

Asher doled out three pills for her and three pills for himself. They swallowed together, hands held. The tall Hasid emerged to Asher's right.

"Are there more?" he asked. And of course there were. Soon the pilot of the botched flight to Dallas smelled the action and emerged from the pool of faces.

"It's been a long day," he said. "I think we ended up in Washington. Can I have another dip into that bottle of yours?" And of course he could.

"We're trapped," Asher said.

"For a while," said the woman in red.

"How do we kill the time?" Asher asked.

The woman reached into her purse and held the empty milk bottle, glistening in the early morning sun, high in the air. "I brought this in case of an emergency." She maneuvered her way to the middle of the motionless moving room, her banner held high and proud, and cleared a circle without speaking or touching another passenger. She sat down on the linoleum floor, cross-legged, and placed the bottle on its side in front of her, its open mouth facing out. Asher followed and sat by her side. The Hasid and the pilot sat across from them, filling out the circle.

The woman in red set the bottle spinning. Men and women, young and old, stood around them, watching the glass, watching the gleam. The mouth of the bottle stopped on the Hasid, and both he and the woman in red leaned in over the glass and met at the lips, kissing with open mouths. Strangers from the crowd plopped down, expanding the circle, including all who wished to be included. Asher spun the bottle, fast and clean, and it clinked to a stop on the pilot. Asher leaned in with his eyes closed and felt his moustache touch another. The pilot's lips were dry and his breath stank sweetly of whiskey.

"Go again," the woman in red whispered into Asher's ear. And so he spun the bottle again, his hand in hers. He kissed the Hasid and tasted pretzels and chastity.

"Go again," said the woman in red.

"Go again," the circle said as one. Asher spun the bottle, again and again, kissing a pregnant woman, kissing her husband, kissing a fat man, kissing a stewardess. The bottle stopped on Dana Muncy and he kissed his mother with passion, breathing her cocoa and asthma-inhaler breath, tasting her misadventure. The bottle stopped on Deborah Muncy and Asher's lips could not tell the difference.

He spun the bottle for the last time, and its mouth stopped on the woman in red, as he had always known it would, as he had known all his life.

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BARBARA LAWRENCE

Proud Tessa, 2012
Oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in



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