PREMONITION

 "It happened again, didn't it?"

 "Yes. How could you tell?"

 "You tossed and turned all through the night. That's the fifth time this month. Your thrashing and moaning kept waking me up. How much longer can this go on, dear?"

 "I'm sorry, honey. I can't help it. The dream is so real, and it keeps repeating itself again and again."

 Dalton Larke's pajamas were damp with sweat. His brown hair was a mess. His green eyes were red-rimmed.

 His wife of ten years, Heather, was on the verge of suggesting that her husband see a psychiatrist, or at least some kind of expert in sleep disorders.

 Dalton's re-occurring dream centered upon a horrific airliner crash. Everyone on board was killed. But the nightmare never revealed the name of the carrier, or the flight number, or where and when the accident took place. Larke always woke up just before those details became known.

 The couple lived in the cozy suburb of Bartlett, Illinois, northwest of Chicago. Heather was a manager of a Verizon cell phone store in Elgin, and Dalton worked for a computer billing agency in nearby Carol Stream. They married when both had turned twenty-one, and planned on starting a family now that they were financially secure. In fact, Heather already had a potential boy's and girl's name in mind. She announced that she would go off birth control pills right after they celebrated their tenth wedding anniversary.

 More than anything, Heather wanted to see Paris, France for two weeks to commemorate that milestone. It had been her long-time romantic wish. Ah...Paris in the Spring! The couple had arranged for their vacation dates from work to coincide for the first half of May next year. It was mid-October now, with the cooler autumn weather coming in, and the annual changing of the leaves to their splendid shades of orange, red, and gold.

 But Dalton's vivid premonition of a terrifying air disaster was beginning to strain their marriage. His dream-triggered paranoia stymied his willingness to make airline reservations, as well as booking their rental car and hotel for next year's fortnight French holiday. When he blandly suggested that they skip Paris and instead do a driving vacation to the Missouri Ozarks or somewhere else for their tenth anniversary, Heather was angry and quite adamant.

 "Honey...look...I love you, and I know you are all of a sudden afraid of flying because of your strange dream, but we are absolutely going to Paris next May -- even if I have to drag you onto a plane bound and gagged! And if you won't make our planned trip reservations, I will."

 So she did as she vowed, in the week between Christmas and New Year's. Dalton was visibly upset but he kept his deeper thoughts and emotions hidden from his wife. The couple by now had decided that Dalton would sleep alone in their modest guest bedroom, so as not to further ruin his wife's necessary sleep. The airline crash dream still crept into Larke's mind at night, however, though the re-occurrence was irregular and unpredictable. And he flatly refused to see a psychiatrist.

 In his free time -- without Heather's knowledge -- Dalton carefully researched the internet for information on historic major airliner crashes from around the world. Here is some of what he found:

 1977 -- Tenerife, in the Canary Islands; two huge Boeing 747s (KLM #4805 and Pan Am #1736) collided in dense fog on a runway as a result of botched air traffic control communications and a lack of ground radar. 583 people died.

 1979 -- American Airlines #191 loses its McDonnell Douglas DC-10 left engine and cartwheels into a huge fireball shortly after take-off at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, killing all 273 people on board and 2 more on the ground.

 1985 -- Japan Airlines #123 crashes into a mountain on a flight from Tokyo to Osaka, killing 520 people. Twelve minutes into the flight, an unexpected explosive decompression had occurred, causing the loss of rudder usage as well as the failure of all hydraulic systems, thus rendering the aircraft completely uncontrollable.

 There were a dozen more spectacular crash reports, but Dalton concluded his research with his flying fears powerfully re-enforced. Meanwhile, his ability to concentrate at his computer job at work was increasingly challenged. And, by March, his marriage to Heather was further strained, as the couple seemed to drift more and more apart.

 But Dalton's flight nightmares relentlessly continued. In his dream, he saw the faces of the frantic pilot and co-pilot trying in vain to abort the disaster. He heard the panicked screams and prayers of the passengers as the plane went down. He saw the explosion, then the twisted crashed wreckage, and smelled the black smoke of the burning debris. He witnessed the appalling charred corpses of scores of scattered, hapless victims. The emergency vehicle sirens, the flashing lights, the fire trucks, the arriving media vans with their protruding satellite dishes -- all added to the dramatic tableau. The horror of the scene was stunning.

 In April, one month before their arranged trip to Paris, Dalton stumbled across an article that he eagerly shared with his wife.

 "Look, honey, I'm not losing my mind. Please read this," he urged. "I'm not the only one."

 It was the true story of David Booth, an office manager in Cincinnati, Ohio. Beginning on May 15th in 1979, he had a re-occurring dream of an airliner crash for ten nights in a row. He clearly saw the American Airlines logo on the craft's tail. He contacted both the FAA and the airline and explained his unusual dreams and strong concerns. They took his story very seriously, but frankly said there was nothing they could realistically do about it. On May 25, American Airlines #191 crashed in Chicago exactly as David Booth had foreseen, killing all 273 persons on board. To his shock and realization, Booth watched the news bulletin of the disaster on his television shortly after it occurred.

 "This was one of the crashes I read about a few months ago without telling you, Heather," Dalton explained. "And in a related story to that catastrophe, I read about the actress Lindsey Wagner, who starred as TV's 'Bionic Woman' back in the late 1970s. She was supposed to be on AA Flight #191, but felt increasingly unwell as her time to board approached. She confessed to having a very bad feeling, so she finally cancelled her ticket, and immediately felt better as she went away from O'Hare Airport. She then heard about the crash -- of the exact plane she would have been aboard -- on her car radio while driving home."

 Heather Larke looked at her husband without speaking. Their eyes locked in utter seriousness.

 Dalton's face flushed with emotion. "Honey, I'm begging you to cancel our flight to Paris. Maybe we can take a cruise ship across the Atlantic to France instead, but please not an airplane. Something weird is definitely affecting my subconscious, for some strange reason which I don't quite understand. But it's there, and it's real. It's a sign, maybe some kind of warning. Please believe me, sweetheart," Dalton pleaded. Her reached out and grabbed his wife's hands.

 When May arrived, Heather reluctantly cancelled their vacation to France. "You win, my dear," she announced. "Maybe we can go next year for our eleventh anniversary, if your bad dreams finally stop. I think we should take Amtrak from Union Station to Glacier National Park in Montana instead. It takes about thirty hours, so we get one night sleeping on the train. We can stay at Many Glacier Lodge and enjoy some hiking and canoeing. We could also rent a car from there and drive north into the Canadian Rockies, and visit Banff and Lake Louise for a little variety. This is something we wanted to do someday anyway. So is that O.K. with you?" A very relieved Dalton grinned and gladly agreed.

 So Heather cancelled their French car rental and hotel reservations, as well as their May 5th tickets on American Airlines #868 from ORD via JFK to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. Dalton quickly booked their national park lodge reservations and their Amtrak sleeper car tickets on the "Empire Builder" for May 6th, which conveniently stopped at West Glacier -- a short walk to their lodge -- on its long route from Chicago to Seattle. The couple could also skip driving and take the Metra commuter rail from their home in Bartlett directly to Chicago's Union Station, thus saving themselves some hefty downtown parking fees.

 On May 5th, the Larke's -- now more or less happily reconciled -- were at an outdoor equipment store in Stratford Square shopping mall in nearby Bloomington, looking at purchasing some hiking poles, when they noticed a crowd gathering in front of big window at an appliance store across the way. Several large-screen TVs were reporting the identical breaking news bulletin.

 "Reports just coming in tell us that an American Airlines plane crashed in the Azores, an island chain located about 870 miles west of Portugal. Flight #866 was coming from New York on its way to Vienna, Austria when it went down. As you can see from the first video footage here, the scene is devastating, with flaming wreckage and all but certain massive casualties."

 "Oh my God! Thank God it wasn't the flight that we would have been on, if we were going to Paris today," Heather exclaimed. "Your dream premonition was right!" She looked at her husband with renewed respect, almost awe. Dalton was still focused, however, on the horrific TV footage and remained wide-eyed yet silent.

 But suddenly the female network anchor interrupted the dramatic and appalling images by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, we apologize for a major reporting mistake, which can sometimes occur under breaking news circumstances such as these. We now know that the plane that crashed was in fact American Airlines #868 -- not Flight #866, as earlier reported -- and that the doomed airliner was on its way to CDG airport in Paris, and not to Vienna. We repeat: it was American Airlines Flight #868, not Flight #866 as previously reported, that has crashed. Officials now on the scene have also added that any survivors of this terrible disaster are extremely unlikely..."

 That was when Heather Larke gasped, raising her hand to her mouth. Her knees buckled and she collapsed, fainting, falling to the floor, a mere second before her husband could react and catch her...

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

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