

[PDF] URBAN SHAMAN

C.E. MURPHY - pdf download free book



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Description:

About the Author C.E. Murphy was born and raised in Alaska, and now lives in her ancestral homeland of Ireland, which is a magical land where it rains a lot but winter never actually arrives. Her first published title was URBAN SHAMAN, and she's since written eight more novels and two novellas featuring Joanne Walker. She's also published The Inheritor's Cycle, the Worldwalker duology, a graphic novel and various other projects. Check her out on Twitter @CE_murphy or at <http://cemurphy.net/> --This text refers to the edition.

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Tuesday, January 4th, 6:45 a.m.

There's nothing worse than a red-eye flight.

Well, all right, that's wildly untrue. There are lots of things worse than red-eye flights. There are starving children in Africa, hate crimes and Austin Powers's teeth. That's just off the top of my head.

But I was crammed into an airplane seat that wouldn't comfortably hold a four-year-old child, and had been for so many hours I was no longer certain what species I belonged to. I hadn't slept in over a day. I was convinced that if someone didn't stay awake, the airplane would fall out of the sky, and I couldn't trust anyone else to do the job.

My stomach was alternating between nausea from the airline meal I'd eaten hours earlier, and hunger from not eating another revolting meal more recently. I'd forgotten to take my contact lens case with me in my carry-on, and my eyes were burning. My spine was so bent out of shape I'd have to visit a chiropractor for a week to stand up straight again. I was flying back from a funeral to be fired.

Overall, starving children in Africa were taking a distant second to my own misery and discomfort. Shallow, but true.

A very small part of my mind was convinced that if the flight attendants would just let me into the unpres-surized luggage compartment to find my contact case, everything would miraculously be right with the world. None of them would let me, so my contacts were welded to my eyes. Every several minutes I decided it wasn't worth it and started to take them out. Every time, I remembered that they were my last pair and I'd have to suffer with glasses until I made an eye appointment.

I might have succumbed, but the glasses in question were also with my luggage. The idea of navigating a soft-focus world full of featureless faces gave me a headache.

Not that I didn't have one anyway.

I climbed over the round man sleeping peacefully beside me and went to the bathroom. At least I could take the contacts out and stew them in tap water for a few minutes. Anything would be better than keeping them in my eyes.

Anything except my reflection. Have you ever noticed that the mirror is by far the largest object in those tiny airplane restrooms? I was a sick pasty color under the flickering florescent light, my eyes much too green against a network of bloodshot vessels. I looked like a walking advertisement for one of those "wow" eye-drop commercials. Second runner-up for Least Attractive Feature on an International Flight was my hair. I put my contacts in two little paper cups and set them ostentatiously on the appropriate sides of the sink, then rubbed water through my hair to give it some life again.

Now I looked like a bloodshot porcupine. Big improvement. The only thing on my person that didn't look slimy was the brand-new silver choker necklace my mother'd given me just before she died. A Celtic cross pendant sat in the hollow of my throat. I wasn't used to jewelry, and now that I'd been reminded it was there, it felt mildly horrible, like someone was gently pushing his thumb against the delicate flesh. I shuddered and put my contacts back in before weaving my way back down the aisles to my seat. The flight attendants avoided me. I couldn't blame them.

I rested my forehead on a grease spot I'd left on the window earlier. The airlines, I thought, must have custodians who clean the windows, or there'd be an inches-thick layer of goo on them from

people like me.

That thought was proof positive that I shouldn't be allowed to stay up for more than eighteen hours at a time. I have a bad habit of following every thought to its miserable, pathetic little end when I'm tired. I don't mean to. It's just that my brain and my tongue get unhinged. Though some of my less charitable acquaintances would say this condition didn't require sleep deprivation.

The plane had been descending for a while now, and I squinted at my heavy black wristwatch. The bright orange button for changing the time had become permanently depressed in Moscow, or maybe Venice. Probably Moscow; I'd found Moscow depressing, and saw no reason why the watch shouldn't. It claimed it was 5:50 p.m., which meant it was almost seven in the morning. I frowned out the window, trying to find the horizon. The sky wasn't turning gray yet, not flying into Seattle three days after New Year's. I blinked at the darkness, trying to unglue my contacts again.

My eyes teared up and I spent a few minutes with my hands over them, hoping perversely that I didn't blink the contacts out. By the time I could see again, the captain had announced the final descent into Seattle. Couldn't they find a less ominous phrase for it? I don't like flying as it is, even without the implication that before landing I might want to have all my worldly and spiritual affairs in order. I pressed my head against the window so I could see the ground when it came into view. Maybe I could convince it to let us land without it being our real final descent.

Or maybe not. The plane banked abruptly and began to climb again. A moment or two later the captain's voice crackled over the intercom.

"Sorry about that, folks. Little disagreement over who got to land next. We're going to take another spin around the Emerald City and then we'll have you at the gate right on time."

Why do airline pilots always call passengers "folks"? I don't usually take umbrage at generic terminology—I'm one of those forward-thinkers who believes that "man" encompasses the whole darned race—but at whatever o'clock in the morning, I thought it would be nice to be called something that suggested unwashed masses a little less. Ladies and gentlemen, for example. Nevermind that, being an almost six-foot-tall mechanic, I had a hard time passing for a lady on a good day, which this wasn't.

I watched lights slip away beneath us as we circled. If I have to fly, I like flying into cities in the dark of morning. There's something reassuring and likable about the purposeful skim of vehicles, zooming along to their destinations. The whisk of cars meant that the people driving them had a goal, somewhere to be, something to do. That was a hell of a lot more than I had.

I stared down at the moving lights. Maybe I didn't like them after all.

The plane dropped the distance that made me an active voyeur in people's lives, instead of a distant watcher. I could see individuals under the streetlights. Trees became sets of branches instead of blurry masses of brown.

A school went by below us, swingsets empty. The neighborhood was full of tidy, ordered streets. Carefully tended trees, bereft of leaves, lined uniformly trimmed lawns. Well-washed cars reflected the streetlights. Even from the air well before sunrise, it screamed out, This Is A Good Place To Live.

The next neighborhood over didn't look as posh. Wrong side of the metaphysical tracks. Cars were older, had duller paint and no wax jobs to make them gleam in the streetlights. Mismatched shingles

on patched roofs stood out; lawns were overgrown. It wasn't that the owners didn't care. It was that the price of a lawnmower or a matched roof patch could be the difference between Christmas or no Christmas that year.

Not that I knew anything about it.

A whole street went by, lightless except for one amber-colored lamp, the kind that's supposed to cut through fog. It made the street seem unnaturally vivid, details coming into sharp-edged focus below me.

A modern church, an A-frame with a sharp, nasty spire, was lit by the edges of the lone amber light. Its parking lot was abandoned except for one car, parked at an angle across two spaces, one of its doors hanging open. I wondered if it closed at all. Probably: it was a behemoth from the seventies, the kind of car that will last forever. I grew up with that kind of car. Air bags or no, the little crumple things they make today don't seem as safe.

Someone tall and lean got out of the car, draping himself over the door as he looked down the street toward the functional light. Even from above I could see the glitter of light on the butterfly knife he played with, comfortable and familiar. Watching, I knew that he could play knife games in the dark and blindfolded, and he'd never stab a finger.

A woman broke into the amber light, running down the center of the street. She took incredibly long strides, eating a huge amount of distance with each step, but her head was down and her steps swerved, like she wasn't used to running. Her hair was very long, and swung loose, flaring out as she whipped her head back to look behind her.

I twisted in my seat as the plane left the subdivision behind, trying to see.

A pack of dogs leaked out of the darkness. Their coats were pale gold under the amber light, and they loped with the casual confidence of a hunting pack following easy prey.

The woman stumbled, the pack gained and the plane took me away from them.

"You don't understand. There is a woman in trouble out there." It was the fourth time I'd said it, and the pilot kept looking at me like I was on drugs. Well, maybe I was. Lack of sleep has the same effect as certain narcotics. I was lodged in the door of the cockpit, other passengers pushing out behind me. Fourteen minutes had passed since I saw the woman. There was a knot of discomfort in my stomach, like I'd throw up if I didn't find a way to help her. I kept hoping I'd burp and it would go away, but I didn't, and the pilot was still eyeing me.

"And you saw this from the plane," he said, also for the fourth time. He had that bright lilting sound to his voice that first grade teachers use to mask irritation. "There are lots of people in trouble, ma'am."

I closed my eyes. They screamed with pain, tears flooding as I opened them again. Through the upwell, I saw an expression of dismayed horror cross the pilot's face.

Well, if he was going to fall for it, I might as well milk it. "It was five minutes before we landed," I quavered. "We circled around and came in from the northwest..." --This text refers to the edition.

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