fans rose from their seats. Some ran down the concrete steps that I ran up. I ran against a torrent. My body tightened and I got defensive. I parried panicked people from my path. A preteen boy tripped and fell into the laps of two stunned baby boomers. I ignored him and kept rushing toward my family. When I reached them, I fell into my mom's protective hug. Then she pulled my brother in too.

"You know I love you," mom said. "No matter what. I'm so proud of you both." Her hug tightened. "Where's your father?" she asked with dawning clarity. "Frank! Frank!" I had never seen her eyes so distant or distraught.

I scanned the stands. Then I saw him and pointed. He was elbowing his way toward us through the mass of confusion in the next section over, still about thirty rows away.

At that moment, the sky torpedo rose up over the left-field edge of the stadium. When it crossed the border, all life inside the stadium paused and held a collective breath. To me, it felt like every eye was

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fixed on the whistle of looming death. It glided through the pristine sky just a few hundred feet above our heads. It was purposeful yet exerted no effort, like a remorseless predator stalking its prey.

I could see that the seams in the destroyer's metal skin were bolted together by human hands. People earned a salary to birth this abomination. Though its girth was only as wide as a pro basketball player is tall and was about twenty feet from tip to tail, if this thing hit the ground, the sleeping atoms inside could wake and exterminate millions. With a good view of it, every other spectator and I could no longer deny the inevitable. It was a bomb on a downward trajectory. It was not a matter of if, but when. It was losing elevation fast like a plane cleared to land on the tarmac.

When it was directly above me, I tilted my head back. I could see ridges on the bomb's black tail, spinning, warping like the blades of a ceiling fan set on high. I saw two silver antennae jutting out of its black tip like the spear of a narwhal. The technology looked older. It wasn't sleek or modern like the deadly missiles on TV. This big bomb had a stout shape and a bulbous center like it was supposed to be a throwback to the original atom bombs of the 1940s.

Time, as I experienced it, slowed. That made me feel glad, because I knew that my life might be over. And I needed all the slow moments I could get to appreciate my family.

A wave of whispers rippled through the stadium as more people concluded that it was a nuclear bomb. Then shouts of anger and screams of fear erupted again. By the time the white-bellied atom bomb cleared the stadium wall behind us, everyone at the baseball game knew what it was. Accepted what it meant? That I can't say for sure.

Since our seats were just two rows from the top, my brother, mom, and I hurried up to the edge to watch the bomb fall. The big whistling bomb had lost substantial elevation since I first spotted it, what, less than a minute ago? Forty-five seconds? I couldn't tell and I didn't really care. I didn't have time to waste thinking about unimportant details while my family was right next to me.

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“Maybe it’ll land way out in Long Island and we’ll be okay,” my mom said. I put my hand on her shoulder and gripped it tight.

“Hopefully,” I replied. “But mom, I think we’re going to die.”

I tried to squash my anger. But the questions wouldn’t stop. Who did this to us? Why now? Why me? Why us? And I was very sad that I wouldn’t get to see my family again. Could this really be the end? Is this our last moment together? Probably. Unless the bomb doesn’t explode on impact, I desperately hoped. Unless, it’s a dud.

The crowd surged back and forth. Some pushed up behind us to watch the descent. Others pushed down the steps in futile escape of its destruction. Our father pushed sideways to rejoin us.

“Carol!” my dad shouted, his voice penetrating the panic, “Carol, I’m coming!”

“Frank!” my mom shrieked back. “Frank, I love you!” Then she started weeping.

My brother and I looked at each other and exchanged bottom-lip smiles that made our chins wrinkle, our eyebrows rise, and the corners of our mouths turn downward like a frown. I looked into my brother’s sad eyes. We really do have the same eyes like they say, I thought.

My mom continued to scream her husband’s name. I watched my dad fight the frenzied swarm harder than I had ever seen him fight in my life. I waved. People I didn’t know heaved up against me to get closer to the edge to watch the descent. It must have looked terribly sad. There I was waving to a man less than twenty rows away like it was the last time I would ever see him.

The whistling hadn’t stopped. It had grown lower in pitch and louder. I looked back out at the big boy. It was near its end now. It seemed content like a child sprinting home for dinner after an afternoon playing outside.

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The monster hurtled past a few low-rise buildings. Then I watched its black tip slip into an old red and brown brick apartment complex in need of a renovation. The building crumbled. Then the surrounding asphalt wrinkled like moist origami paper. Cracks stemmed out from the impact site. The penetration sucked the ground, cars, and other city stuff closer. Moments later, a swash of air whizzed past me toward the impact site as if filling a vacuum. Then the bomb went off. I was blinded by the brightest white light I'd ever witnessed. I grabbed my eyes in pain because it hurt a lot. I heard the water vapor in the humid air sizzling. Then I felt the scalding heat. Then there was nothing.