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As Flies to Wanton Boys

*"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport..."*

—William Shakespeare

The Tragedy of King Lear, IV.vi.38-39.

It had been six days since Sancho had consumed water. Usually, his iron will could keep him alive through great periods of discomfort. The problem was that his will needed water in order to work properly. He had read accounts of thirst in which people's tongues swelled up in their mouths, but he had never conceived of it happening to him. His legs were weak, his vision was blurry, and he almost regretted going without water, but not quite.

Even though it was rather painful, Sancho knew he was obligated by his own internal code to go without water. The less water he drank, the more the women and children could have. The thought of dying to save women and children kept him going. "Sancho Vasques," he fantasized, "a true martyr, and rescuer of kindred spirits, died of thirst today in the Eternal Bliss Savings Bank vault. The two mothers and five children who were trapped with him, six days ago, are alive today thanks to Sancho."

Six days before, Sancho had taken his wife Louisa, and their three children, Louis, Louise and Lois, on a small outing. He needed to go to the supermarket in order to buy distilled water for the iron and some beef jerky and potato chips for the poker game that night. While in the *Eight Items or Less* lane, Sancho's pocket pager started beeping.

"Damn it all," he said to his wife. "I just can't get away from those airplanes!"

"Ignore it," Louisa suggested. "You've been working at the airport long enough to miss one call. Besides, you've been at it for seven days straight. Spend some time with us."

Sancho nodded his head and clicked off the pager. "Even an air traffic controller should be able to get away from those airplanes sometimes," he said. He silently thanked God for his job. "I'm not going this once. I'm going to escape those planes this once."

After leaving the market, and buying a gumball for each of the

children as a reward for being seen but not heard, Sancho got an idea. He thought that since the bank was right next door, it might be nice to let the children see the safety deposit box he had just purchased. The inside of the vault seemed like an enriching learning experience to Sancho.

The safe was new, as was the bank. The floor was still an uncovered slab of grey concrete. The stainless steel safe deposit box doors, still covered with a slight film of dust, lined the four walls. They reminded Sancho of tiny drawers in a tiny morgue.

Sancho set the distilled water and snack foods in the center of the floor so he could get the key from his pocket. As he carefully searched through loose change, lint wads, and other keys, a woman and her two children also came in to look at their safe deposit box. Sancho ran his fingers through his bent, charcoal colored hair. He was slightly resentful because another family was engaging in what he thought was an original idea.

It was then that Sancho heard the loud deep roar that could only be emanating from a low flying 747. He remembered the familiar whine shattering concentration in the control tower. But this was the center of town, nearly ten miles from the airport. There was only one explanation. Sancho looked out the vault door to confirm the horrifying reality. As it were, through the bank window, he could see the 747 heading directly at him. Someone shouted, "Run!"

"No, you can't escape," Sancho said. Without a cognition or hesitation, Sancho closed the safe door and locked it. He yelled for the women and children to get to the back of the vault. The ensuing crash threw everyone to the ground. A concrete beam dropped from the vault roof, dividing the vault into a quarter on one side, and three quarters on the other. Grey clouds of concrete dust stifled the air and refused to settle. A line of white light broke through the roof where the concrete beam had fallen. Sancho grasped his head at the temples. His ears would be left ringing for the better part of three days.

Sancho stood up and walked over to sit down on the beam, in the light. Twisted wakes of convoluted dust followed each footstep, then eventually settled. Sancho had to now do some quick figuring. He realized that everyone in the bank was probably dead. Therefore, no one could know they were in the vault. Sancho thanked his God that fate had provided enough beef jerky and potato chips to feed a small army. He thanked the powers that be for the two gallons of distilled water. In his thankfulness, Sancho rubbed the throbbing black bags beneath his eyes. He stood, and vowed that he would not strike the women and children for complaining, nor would he drink any of the water that could quench their fantastic thirst.

Sancho often paced about looking at the pale children prone

on the floor. None seemed to mind the suffocating dust as much as he. Louis, his oldest, was stretched out next to a full bottle of water, but didn't drink. Sancho knelt next to the boy and uncapped the bottle. He propped up his son's head, and poured some water in his mouth. It trickled slowly down his throat. Sancho stood, proud.

There was no conversation in the dusty darkness. There was no light, save the shaft that pierced through the four inch hole in the ceiling, ten feet above. Sancho knew that this must be quite a depressing experience for the group, but he wished that someone would break the awkward silence. He decided that this had gone on too long, and became determined to quell the paralyzing fear.

Sancho positioned himself on the opposite side of the concrete beam, in the one quarter side of the vault. He aligned himself directly below the shaft of light. It reflected off the dust in and around his hair, and made the area around the top of his head glow. The black bags below his eyes were highlighted and his four day sparse beard looked thick and full in the darkness beneath his head. He hoped he looked imposing and persuasive here, and began to speak.

"I know you are all frightened," he sermonized at the motionless group. "But we now have a chance to demonstrate our faith." Sancho stood and spoke down to his companions, pounding on the beam with his fist when he made a point. "Remember when the Lord led the Children of Israel from slavery under the Pharaoh? They had no food, no hope. Just like us. They were hungry. But the good Lord provided. He dropped bread from the heavens. All the Children of Israel had to do was have faith. If we have faith, we will be saved."

Sancho climbed back over the beam and sat down against the vault wall. A cocoon of dust surrounded his prenatally positioned body. He was proud of his attempt, but wished for a greater response.

He looked at Louisa, lying across from him. Her wide grey eyes shone glass-like through the diffused light. Sancho saw only fear in them.

Sancho leaned against the vault door, then sat down. He wished he had answered his pager in the market and gone to work. That would have prevented the suffering. But he thanked God for the chance to show his faith.

At long last, Sancho could feel the vibrations of the emergency rescue team working on the vault door behind him. Soon, he could hear them. Before long, there were nearly deafening cutting noises and prying sounds. The lock clicked, quite undramatically, as molten sparks flew into the opening. Blinding light split white across the vault.

Sancho yelled for the children to stay away from the swinging door. Three paramedics entered. Sancho dropped to his knees and

gave thanks for being saved. "Thank-you for saving us." He swallowed the words as he fell to the floor in relief and exhaustion. The disturbed cloud of concrete dust settled on his back. He finally closed his eyes, and slept.

After what seemed like years, Dr. Pistil approached the press conference podium. Curious reporters flung unrefined questions at her in a bellowing flurry. They grew silent as she opened a prepared statement. "Sancho Vasques was admitted to 'Our Lady of Eternal Forgiveness Hospital' at eleven-thirty this morning after being pulled from the wreckage of Flight 333. He was not aboard the plane, but trapped in the bank vault that the plane impacted. He is suffering from severe dehydration, and, while in serious condition, he is expected to make a full recovery. I'm open for questions."

Cigarette smoke wafted from the reporters like a smoldering fillet, yellowing and dimming the T.V. camera lights. A reporter deep in the belly of the group shouted to the doctor, "Why was he not suffering from hunger, as well as thirst?"

"Mr. Vasques had a great deal of beef jerky and potato chips in the vault with him."

The crowd grumbled, reaching an apex, then quieted. A polyester clad reporter in the front row spoke next. "Is there any validity to the report that there were also two gallons of water in the vault with—"

"It's difficult to speculate, but after speaking with Mr. Vasques, it is clear to me that in some odd altruistic gesture, or macho type sacrifice... I don't know... Mr. Vasques was saving the water for those in the safe with him. Apparently, after the crash, he went on as if they were still living... Feeding the children water, speaking as leader, acting as protector... He even went so far as to save water for those he *thought* needed it more than him. That, I think, is why he suffered."

Sancho turned off the television press conference with the remote control beside his bed. He reached for his pitcher of water, but in his weary state, missed and brushed open the window curtains it sat near. A shaft of blue-white light broke through, into the hospital room, and shined in Sancho's eyes. They compensated for the intensity of this light, and he saw the room grow dark. He could barely perceive what looked like swirling storms of concrete dust above him, then settling about him in the room. He heard the silence that he heard in the vault.

He reached again for his water, but couldn't find it with the sun in his eyes, and the room dark. Sancho saw another light as the door inched open. A silhouette stood in the opening, then entered the room. Sancho realized it was an orderly. Still silhouetted, the orderly closed the curtains, then stepped back out of the room. Sancho's

eyes adjusted back to normal, so he reached once more for his pitcher. He emptied it into his cup and drank, hoping to wash the salty taste from his mouth, and the memory of his family from his mind.