

A HUMMINGBIRD FLYING WITH THE HUMMER

Bob Ticer

The Breach

His helmet muffled the hum of single blade rotors as the aircraft carrier below became a speck amidst a giant ocean. The hummer's rotors slowed for the blades to align with and retract into the aircraft's wings, tail and nose. After it converted from a chopper into an airplane, it then thrust forward to the roar of its jet engines.

The only cloud in the sky was a faraway jet trail. That'd be Air Force One on its way to Pearl Harbor for a stopover before it continued on its way to Beijing.

This Navy pilot was ready to show his Commander in Chief what the nation had gotten for its money. This special spy plane had become Jay's primary mission in life. It had all the tools needed to find out what General Wong was up to, or to uncover any other threat to national security.

As Air Force One neared, Jay pulled the lever back. The hummer's nose lifted and it climbed higher and higher for a greater speed to descend at.

It climbed no more. Jay rotated his special shock-absorbing seat and faced the onboard flight technician behind him. "Little sister ready for butterfly hop at mach three?"

Ken nodded. "Ready little brother."

Jay pushed close to his mouth the mike that was attached to his helmet. "Does everyone see duck in sky?"

"Big brother has you covered," replied the flight controller onboard the aircraft carrier named the Ronald Reagan.

"Watchdog watches duck," said the voice from the observatory at Hickam Air Force Base.

"Big bird in sky sees duck," announced Admiral Young from Air Force One.

Jay shoved the control stick down and forward. Whoa! His seat jolted his back as the jet shot forward. Down, down, down it dived, faster and faster to mach three as the ocean closed in and something like a seagull or pelican went splat before him, and his seatbelt grabbed his body tight, as the jet flipped this way and that, and the world suddenly spun like a blur until it finally came back to a stillness never realized so much until then.

The jerks and gyrations had nearly stretched his neck out of joint. His body ached all over. So nauseated was he that he nearly emptied his stomach. Still, the thrill outweighed the pain.

"Is everyone okay?" asked the controller onboard the Ronald Reagan.

"Little brother's alive and well," replied Jay.

"Roger."

"Little sister survived," replied Ken.

"Roger. Switch over."

In wait to surrender his fate to the reliability of a distant computer, Jay's lovely Susie entered his mind. He'd fly over a volcanic eruption and bail out over Los Angeles to hold her gorgeous body tight. He couldn't wait to hold her in his arms and taste her sweet lips as he slipped the diamond ring on her finger.

Something should've happened by now, but nothing did. "Big brother duck on big pond please respond to lame duck in sky."

Jay noticed something outside the window on his left. He peeked at it. He looked away, and then back at it. He stared at the tiny object that kept pace three feet from the cockpit. It couldn't be a real hummingbird beside an aircraft named the hummer, not at twice the speed of sound. It must be a feature of this new technology he piloted, but why hadn't someone informed him of it?

Maybe the controller onboard the Ronald Reagan knew what it was. "Come in big brother . . . Is big brother there? . . . Does little sister receive anyone?"

The only response came from behind him. "Little sister receives only you."

"Is there something you forgot to tell me?"

"Like what?"

"Like that little thing outside on my left with flapping green wings and the iridescent orange and red neck."

Ken's upper body leaned into the front cockpit. "They're playing with us."

"Some joke - a hummingbird flying with the hummer."

"Maybe China developed a new kind of probe. I'll scope it with the satellite."

Jay waited.

"Won't focus."

"Returning to big brother," Jay announced to anyone able to hear him.

He moved the control stick and the hummer circled downward to the left. After nearly a one-eighty he attempted to halt the turn, but the control lever wouldn't move and the jet, with the hummingbird thing still by its side, continued to lose altitude.

"Do something," Jay hollered.

"Switched to backup computer."

Still, nothing worked.

The President stared at Admiral Young. As expensive as the hummer had been to produce, a failed outcome was the last thing he'd tolerate.

The Admiral lowered the phone. "Monitors are also out on the Ronald Reagan and at Hickam."

George Kroft turned away from the window and laid down his binoculars. "It's going down. If word of it leaked to General Wong, he'd sabotage it for sure."

The President closed his eyes tight for a second.

Elisabeth Black rolled her eyes upward. "A malfunction is more likely. If the hummer's scrambler and descrambler are out of sync with the others, electronic signals could jam its control system."

Although the heads of CIA and Homeland Security disagreed with each other, as usual, the President welcomed neither sabotage nor an electronic malfunction as an excuse for a failed outcome.

Still unable to regain control of the hummer, Jay's composure took another hit from a screechy voice that clearly said in plain English, "Have no fear. I control your aircraft."

"Identify yourself and state your business."

"My name is Netone. I came to your planet to learn its ways."

Jay pivoted his seat and faced Ken. He smiled. "We have aliens from afar, English-speaking ones at that."

Ken nodded. "Must be some kind of a test."

"Disengage this joker before he causes us to crash."

"No can do. We're locked in. Can't reach big brother or locate anything."

Not far away from a plunge into the ocean Jay was about to lose his calm. "What you want?"

"I want your help?"

"Why?"

"I need you to contact your leaders for me."

"Why me?"

"Because your aircraft scrambles outgoing electronic signals, and descrambles incoming ones, you must be an influential human on your planet."

"How come we communicate?"

"My probe bypasses your scrambler and descrambler."

A probe disguised as a hummingbird and somehow attached to the aircraft was the only reasonable explanation Jay could come up with. Maybe this intrusion was only a test. If it was, it angered him that he'd been kept in the dark about it.

What the heck? His only option was to play along with the intruder. "Okay, good buddy, I'll comply with your request."

After nearly a minute wait for a reply, he tried to move the control stick. It still wouldn't budge. "Need something else?"

"I need nuclear fuel. Can your Scottie beam it to me?"

As the big body of water closed in, Jay's eyes opened wide. "Let go, you idiot. We'll crash."

"Because you seem to understand me not, I will digest more data before I contact you again."

At the last possible moment the control stick finally moved. It came back with more ease than needed and Jay quickly moved it forward for the hummer to not flip out of control.

Nick Kusiak gawked when the hummer reappeared on the monitor. The aircraft smashing against ocean waves was a sight too horrid to behold by this watchdog at the Hickam monitoring facility. Even though the hummer was made of a carbon steel alloy one-hundred times lighter, yet one-hundred times stronger than plain steel, in no way did he believe it wasn't damaged beyond repair. Even though flight suits were well-padded and multiple rings allowed free spin of seats in any direction, he

still couldn't imagine how those thumps wouldn't cripple the crew for life, or even kill them.

The hummer managed to skip across the ocean surface and bounce back up into the sky.

With audio restored Nick heard different voices: "*Little sister okay?*" . . . "*Did they test us or what?*" . . . "*Don't know. Got any ideas?*" . . . "*What'd that little birdie tell us?*" . . . "*Little birdies don't talk without moving their beaks.*"

Peggy gave a thumbs-up. "Ooh-wee, that was a close one."

Nick turned away from the Air Force Lieutenant assigned to the monitoring facility to assist him in its operations. Those words he had heard on the monitor troubled him. He needed to decipher their meaning.

He figured they meant a small plane had gotten in the way. But with satellite imaging and expensive computers to guide the hummer, nothing except Air Force One should've been within ten miles of it. Either the equipment failed or human error was at fault. More troublesome was the possibility of sabotage, as Nick wanted to spend his time on something that was more important to him.

More conversation came by way of the monitor: "*Little brother to big brother.*" . . . "*Big brother listens to little brother. Where you been?*" . . . "*In wonderland. Clear the driveway. We're on our way home.*"

A lengthy investigation was sure to follow that could tie Nick up for hours. He'd be fine with it, except he was eager to celebrate the twenty-first birthday of someone special to his heart.

He checked emails to find out anything he could about the investigation. One came in with the name of the agent in charge of it, but no specific instructions were given other than for him to report whatever he knew with regard to the outcome of the test flight.

All Nick knew for sure was the monitor had blanked out during the time when the hummer nearly crashed. He hurried all the way out of the building to his jeep Cherokee and drove to CIA headquarters to give his boss a brief report.

When he entered the building, the secretary was away from her desk and Dirk was out of his office. It seemed an opportune time to take a bold step forward. He went in, typed up a written statement on the computer, printed it, and laid it on Dirk's desk. He then picked up the phone to bug it with an electronic listening device.

The sound of footsteps persuaded him otherwise.

"What you want?" Dirk barked.

Nick kept his cool. "The Navy had problems with its new spy plane. I put my report on your desk."

The fax machine started up.

The stout man with the bald head peeked out of the corner of his eye towards the desk. "Put it in an envelope. I'll take it with me."

Nick found an envelope while Dirk checked out the fax.

"Nice of you to show up," Dirk said. "Cover me while I take care of business."

"I'm late for a special occasion."

"Sorry. Have to be at the airport when Air Force One arrives."

Nick put his report in the envelope and handed it to Dirk. At least Nick now had time to wire the room up good, even if it would make him late for the celebration of Nitay's twenty-first birthday.