

Ch. - His First Flight

Part II - The Black Aeroplane

Introduction -

The lesson “Black Aeroplane” by Frederick Forsyth reflects on how one’s judgement gets distorted due to fantasizing and how it creates problems. In this chapter, the narrator is a pilot who is so eager to meet his family and have a good breakfast that he takes the wrong decision of facing the storm instead of doing the right thing. Miraculously, he somehow manages to escape with the help of a mysterious aeroplane.

Summary

The story “Black Aeroplane” is about a pilot who feels happy and contented to fly over a city that is sleeping (at the night time). He is flying from Paris to London. While taking his flight, he dreams about the long holiday with his family. He also fantasizes about the scrumptious breakfast he would have upon landing. As soon as he crosses Paris, he gets a look of the dark clouds that were a sign of the upcoming storm. The right decision would have been to turn back to Paris for the sake of safety. But he being overshadowed by his dreams and not wanting to delay them, risks the life of his passengers and heads straight into the storm. Everything gets dark, he is unable to see, all his direction instruments stopped functioning and he lost control of the plane. When all hope was lost, he saw another plane whose pilot was more than willing to rescue them. The author was panicking as there was very less amount of fuel left. The anonymous pilot guided them out of the storm and disappeared as soon as they saw light. Upon landing, when he asks the lady in the control room about the other pilot, he is left in shock when she says that his was the only plane in the sky.

Explanation:



THE moon was coming up in the east, behind me, and stars were shining in the clear sky above me. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. I was happy to be alone high up above the sleeping countryside. I was flying my old Dakota aeroplane over France back to England. I was dreaming of my holiday and looking forward to being with my family. I looked at my watch: one thirty in the morning.

It was night time when the sky was clear and the stars could be seen twinkling. The pilot felt peace in being above a country that had fallen asleep while he was flying over France to England. It was half-past one in the morning and he was fantasizing about holidaying with his family.

'I should call Paris Control soon,' I thought. As I looked down past the nose of the aeroplane, I saw the lights of a big city in front of me. I switched on the radio and said, "Paris Control, Dakota DS 088 here. Can you hear me? I'm on my way to England. Over." The voice from the radio answered me immediately: "DS 088, I can hear you. You ought to turn twelve degrees west now, DS 088. Over."

When the aeroplane was in France, the pilot thought of informing the Paris Control personnel about its presence and for instructions. At that time, lights from the Paris city were blaring at him. He informed the Control Agency to which they replied with further instruction on directions. The control room at Paris instructed him to turn 12 degrees towards the west.

I checked the map and the compass, switched over to my second and last fuel tank, and turned the Dakota twelve degrees west towards England. 'I'll be in time for breakfast,' I thought. A good big English breakfast! Everything was going well — it was an easy flight.

Compass- instrument for telling direction

After receiving the instructions, the pilot geared up and followed them while putting the last fuel tank into operation. All this time, he was dreaming about his time with his family and then, he started thinking about having a satisfactory breakfast at the destination point. He was calm as everything was going as planned.



Paris was about 150 kilometres behind me when I saw the clouds. Storm clouds. They were huge. They looked like black mountains standing in front of me across the sky. I knew I could not fly up and over them, and I did not have enough fuel to fly around them to the north or south. “I ought to go back to Paris,” I thought, but I wanted to get home. I wanted that breakfast. ‘I’ll take the risk,’ I thought, and flew that old Dakota straight into the storm.

Now, the plane had crossed Paris when he started seeing clouds in the sky. The presence of clouds made it unsafe to travel by air because there were chances of a storm. They were so huge and dark that the pilot compared them with “black mountains”. He knew he couldn’t pass them as it was impossible to go above them or escape them with the amount of fuel that was left in the last tank. The right decision would have been to fly back to Paris safely. But the pilot’s decision making was clouded by his wish to meet his family. He so desperately wanted to be with his family and have that English breakfast he had been dreaming of all day, that he took the risk of not going back. Thus, he headed the plane right into the storm.

Inside the clouds, everything was suddenly black. It was impossible to see anything outside the aeroplane. The old aeroplane jumped and twisted in the air. I looked at the compass. I couldn’t believe my eyes: the compass was turning round and round and round. It was dead. It would not work! The other instruments were suddenly dead, too. I tried the radio.

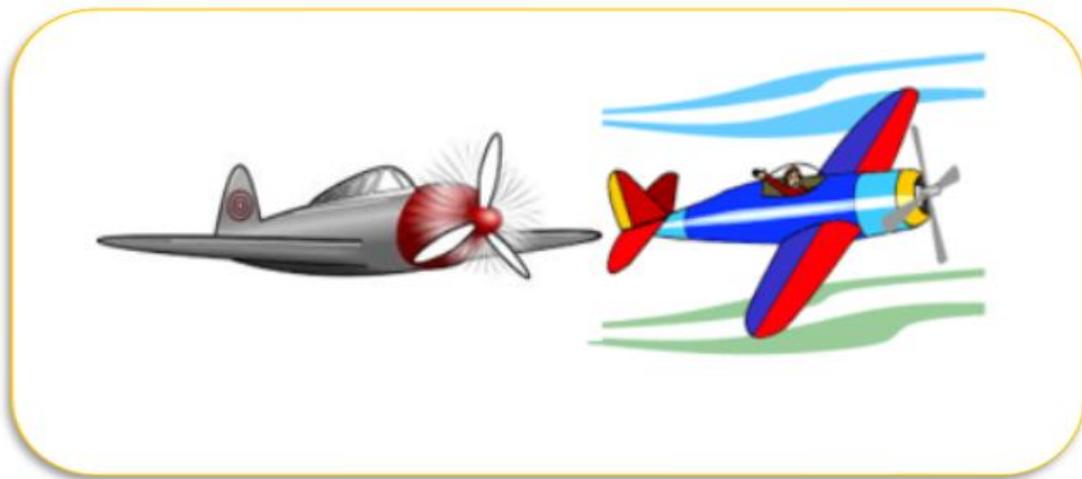
It was so dark because of the storm that nothing was visible outside the plane. He started losing control of the aeroplane. The compass and other instruments had also stopped working because of the bad weather. He became helpless.

“Paris Control? Paris Control? Can you hear me?” There was no answer. The radio was dead too. I had no radio, no compass, and I could not see where I was. I was lost in the storm. Then, in the black clouds quite near me, I saw another aeroplane. It had no lights on its wings, but I could see it flying next to me through the storm. I could see the pilot’s face — turned towards me. I was very glad to see another person. He lifted one hand and waved. “Follow me,” he was saying. “Follow me.” ‘He knows that I am lost,’ I thought. ‘He’s trying to help me.’

He tried calling the Paris Control Agency who had helped him earlier but couldn't connect because of the weather. In the midst of nowhere, when everything failed, he saw a ray of hope when he saw another aeroplane. He felt relieved when he saw another pilot's face and willingness to help him escape the storm. He thought to himself that the other pilot is very kind as he knew that they were lost and was trying to help him.

He turned his aeroplane slowly to the north, in front of my Dakota, so that it would be easier for me to follow him. I was very happy to go behind the strange aeroplane like an obedient child. After half an hour the strange black aeroplane was still there in front of me in the clouds. Now there was only enough fuel in the old Dakota's last tank to fly for five or ten minutes more. I was starting to feel frightened again. But then he started to go down and I followed through the storm. Suddenly I came out of the clouds and saw two long straight lines of lights in front of me. It was a runway! An airport! I was safe! I turned to look for my friend in the black aeroplane, but the sky was empty. There was nothing there. The black aeroplane was gone. I could not see it anywhere.

Runway- a strip of hard ground along which aircraft take off and land



Frightened- terrified

Followed- chased

Obedient- one who obeys

Glad- happy

The other pilot took his plane ahead of the lost aeroplane to make it easier for them to follow while the author followed him like an "obedient child". He was also panicking because there was very less amount of fuel left. It was only then that he started coming out of the storm and

could see the runway to land his plane safely. When he turned to thank the other pilot, he realised that the plane that helped him, had disappeared as soon as he came out of the storm.

I landed and was not sorry to walk away from the old Dakota near the control tower. I went and asked a woman in the control centre where I was and who the other pilot was. I wanted to say 'Thank you'. She looked at me very strangely, and then laughed. "Another aeroplane? Up there in this storm? No other aeroplanes were flying tonight. Yours was the only one I could see on the radar." So who helped me to arrive there safely without a compass or a radio, and without any more fuel in my tanks? Who was the pilot on the strange black aeroplane, flying in the storm, without lights?

Radar- a system for detecting the presence, direction, distance, and speed of aircraft, ships, and other objects, by sending out pulses of radio waves which are reflected off the object back to the source

Strangely- in a strange manner

The author did not know where he had landed but was not afraid of leaving his plane unattended. He headed straight into the control room to ask about the other pilot. To his utmost surprise, the lady informed him that there was no other plane in the sky except his because of the bad weather. He is left astonished with a lot of questions unanswered in his mind.

The Black Aeroplane:

Questions and Answers

Q1. "I'll take the risk." What is the risk? Why does the narrator take it?

A. The "risk" here refers to not doing the right thing, which is flying back to Paris when he came to know about the storm. Despite being aware of the bad weather, the pilot headed straight into the storm and risked the lives of his fellow passengers. The pilot's decision making was clouded by his wish to meet his family. He so desperately wanted to be with his family and have that English breakfast he had been dreaming of all day, that he took the risk of not going back.

Q2. Describe the narrator's experience as he flew the aeroplane into the storm.

A. The narrator was frightened as he lost control of the plane. He felt helpless as the compass and other instruments had stopped working. Nothing outside the aeroplane was visible when suddenly in the midst of nowhere, an unknown plane was visible and the pilot was eager to help him. The narrator was panicking because there was very less fuel left but somehow, he managed to escape the storm with the help of the strange pilot who he could not thank.

Q3. Why does the narrator say, “I landed and was not sorry to walk away from the old Dakota...”?

A. The narrator had landed at an unknown place as his compass and radar had stopped functioning in the storm. He was not scared to leave the plane unattended and go to the control centre to inquire about the mysterious plane which had helped him out of the storm.

Q4. What made the woman in the control centre look at the narrator strangely?

A. The woman in the control centre looked at the narrator strangely when he asked about the other pilot that helped him escape the storm. This is because there was no other plane in the sky during such bad weather.

Q5. Who do you think helped the narrator to reach safely? Discuss this among yourselves and give reasons for your answer.

A. It was the pilot’s own conscience which helped him out of the storm. There was no other plane out on that stormy night. So, probably, he was hallucinating. It was his own capability as a pilot which led him out of that black cloud.

The Black Aeroplane:

Grammar Exercise

Now, try to guess the meanings of the word ‘black’ in the sentences given below. Check the meanings in the dictionary and find out whether you have guessed right.

1. Go and have a bath; your hands and face are absolutely black. _____
2. The taxi-driver gave Ratan a black look as he crossed the road when the traffic light was green. _____
3. The bombardment of Hiroshima is one of the blackest crimes against humanity. _____
4. Very few people enjoy Harold Pinter’s black comedy. _____
5. Sometimes shopkeepers store essential goods to create false scarcity and then sell these in black. _____
6. Villagers had beaten the criminal black and blue. _____

Answers-

1. Go and have a bath; your hands and face are absolutely black.

The meaning of ‘black’ in this sentence is that the face and hands are dark with dust and heat.

2. The taxi-driver gave Ratan a black look as he crossed the road when the traffic light was green.

Here, 'black' refers to an angry look.

3. The bombardment of Hiroshima is one of the blackest crimes against humanity.

Here, 'blackest' refers to the darkest and cruellest crime against humanity.

4. Very few people enjoy Harold Pinter's black comedy

Here, 'black' refers to dark and gloomy comedy.

5. Sometimes shopkeepers store essential goods to create false scarcity and then sell these in black.

The meaning of 'black' in this sentence is that the shopkeepers sell the described goods 'at a higher price'.

6. Villagers had beaten the criminal black and blue.

Here, 'black' means that the criminal suffered excessive beating at the hands of the villagers.

Match the phrases given under Column A with their meanings given under Column B:

A	B
.Fly a flag Fly into rage Fly along Fly high .Fly the coop	Move quickly/suddenly Be successful Display a flag on a long pole Escape from a place Become suddenly very angry

Answers-

A	B
.Fly a flag	.Display a flag on a long pole

Fly into rage Fly along Fly high Fly the coop	Become suddenly very angry Move quickly/suddenly Be successful Escape from a place
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We know that the word ‘fly’ (of birds/insects) means to move through air using wings. Tick the words which have the same or nearly the same meaning.

swoop	flit	Paddle	Flutter	ascend
float	ride	Skim	Sink	Dart
Hover	Glide	Descend	Soar	Shoot
Spring	Stay	Fall	Sail	Flap

Answers-

Swoop	flit	Paddle	Flutter	ascend
Float	ride	Skim	Sink	Dart
Hover	Glide	Descend	Soar	Shoot
Spring	Stay	Fall	Sail	Flap

His First Flight (Part - I)

Questions and Answers

Q1. Why was the young seagull afraid to fly? Do you think all young birds are afraid to make their first flight, or are some birds more timid than others? Do you think a human baby also finds it a challenge to take its first steps?

A. The young seagull was afraid to fly because it was his first flight. He doubted that his wings would not be able to support him. We are well aware that “Journey to a thousand miles begins with a single step” and it is very difficult to take that first step. Thus, I think all birds must be hesitating before taking their first flight, some more than others. Yes, just like young birds, human babies also hesitate while taking their first step.

Q2. “The sight of the food maddened him.” What does this suggest? What compelled the young seagull to finally fly?

A. On not being able to gather courage to fly and acting like a coward, the young seagull’s family left him alone. As a result, he was starving since he could not fly to get his own food. When he saw his mother coming near him with fish, he got excited and dived straight at the fish, forgetting for a moment that he was afraid of flying. Thus, he got so maddened by the sight of food because he was starving, which compelled him to take his first flight.

Q3. “They were beckoning to him, calling shrilly.” Why did the seagull’s father and mother threaten him and cajole him to fly?

A. Unlike his younger siblings, the poor seagull could not gather enough courage to take his first flight. Thus, his parents taunted him for being a coward. They even threatened it to let it starve if he did not try. They thought hunger would make him fly looking for his food. They did all of this because they wanted him to fly.

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